

RESEARCH

**on Online and Offline Incidents of Violence
against Young Women and Girls in Public
Life in North Macedonia**

Title:

RESEARCH on Online and Offline Incidents of Violence against
Young Women and Girls in Public Life in North Macedonia

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978-92-9271-682-0



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This report presents the findings of the research on gender-based violence and harassment against young women and girls aged 18 to 29 in North Macedonia, conducted in 2025 with the support of the OSCE Mission to Skopje and in cooperation with the Office of the President of the Republic of North Macedonia.

The aim of the research is to identify the prevalence, nature, and perception of different forms of gender-based violence, as well as the effectiveness and accessibility of institutions responsible for the protection and support of survivors of gender-based violence. In addition, the research examines online forms of violence, which pose an increasingly significant challenge in the context of society's digital transformation.

Methodology

The research was conducted on a representative sample of 600 respondents from all planning regions of the country, through structured face-to-face surveys in Macedonian and Albanian, with a statistical margin of error of $\pm 3.9\%$. In addition to the quantitative component, four focus groups were organised with representatives of civil society organisations and experts in the field of human rights and gender equality. The combination of methods enabled an in-depth analysis of individual experiences, societal perceptions, and institutional practices.

Findings of the Research

Perception and Sense of Safety

- ▶ Two thirds (74%) of young women and girls stated that they had felt unsafe in the public life because of their gender, while 27% had never experienced such a feeling.
- ▶ Young Albanian women reported significantly higher levels of feeling unsafe (90%) at least at some point in public life, compared to young Macedonian women (66%), Roma women (77%), and women from other ethnic communities (74%).

- ▶ 27% of respondents avoided an activity or visiting a specific place due to fear of violence, with the highest levels of concern recorded among the youngest group (18–21 years old) and among the Roma population (57%). Furthermore, young women and girls from families with lower economic status (43%), with no formal education (49%), and from the North-eastern region of the country (42%) were more likely to avoid an activity or place due to fear of gender-based violence and/or harassment.
- ▶ The sense of safety is strongly correlated with economic status, with young women and girls from lower-income families more frequently feeling at risk.

Institutions for the Prevention and Protection from GBV

- ▶ The highest levels of trust were expressed toward educational (67%) and health institutions (62%), followed by the police (55%), centres for social work (51%), and civil society organisations (50%). The lowest levels of trust were reported for the judiciary (38%) and the prosecution service (41%).
- ▶ The police were identified as the most important institution for responding to gender-based violence (69%), followed by the centres for social work (61%); however, in the focus groups, both institutions were described as reactive and not always effective.
- ▶ Half of the respondents (51%) believe that institutions respond appropriately to the prevention and sanctioning of gender-based violence and/or harassment against young women and girls, while a significant 40% do not share this view.

Knowledge about GBV

- ▶ Most young women and girls (71%) have enough information to recognise gender-based violence and/or harassment. However, one in four (27%) state that they do not have sufficient information to recognise GBV or to seek protection. This percentage is particularly high among Roma women (47%), as well as among those without formal education (50%) or with only primary education (49%).
- ▶ The main reasons for not reporting are: fear (58%), distrust in institutions (56%), and shame (50%). Family pressure is noted at a significantly higher rate among Roma women (53%) compared to the overall average (25%). Shame appears as a reason at notably higher rates (66%) among young women and girls with primary education compared to those with higher education.
- ▶ Half of young women and girls believe that youth-friendly and gender-sensitive support services for GBV survivors either do not exist (30%) or they do not know

such services exist (21%). Awareness is especially low among the youngest group (18 to 21 years old), Roma women, and young women and girls without formal education or with only primary education. Only 7% of young women and girls are aware that such youth-friendly and gender-sensitive services are available.

Positions on GBV

- ▶ Three out of five respondents disagree with the statements that domestic violence is a private matter and should remain within the family (61%), that violence is caused by the survivor herself (67%), and that women invent or exaggerate claims of abuse (65%). One in four respondents believes that women are more often raped by strangers than by people they know (27%).
- ▶ Negative attitudes toward gender-based violence are more frequently found among young women and girls with lower economic status, among certain ethnic groups (primarily Albanian and Roma), and in rural areas. These respondents more often believe that domestic violence is a private matter, that the survivor provokes the violence, and that women who report abuse often exaggerate.
- ▶ The results show that most young women and girls reject traditional views of female submissiveness — 80% disagree that a woman is obliged to engage in sexual relations without desire, and 75% disagree that the man should be the “head” of the relationship. However, it is concerning that 31% normalise provocative clothing as a reason for violence, 24% shift blame to the survivor, and 20% do not recognise sexual harassment, even though 66% support external intervention in cases of violence and 71% defend women’s freedom to choose their friends.
- ▶ Respondents recognise intersectional factors—ethnic affiliation (42%), disability (41%), and place of residence (37%)—as significant in shaping the risk of gender-based violence, yet socio-economic status remains the most influential. Nearly half (46%) believe that women with lower socio-economic status are more exposed to violence and that this factor most strongly affects how survivors are treated.

Forms and Prevalence of GBV

- ▶ According to the respondents, financial difficulties and economic instability are the most common challenges faced by young women and girls — 23% identify them as primary, and a total of 30% as significant problems, especially among those who are occasionally employed (41%), unemployed (37%), and

Roma women (60%). These are followed by the feeling of insecurity in public life (16%), mental health concerns (12%), and online harassment (16% among the youngest age group, 18–21 years), while discrimination is more common in rural areas (13% compared to 8% in urban areas).

- ▶ Young women and girls feel less safe in large and virtual environments (such as digital spaces). Thus, 44% feel unsafe in the digital space, while 37% feel unsafe in public places such as squares, parks, and streets, and 34% on public transport. In contrast, 89% of young women and girls feel safe in their neighbourhood, and 79% in their town/village and in educational institutions.
- ▶ According to respondents, the most common forms of violence against young women and girls are verbal violence (33% as witnesses, 24% as survivors), psychological violence (24% as witnesses and 16% as survivors) and physical violence (22% as witnesses and 12% as survivors), whereas economic and sexual violence and harassment are reported at lower rates.
- ▶ The highest exposure to violence is among young women and girls from the Roma community — 47% have experienced verbal violence, 40% psychological violence, and 27% physical violence. Sexual harassment is reported above average among young women and girls from rural areas (10%) and young Albanian women (10%).
- ▶ Psychological violence and digital violence are assessed as the most hidden and least frequently sanctioned forms.
- ▶ Violence against young women and girls is widespread and occurs in all settings, most frequently in the home (24%), where controlling and economic violence are reported by 49% and 65% of respondents, indicating dependency and control within intimate relationships. According to respondents, in public life, sexual harassment (64%) and stalking (68%) dominate; in educational institutions, psychological and verbal violence are most common (up to 45%); in the workplace, psychological (14%) and economic violence (15%) are present; while in friends' homes and student dormitories, sexual harassment reaches 43%.

Reporting and Institutional Response

- ▶ Only 5% of survivors who experienced or witnessed violence reported the incident, while 89% did not. This is an alarming finding, indicating that gender-based violence against young women and girls most often remains hidden.

- ▶ The main reasons for not reporting among young women and girls who were survivors or witnesses of GBV are: fear (31%), distrust in institutions (27%), shame (21%), and insufficient information (16%).
- ▶ After experiencing an incident of gender-based violence, respondents who were survivors or witnesses most often sought emotional support from family or close persons (34%), rather than from formal institutions, 31% left the violent environment, while only 7% sought professional psychological support.

Institutional Shortcomings

- ▶ The greatest weaknesses in institutional response are insufficient sanctioning of perpetrators (65%), inadequate protection and support for survivors (56%), and slow institutional reaction (55%), all of which create a sense of impunity and distrust in the system.
- ▶ Furthermore, respondents highlight the need for better prevention and information (35%), more effective inter-institutional cooperation (31%), and greater training and sensitivity among officials (29%) when handling cases of gender-based violence.
- ▶ To make institutions more accessible and trustworthy, young women and girls most often call for confidentiality and protection of personal data (62%); 52% expect a personalised and sensitive approach; 45% request awareness-raising and trust-building campaigns; and 41% want easier physical and online access to services without complex procedures.

Measures to Improve Safety

The most frequently proposed measures for increasing safety are:

- ▶ Faster institutional response (48%),
- ▶ Greater support from the police and social services (46%),
- ▶ Improved lighting and infrastructure in public life (34%),
- ▶ Informational and educational campaigns (26%),
- ▶ Sustainability and accessibility of existing services for survivors (25%).

Gender-Based Violence in the Digital Space

- ▶ 10% of young women and girls have been survivors of this form of gender-based violence, and 15% have witnessed violence occurring in the digital space.

- ▶ The most common forms in which GBV appears in the digital space include: creation of fake profiles (55%), abusive comments (45%), phone calls, or SMS messages (33%), sexually explicit messages without consent (25%), and online stalking (23%).
- ▶ The highest-risk platforms are Facebook (74%), Instagram (41%), and TikTok (18%).
- ▶ Only one in ten young women or girls who experienced or witnessed GBV in the digital space reported the incident, most often to the police or directly through the social media platform where the violence occurred.
- ▶ The main factors contributing to the occurrence of online violence are lack of sanctions (50%), anonymity (41%), and the ease with which abusive content spreads (39%). A significant share of respondents also emphasise inadequately regulated platforms (29%), insufficient literacy regarding digital rights (27%), and the normalisation of aggressive speech and violent behaviour (27%).
- ▶ Young women and girls believe that the key needs to be met so as to ensure greater safety in the digital space are institutional support (51%), clear and strict rules on online platforms (45%), and accessible digital tools for reporting and blocking perpetrators (43%).

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

1. The research indicates that gender-based violence is a deeply rooted and often unrecognised phenomenon that persists due to a lack of sanctions, institutional inefficiency, and the normalisation of violent behaviour. Gender-based and digital violence against young women and girls represent a serious and growing problem that requires a systemic and coordinated approach. The safety of young women and girls is a multidimensional issue that warrants simultaneous institutional, infrastructural, and educational responses.
2. The data confirm that institutional trust among young women is partial. Although awareness is increasing among young people and the topic is more frequently addressed publicly, institutional distrust and slow reactions remain key obstacles to effectively addressing violence. Young women tend to trust institutions with which they have direct and daily contact (educational and health institutions), as well as the police and centres for social work, while

the judiciary and prosecution are perceived as ineffective, inaccessible, and lacking empathy.

3. The institutions with the lowest trust are at the same time those in which young women and girls perceive the greatest shortcomings, particularly regarding adequate sanctioning of perpetrators. Systemic weaknesses, slow procedures, and insufficient sensitivity among officials reduce survivors' willingness to report violence, where the most significant shortcomings are seen in sanctioning perpetrators, supporting survivors, and ensuring timely responses. The lack of sensitised staff, poor coordination between institutions, and the limited legal framework further exacerbate the problem.
4. Young women and girls expect institutions to be more accessible, transparent, and sensitive to their needs, whilst taking into account key priorities such as guaranteed confidentiality, simple access to services, specialised support, and clear, direct communication in line with a survivor-centred approach.
5. Civil society organisations enjoy greater trust and provide psychological, legal, and material support (including housing and shelter for survivors), however, their capacities remain limited, particularly in rural areas. Nevertheless, increased engagement by civil society organisations, positive examples from schools, and ongoing education and support initiatives represent an important foundation for improvement.
6. A significant number of young women and girls have direct or indirect experiences of violence from their teenage years onward. Although most stated that they had not been survivors, there is a strong likelihood of underreporting, particularly in cases of psychological, verbal, and economic harassment and abuse. Young women and girls are increasingly exposed to various forms of gender-based violence and/or harassment—especially psychological, verbal, economic, and digital forms which, although most prevalent, remain the least recognised and least sanctioned.
7. Patriarchal attitudes and norms, combined with low levels of awareness and knowledge, contribute to the normalisation and frequent minimisation of violence, particularly within families and partner relationships.
8. Violence occurs everywhere, but the home, the street, and public life represent the highest-risk environments where young women face different forms of violence. In the home, controlling and economic forms of violence are most prevalent. On the street, the highest rates of sexual harassment and stalking are recorded, confirming women's sense of insecurity in public life. Schools and universities are hotspots for psychological and verbal violence.
9. Fear, shame, and distrust in institutions are the three most significant

factors preventing young women and girls from reporting gender-based violence. Insufficient information about procedures and available services further reduces the likelihood that cases will be reported. Fear of judgment, retaliation, and stigma, combined with economic dependence and the lack of safe mechanisms for anonymous reporting, discourages survivors from seeking help.

10. Young women and girls primarily respond through avoidance and self-protection strategies rather than through institutional channels. Young women and girls most often react within their personal or informal support networks, while institutional reporting and seeking formal assistance remain rare.
11. Digital violence is becoming an increasingly common and serious form of violence, disproportionately affecting young women and girls. The most frequent forms of violence in the digital space include the creation of fake profiles, abusive comments, and unwanted messages, and social media platforms are the main environment in which young women and girls experience or witness gender-based violence and/or harassment.
12. The combination of anonymity, rapid dissemination, and lack of awareness creates an environment in which gender-based violence and/or harassment in the digital space is easily reproduced.
13. Reporting online violence is very rare due to distrust in institutions, insufficient awareness and recognition of violence, as well as ineffective protection mechanisms.
14. Young women and girls expect an integrated system of prevention and support in cases of gender-based violence and/or harassment in the digital space, which includes institutional action, clear platform rules, technological protection tools, and continuous education.

Recommendations

1. Establishment of clear response protocols, training of officials, and rapid reaction. To improve safety, a fast and effective institutional response to reports is required, alongside continuous support, strengthened protection systems, and increased police presence in public life.
2. Efficiency and multisectoral cooperation of institutions which shall ensure a faster and more coordinated response through providing trained staff in every police station, prosecution office, and centre for social work for sensitive and professional handling of cases of violence, as well as sufficient human and financial resources for functional services such as shelters and free psychological assistance and support.

3. Non-institutional support for survivors of gender-based violence and/or harassment through support of civil society organisations and youth centres that work with survivors of violence.
4. Introducing programmes for working with perpetrators, which shall enable resocialisation and reduction of the risk of repeated violence.
5. Mandatory educational programmes in schools: Introducing education on gender roles, violence prevention, and sexual education from an early age, with active involvement of parents for emotional and practical support for children, and through integrating approaches that actively involve men and boys by promoting positive masculinity, empathy, and respect for gender equality.
6. Develop targeted programmes and activities for young people that guide them toward positive and educational engagement.
7. Educational programmes for recognising, preventing, and reporting gender-based violence and/or harassment, sexual education, with active participation of parents.
8. Strengthen public awareness through campaigns and positive examples, with the aim of fostering trust among survivors and promoting a culture of accountability and zero tolerance for violence
9. Ensure continuous education for young women and girls on digital literacy. In addition, young people shall receive continuous training on reporting gender-based violence and misuse of personal data. They should be familiarised with the roles of relevant institutions such as schools, the police, and the Ombudsman, and with the procedures for reporting gender-based violence.
10. Digital support platform: A space that brings together survivors, professionals, and institutions, enabling the sharing of experiences, access to resources, and practical guidance, including anonymous options that support the safety and empowerment of survivors. Efforts to inform and educate should be expanded through youth-friendly communication channels, including mobile applications and social media platforms, to effectively engage young people in the prevention of gender-based violence.

METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH



Purpose of the Research

The main objectives of the research are as follows:

- ▶ To examine the prevalence and different forms of violence against young women and girls aged 18 to 29 in public life, both online and offline.
- ▶ To explore how violence manifests in different environments, including educational institutions, workplaces, public life, community settings, and digital platforms.
- ▶ To examine how intersecting identities, including ethnic background (for example among Roma women), disability, place of residence (urban/rural), and socio-economic status, influence the nature and intensity of violence.
- ▶ To identify barriers to accessing protection and justice, including reasons for underreporting, fear of retaliation, revictimisation, distrust in institutions, lack of accessible and youth-friendly support services, and the quality of institutional support.
- ▶ To analyse key factors that contribute to gender-based violence, including harmful gender norms, gender stereotypes that influence GBV, gaps in institutional and legal protection, an online environment that enables harassment and abuse, and limited access to resources, information, or opportunities that reduce the ability to seek support or take action.
- ▶ To identify coping mechanisms for survivors of gender-based violence (constructive or potentially harmful).

Research Methodology

Quantitative Research

The target group of this research consisted of young women and girls aged 18 to 29 from the Republic of North Macedonia. For the purposes of this study, a representative sample was developed using stratified multistage sampling with probability proportional to the estimated population size. Before selecting the sample, sampling units were allocated across strata according to the proportions in the population covered by the research. In this way, a representative sample of the structure of the target population was ensured, with regard to ethnic background, gender, age group, place of residence (urban/rural), and statistical region.

A total of 600 respondents were included in the sample, and the sampling error amounts to 3.94% with a confidence level of 95%¹.

Interviews with respondents were conducted through computer-assisted face-to-face interviews in the respondent's home. The interviews were carried out in Macedonian or Albanian language.

Qualitative Research

Within the framework of the qualitative research, four (4) focus group discussions were organised with representatives of civil society organisations and the Youth Council of the President of North Macedonia. The sample for the focus groups consisted of a total of 24 participants, distributed across four groups, representing civil society organisations working on issues related to youth activities, education, and protection from GBV and domestic violence. The participants represented seven different organisations, namely: (1) Youth Council, (2) Union of Secondary School Students, (3) NECI – Network for European Citizenship and Identity North Macedonia, (4) Stella, (5) Humanitarian Association Majka Kumanovo, (6) National Network against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, and (7) Cortex Centre.

1 The sampling error was calculated using the formula $E = 1,96 \times \sqrt{p(1-p)/n}$, whereby for $p = 0,5$ and $n = 600$ it amounts to $\pm 3,94\%$ at a confidence level of 95%.

Results

The analysis is based on findings collected through the survey and focus groups with young women and girls aged 18 to 29. This section provides an overview of the findings across several areas, including:

- ▶ Perceptions and attitudes related to gender-based violence and the institutional context
- ▶ Forms and prevalence of gender-based violence and/or harassment
- ▶ Online environment and digital violence

Perception and Positions Related to GBV and the Institutional Context

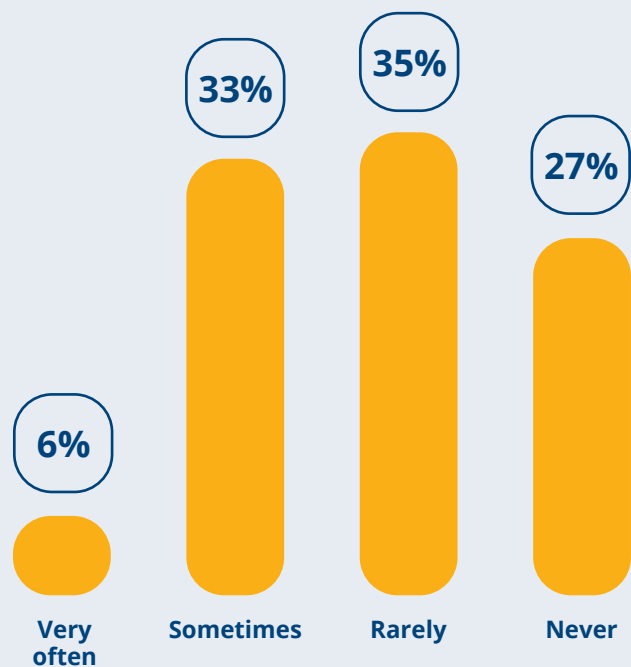
Assessment of the Safety Situation

Young women and girls were asked to assess safety in public life, specifically how often they felt unsafe in such spaces because they are women or girls. Three out of four respondents, or 74%, reported having felt unsafe in a public life for this reason, while only 27% stated that they had never felt unsafe in the public life due to their gender.

Chart 1:

Sense of Safety in Public Life

How often have you felt unsafe in the public life because you are a woman or a girl?



The findings across age groups do not indicate significant differences in the sense of safety among the various subgroups of young women and girls. Although young women and girls from urban areas reported somewhat more frequently that they had sometimes or rarely felt unsafe compared to those from rural areas, no statistically significant difference in the sense of safety was observed between the two subgroups of young women and girls.

When viewed by ethnic background, young Albanian women reported substantially higher levels of feeling unsafe at least at some point in the public life (90%), compared to young Macedonian women (66%), Roma women (77%), and women from other ethnic communities (74%).

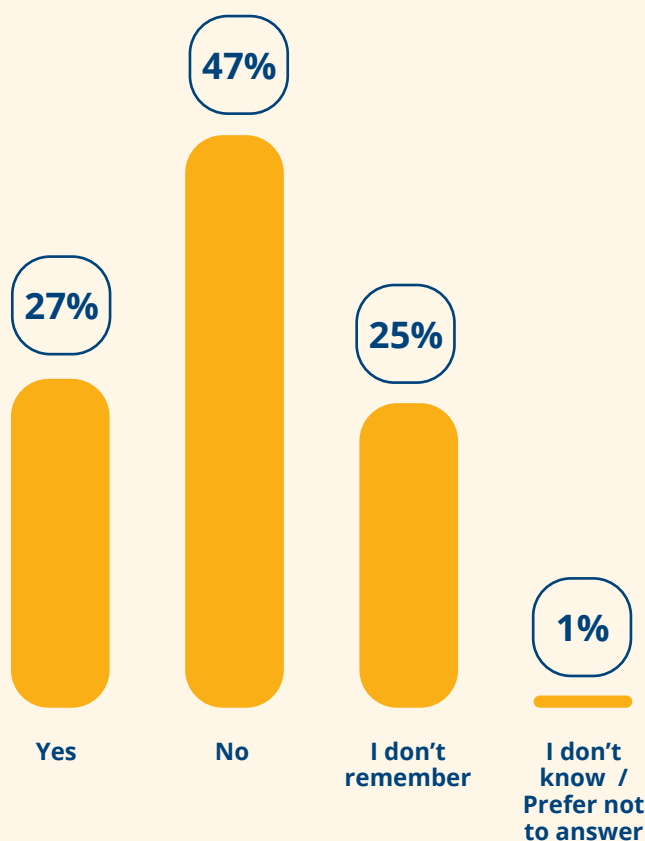
Significant differences in the sense of safety appear among respondents from families with lower economic status (measured by monthly household income) compared to those from families with higher economic status. Specifically, within the first group, nine out of ten young women and girls (88%) reported feeling unsafe in public life, compared to 67% of young women and girls from higher-income families who reported feeling unsafe.

Closely linked to the sense of safety in public life is whether such a feeling has ever prompted young women and girls to avoid an activity due to fear of violence. One in four young women and girls (27%) stated that, since the age of 15, they had avoided an activity or place because of fear of gender-based violence and/or harassment. It is concerning that one in four respondents (25%) answered that they do not remember whether they had avoided an activity or place due to fear of gender-based violence and/or harassment.

Chart 2:

Avoided activity/place due to fear of GBV

Since the age of 15, have you ever avoided an activity or place because of fear of gender-based violence and/or harassment?



Viewed by age groups, young women and girls aged 18 to 21 report in significantly higher proportions (32%) that they had avoided an activity or place due to fear of gender-based violence and/or harassment, compared to those aged 26 to 29 (22%). The analysis of results by ethnic background shows that as many as 57% of Roma women had avoided an activity or place due to fear of gender-based violence and/or harassment, compared to considerably lower percentages among Macedonian women (24%), Albanian women (31%), and women from other ethnic groups (21%).

Further analysis of the data shows that certain groups of young women and girls are more likely to avoid an activity or place due to fear of GBV and/or harassment. These groups include:

- ▶ Young women and girls from families with lower economic status (household income up to 24,000 denars) – 43%,
- ▶ Young women and girls without formal education or with only primary education (49%),
- ▶ Young women and girls from the North-eastern region (42%), the South-eastern region (38%), and the Vardar region (35%).

Work of Institutions in the Protection from GBV

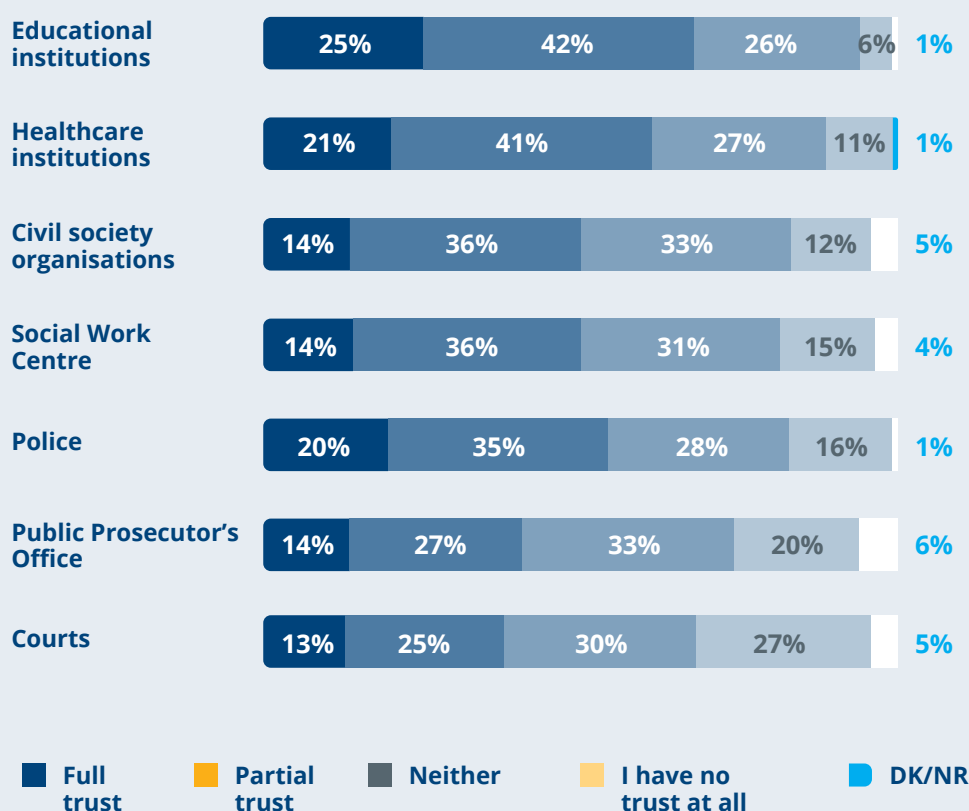
According to the results of the quantitative research regarding trust in institutions when it comes to protection against gender-based violence and/or harassment, young women and girls express the highest levels of trust in educational institutions (67%) and health institutions (62%), followed by the police (55%), centres for social work (51%), and civil society organisations (50%).

On the other hand, young women and girls express the lowest levels of trust in the courts — 27% of respondents stated that they have no trust at all in this institution — and in the public prosecution service, where 20% stated that they have no trust.

Chart 3:

Trust in Institutions

To what extent do you trust the following institutions and organisations (, ,) when it comes to protection against gender-based violence or harassment?



Findings from the qualitative research indicate that trust in institutions is very low, to the point that it is almost non-existent. According to participants in the focus group discussions, this distrust generally stems from frequent cases of ineffective institutional response, lengthy procedures, and insufficient protection for survivors, creating a perception that reporting does not lead to real outcomes. Furthermore, survivors often choose to remain anonymous or not to report at all due to fear of judgment, shame, and potential retaliation from the perpetrator. The lack of specialised and sensitised personnel further worsens the situation, as institutions often act formally, without empathy or understanding.

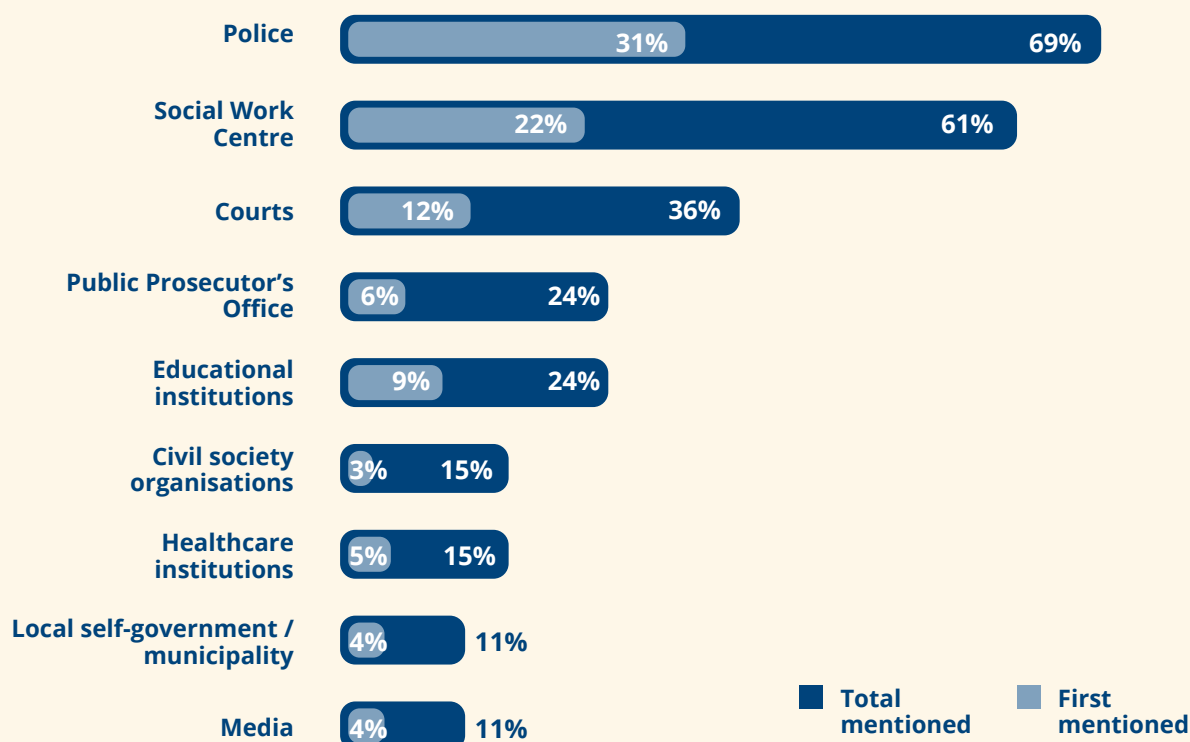
Key Institutions for Addressing GBV

The police and centres for social work are seen as having a key role in addressing gender-based violence and/or harassment according to young women and girls. Specifically, 69% of respondents identified the police as the key institution in addressing GBV and/or harassment, followed by 61% who identified the centres for social work. These two institutions also have the highest share when considering the percentage of first-mentioned responses, with 31% for the police and 22% for the centres for social work.

Chart 4:

Key Role in Addressing GBV

Which institutions and/or organisations, in your view, should have a key role in addressing gender-based violence and/or harassment?



Opinions on which institutions should have a key role in addressing GBV and/or harassment differ across various groups of young women and girls, who consider that:

- ▶ Young women and girls from rural areas, in a higher proportion (20%), believe that health institutions should have a key role, compared to respondents from urban areas (11%), who in turn believe that educational institutions should have a key role (27%), compared to 19% of respondents from rural areas who share this view.

- ▶ Almost all Roma respondents (97%) identified the police as the institution that should have a key role in addressing GBV and/or harassment, which is a significantly higher percentage compared to respondents from other ethnic communities. Albanian women, in a higher proportion, assign importance to local self-government (20%) in addressing GBV compared to Macedonian women (9%), who in turn believe that centres for social work should have a key role (65%), compared to 54% of Albanian women who share the same view.
- ▶ Young women and girls with higher education, in a higher proportion (19%), believe that civil society organisations should have a key role, compared to only 3% of young women and girls within the overall sample who share this view.

The role of the police as a key state institution in addressing gender-based violence was also emphasised in the focus group discussions within the qualitative research. However, according to participants, the practical role of the police is very weak and almost invisible - the police most often react only when the situation becomes alarming or when a tragedy has already occurred, while preventive activities are almost entirely absent. In addition to the police, the importance of the Centres for Social Work, the courts, and the public prosecution services was highlighted. Health institutions — particularly general practitioners and psychological services — were identified by focus group participants as those who can first recognise signs of violence.

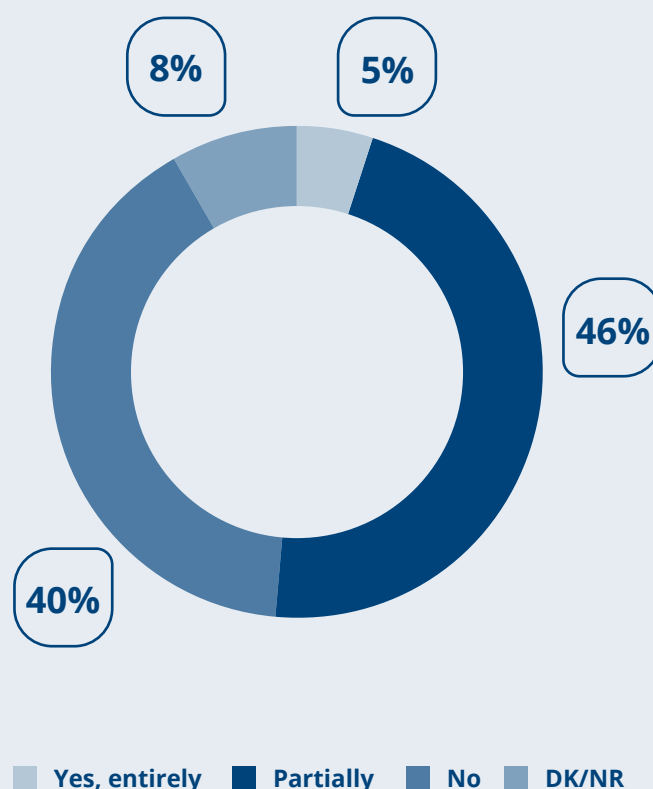
In terms of prevention, participants emphasised that schools and universities should play a greater role through the introduction of educational programmes aimed at raising awareness and knowledge among young people about what constitutes violence and how to respond. According to some participants, such practices already exist in certain schools and are viewed as positive examples that should be expanded and systematised.

When it comes to the institutional response in preventing and sanctioning gender-based violence and/or harassment against young women and girls, respondents' opinions are divided. Specifically, 51% of respondents believe that institutions fully or partially respond appropriately to the prevention and sanctioning of GBV, while 40% do not share this view, which is an exceptionally high percentage.

Chart 5:

Appropriate Institutional Response

Do you believe that institutions in our country respond appropriately when it comes to preventing and sanctioning gender-based violence and/or harassment against young women or girls?



The analysis of the data for this question shows that a significantly higher percentage of respondents who believe that institutions do not react appropriately when it comes to preventing and sanctioning GBV and/or harassment against young women or girls is found among those without formal or with only primary education, among Roma women, and among respondents with higher economic status, that is, those coming from families with higher monthly household incomes.

Findings from the qualitative research indicate that what is most lacking in the institutional response is a fast and timely reaction, as well as a serious and sensitive approach toward survivors. Participants emphasised that many women feel that institutions do not perceive violent situations as a serious problem, which undermines their trust and encourages them to hide the violence or not report it.

There is also a lack of coordination among institutions — the police, the courts, the public prosecution service, and the centres for social work often do not exchange information in a timely manner, cases are postponed or neglected, and survivors are left alone without psychological, social, or financial support. The absence of specialised services and resources further worsens the situation, leaving survivors vulnerable and without adequate protection.

Knowledge Related to GBV

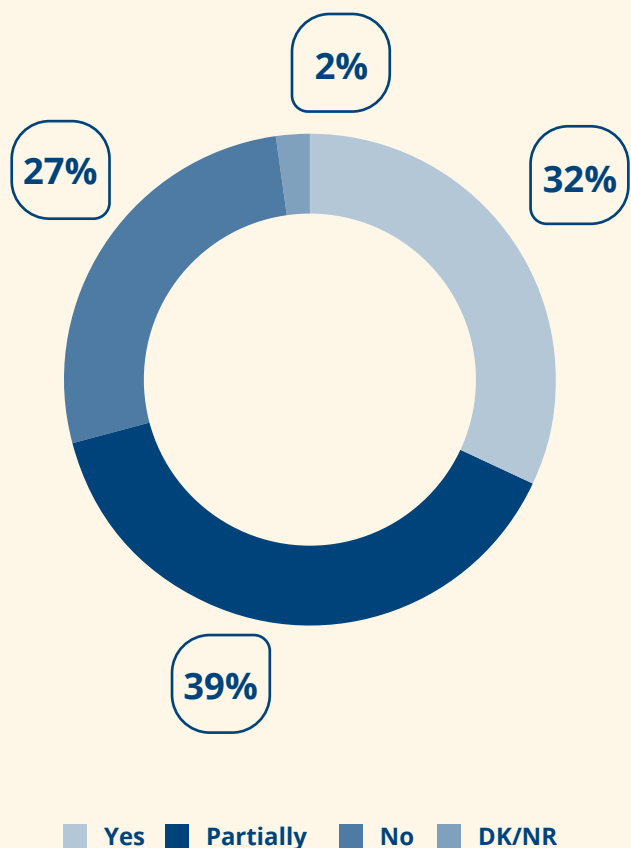
Most young women and girls (71%) have sufficient or partial information to recognise gender-based violence and/or harassment. However, one in four young women or girls (27%) stated that they do not have enough information to recognise GBV and to seek protection.

According to participants in the focus group discussions, many girls are not aware that they are survivors of gender-based violence and/or harassment, especially when it involves psychological or economic forms — controlling behaviour, jealousy, restriction of finances, or limitation of personal freedom. This type of gender-based violence and/or harassment is often concealed under the guise of “love”, “care”, or “normal behaviour” in a relationship, leading to the creation of toxic dynamics in which young women and girls gradually lose self-confidence and the ability to recognise that they are being abused.

Chart 6:

Information on GBV

Do you believe that you have sufficient information to recognise gender-based violence and/or harassment and to seek protection?



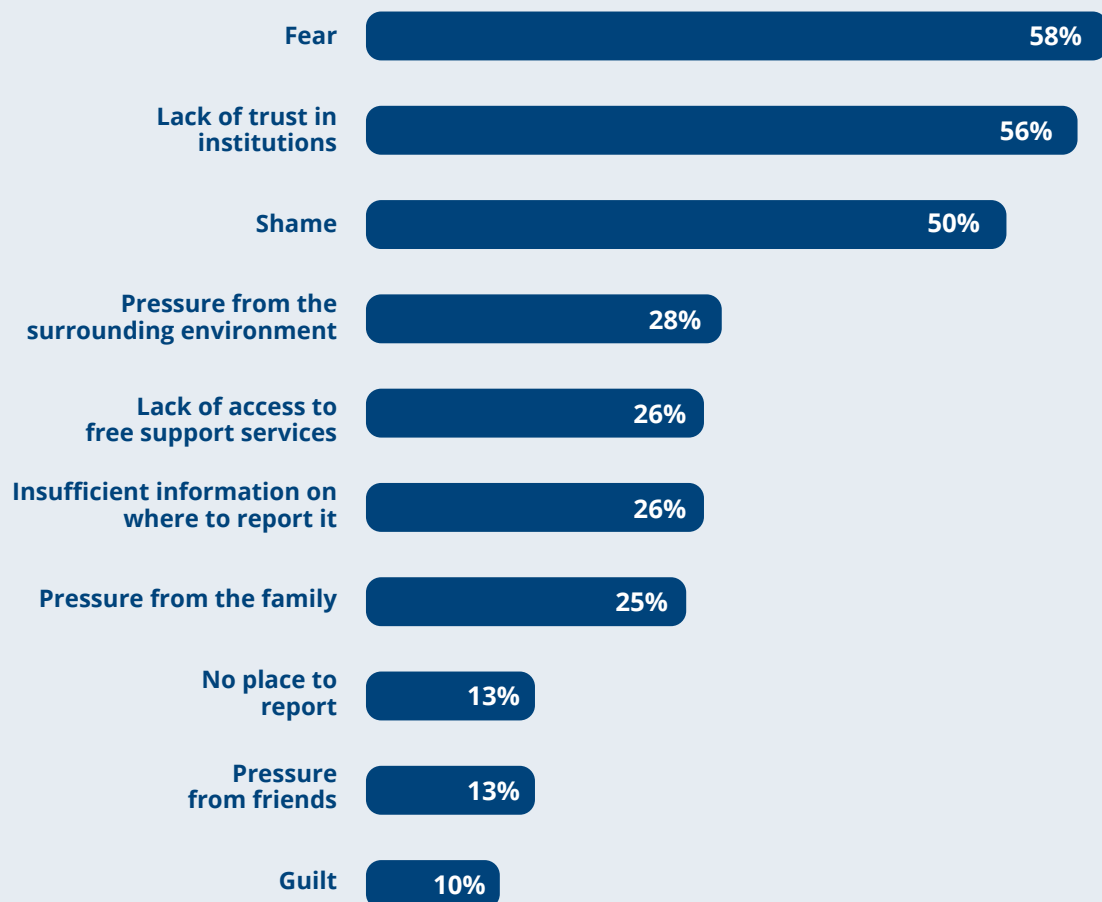
The percentage of young women and girls who do not have sufficient information about gender-based violence and how to seek protection is particularly concerning among Roma women (47%), as well as among those without formal education (50%) or with only primary education (49%).

According to respondents, fear, distrust in institutions, and shame are the most commonly cited reasons why gender-based violence and/or harassment is not reported.

Chart 7:

Reasons for Not Reporting GBV

What are the most common reasons why gender-based violence and/or harassment is not reported?



This was also confirmed through the qualitative research, where the main reasons why young women and girls do not report gender-based violence are fear, shame, and distrust in institutions. Fear of retaliation, judgment from the community, and the possibility that the perpetrator might find out that the survivor reported the incident increase insecurity and risk. Shame, feelings of guilt, and fear of public stigma impel survivors to remain silent. Distrust in institutions and the belief that reporting will not result in protection or sanctions further discourage them. Economic dependence is also an important factor — many young women and girls have nowhere to go or lack the means to become independent. All of this creates a cycle of silence that can only be broken through increased trust in the system, effective protection, and a change in societal attitudes toward survivors.

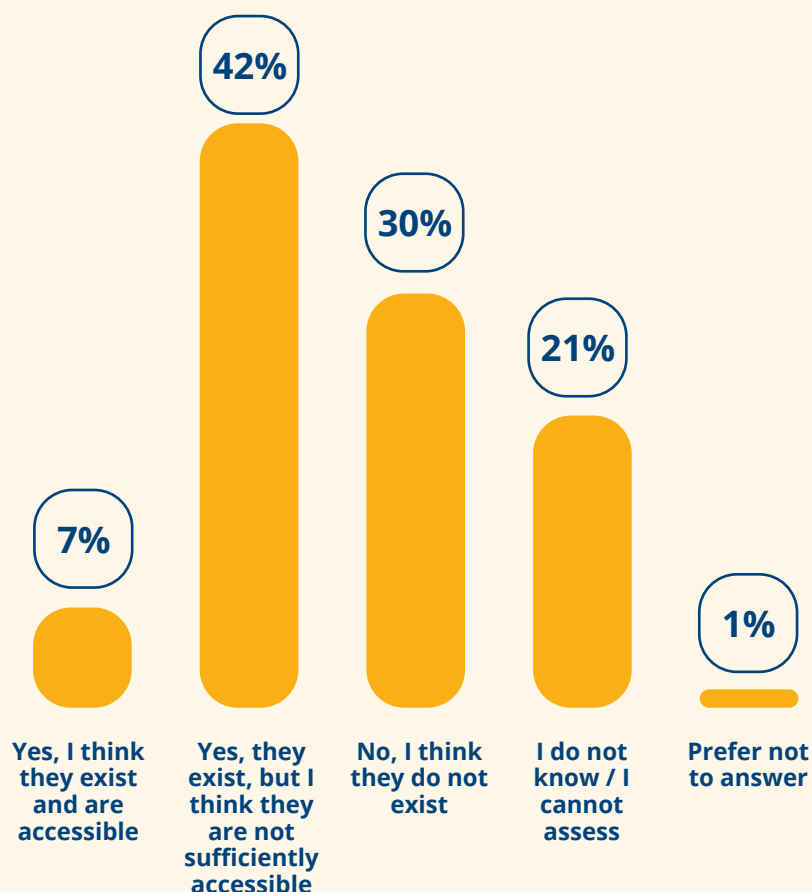
Although the remaining reasons are cited by a smaller proportion of young women and girls overall, certain reasons are reported at significantly higher levels within specific groups.

- ▶ Pressure from the family is reported at a significantly higher rate among Roma women (53%) compared to the overall percentage within the target population (25%).
- ▶ Insufficient information about where to report is cited at considerably higher rates among Roma women (37%) and among women from other smaller ethnic groups (36%).
- ▶ Regarding educational status, shame as a reason appears at a considerably higher rate (66%) among young women and girls with primary education compared to respondents with higher education.
- ▶ Lack of access to free support is reported as a reason at a significantly higher rate (31%) among respondents with higher education.

Awareness of the existence and availability of youth-friendly and gender-sensitive support services for survivors of gender-based violence and/or harassment is relatively low. Half of young women and girls believe that such services do not exist (30%) or do not know that they exist (21%), meaning they are unable to assess their availability. Only 7% of young women and girls know that such services exist and consider them accessible, while an additional 42% stated that they are aware of their existence but believe they are not sufficiently accessible.

Chart 8:**Awareness of the Existence
of Services**

**Do you believe that
accessible, youth-
friendly, and gender-
sensitive services
exist for supporting
survivors of gender-
based violence and/
or harassment?**



Awareness of the existence and accessibility of such services is particularly low among the youngest respondents (18 to 21 years old) and among Roma girls and young women. In terms of educational status, young women and girls without formal education or only with primary education report in significantly higher proportions that they do not know about the existence of youth-oriented and gender-responsive services providing support to survivors of gender-based violence and/or harassment.

In this regard, participants in the focus group discussions emphasised that civil society organisations should also play a role in providing practical assistance — psychological support, legal counselling, shelter services and educational programmes — particularly in contexts where the state lacks sufficient capacity. Only through continuous support, publicly visible results, and coordinated cooperation with institutions can a sense of safety be created for survivors, encouraging them to come forward, knowing they will not be left alone throughout the process.

Positions regarding GBV

In the survey, young women and girls were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements related to gender roles and interactions between men and women. Regarding fundamental attitudes connected to gender-based violence, the majority of young women and girls disagreed (61%) with the statements that domestic violence is a private matter and should remain within the family, that violence is caused by the survivor herself (67%), and that women invent or exaggerate allegations of abuse (65%). Opinions on whether women are more often raped by strangers than by people they know were divided. Specifically, 27% of respondents agreed with this statement, while 34% disagreed.

Chart 9:

Fundamental positions regarding GBV

To what extent do you agree with the following statements, where 1 means “strongly disagree” and 5 means “strongly agree”?



Strongly / Somewhat agree

Strongly/ Somewhat disagree

Although levels of agreement with these statements are relatively low overall, certain groups of young women and girls express these negative stereotypes more strongly. The view that domestic violence is a private matter and should be resolved within the family is more prevalent among young Albanian and Roma women and girls, those who are occasionally/informally employed or unemployed, and respondents coming from families with lower economic status (monthly household income up to 30,000 MKD). The belief that violence is often caused by the survivor herself appears above the average among respondents of Albanian ethnic background, as well as young women and girls who are occasionally/informally employed or unemployed and come from households with monthly income up to 24,000 MKD.

Agreement with the statement that women and girls who say they have been abused often exaggerate their claims is significantly higher among respondents from rural areas (14%), those without formal education (17%), and those who are unemployed (16%) or occasionally/informally employed (15%), with household incomes up to 24,000 MKD (30%).

The data indicate that beliefs related to women's subordination and obedience are minimally present among the young women and girls included in the research. Most respondents disagree with the statement that it is a woman's or partner's obligation to engage in sexual relations with her partner even when she does not want to (80%), as well as with the statement that it is important for a man to show his partner "who is in charge" in the relationship (75%).

Significantly higher levels of agreement among young women and girls appear in statements that normalise violence and shift responsibility onto the survivor:

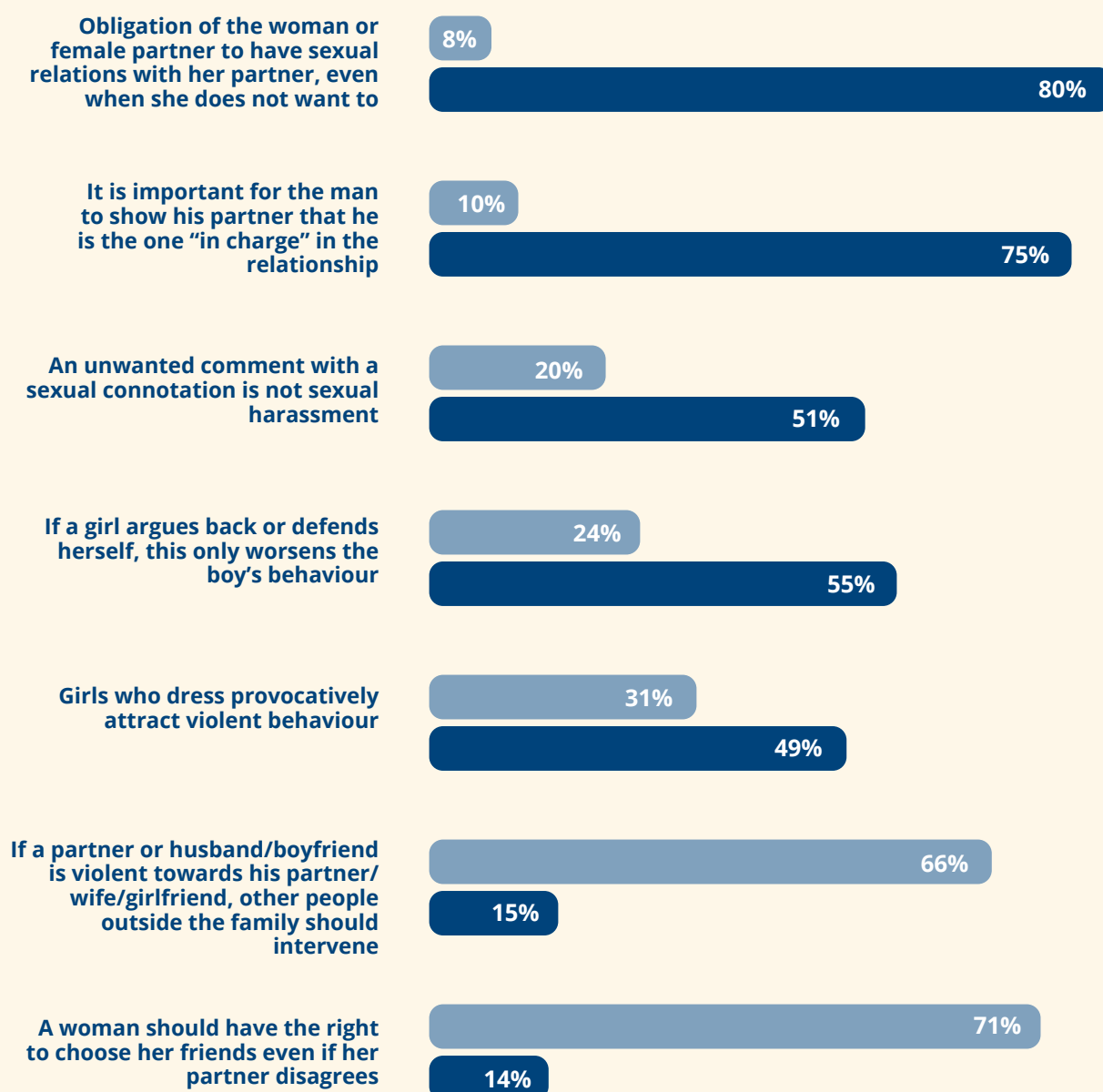
- ▶ **31%** of respondents agree with the statement that girls who dress provocatively attract violent behaviour,
- ▶ **One in four** young women or girls (24%) agree with the statement that if a girl argues or defends herself, this only worsens the partner's behaviour,
- ▶ **One in five** respondents (20%) agree with the statement that an unwanted comment with a sexual connotation does not constitute sexual harassment.

Finally, most young women and girls (66%) agree that people outside the family should intervene if a partner is violent towards his partner, and 71% support a woman's right to choose her friends even if her partner disagrees with that choice (71%).

Chart 10:

**Norms and acceptable
behaviour**

**To what extent do you agree with the following
statements, where 1 means “strongly disagree” and 5
means “strongly agree”?**



Strongly / Somewhat agree

Strongly / Somewhat disagree

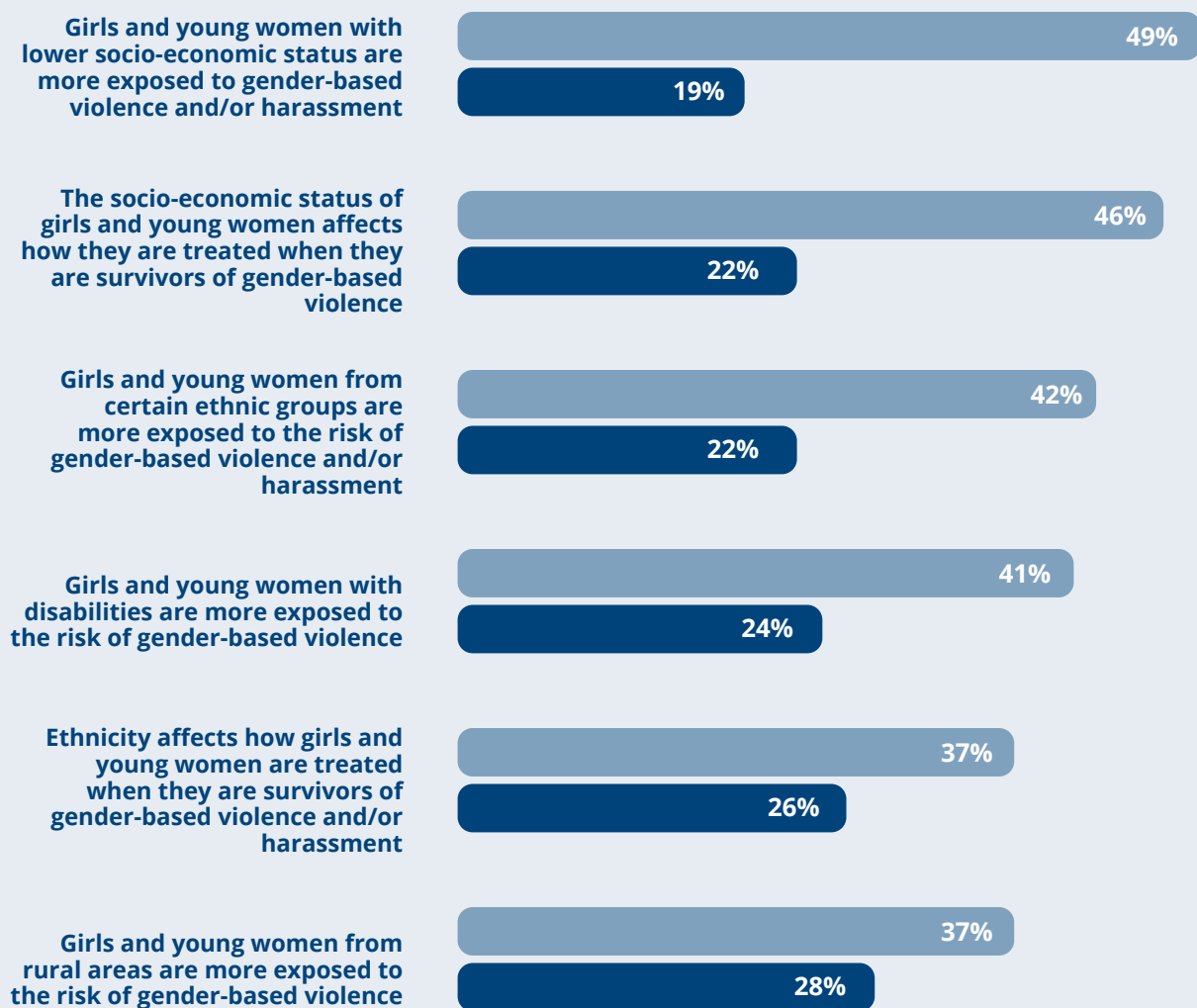
In the final section, which examined different positions of young women and girls towards gender-based violence and/or harassment, the analysis explored perceptions of vulnerability among various at-risk groups of young women and girls. All examined factors (status, affiliation, disability, place of residence) are considered important in shaping perceptions of risk related to gender-based violence. However, socio-economic status is the most strongly recognised factor, both in terms of exposure and in terms of treatment. Almost half of the respondents agree that girls and young women with lower socio-economic status are more frequently exposed to gender-based violence and/or harassment (46%), and that socio-economic status affects how they are treated when they are survivors of gender-based violence (46%).

According to the expressed positions, ethnicity also affects both the risk and the treatment of survivors of gender-based violence. A total of 42% of respondents agree that girls and young women from certain ethnic groups are more exposed to the risk of gender-based violence and/or harassment, and 37% agree that ethnicity influences how survivors are treated.

Chart 11:

Positions towards at-risk groups of young women and/or girls

To what extent do you agree with the following statements, where 1 means “strongly disagree” and 5 means “strongly agree”?



■ Strongly / Somewhat agree

■ Strongly / Somewhat disagree

Young women and girls with disabilities are more likely to be exposed to the risk of gender-based violence — this is a view shared by 41% of survey respondents. A relatively high percentage of disagreement indicates that opinions remain divided on certain aspects. For example, 28% disagree that young women and girls from rural areas are more exposed to the risk of gender-based violence, while 37% hold the opposite view, considering that this group of young women and girls is more likely to be exposed to the risk of gender-based violence and/or harassment.

Forms and Prevalence of GBV and/or Harassment

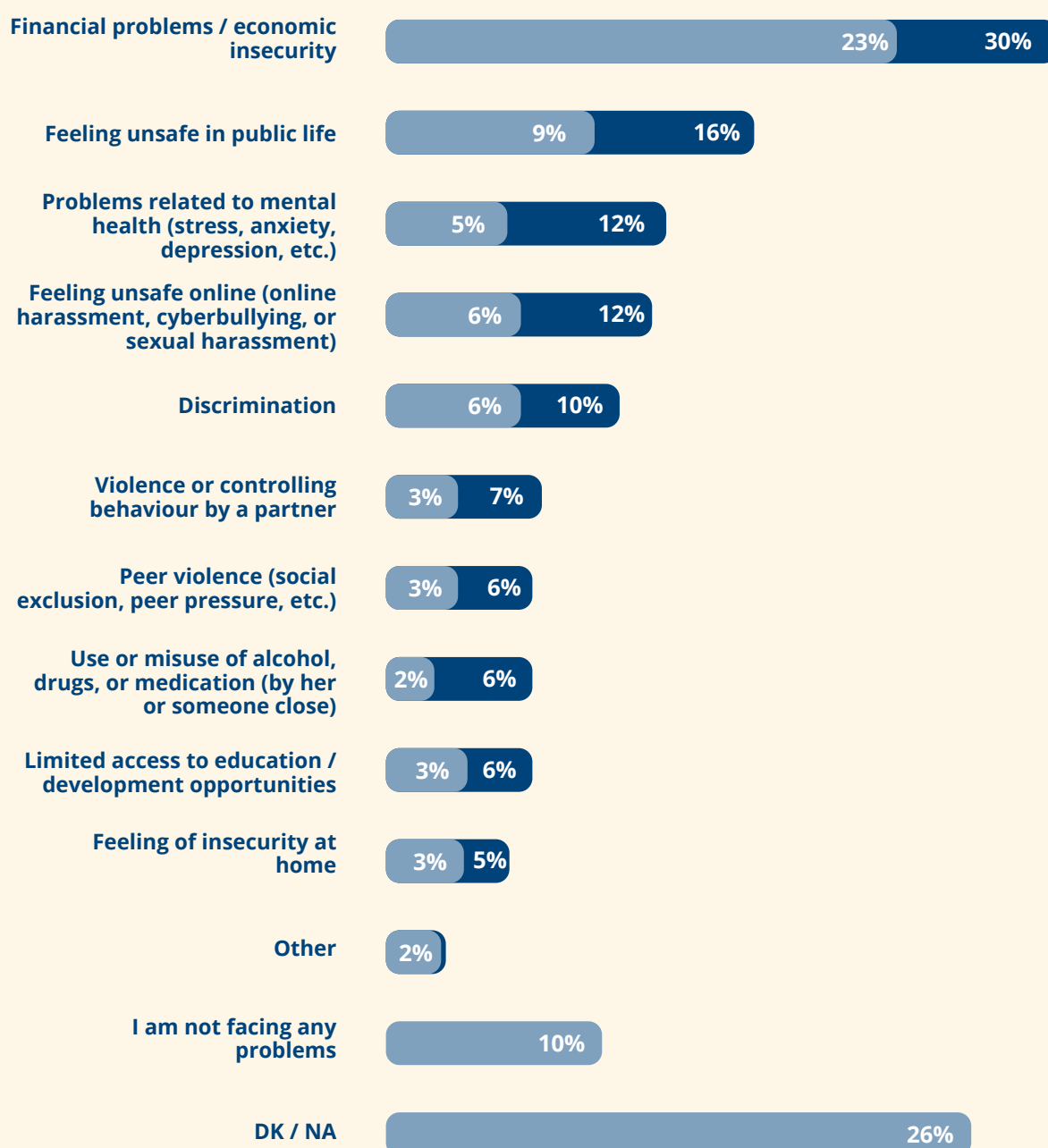
Major Challenges

Financial difficulties and economic instability are the most commonly reported challenges faced by young women and girls – one in four respondents (23%) identified this as the primary issue, and overall 30% selected it as one of the key problems they currently face. Immediately after this, the feeling of insecurity in the public life was identified as the second-most reported problem — 16% listed it as an issue, followed by issues related to mental health and the feeling of insecurity in the online space – problems that were each mentioned by 12% of the young women and girls.

Chart 12:

Major challenges

What is the biggest problem you are currently facing?



■ Mentioned overall ■ First mentioned

The analysis by demographic characteristics shows that certain groups of young women and girls are more affected by specific problems:

- ▶ As expected, financial problems and economic instability are particularly reported as the biggest problem among young women and girls who are occasionally employed / informally employed (41%), as well as among those who are unemployed (37%). In terms of ethnicity, young women and girls from the Roma community report this problem in a significantly higher percentage (60%), identifying it as the main difficulty they face.
- ▶ Mental health problems are more frequently reported by young women and girls aged 22 to 25 (17%), while the feeling of insecurity in the online space, such as exposure to technology-facilitated harassment or cyberbullying, is significantly more common (16%) among the youngest interviewees aged 18 to 21.
- ▶ Although the feeling of insecurity at home is reported at an overall low percentage (5%), this problem is identified by twice as many respondents (10%) among young women and girls of Roma and Albanian ethnicity.
- ▶ Discrimination as a problem is particularly significant among young women and girls living in rural areas, who reported it in 13% of cases, compared to only 8% among young women and girls in urban settings.

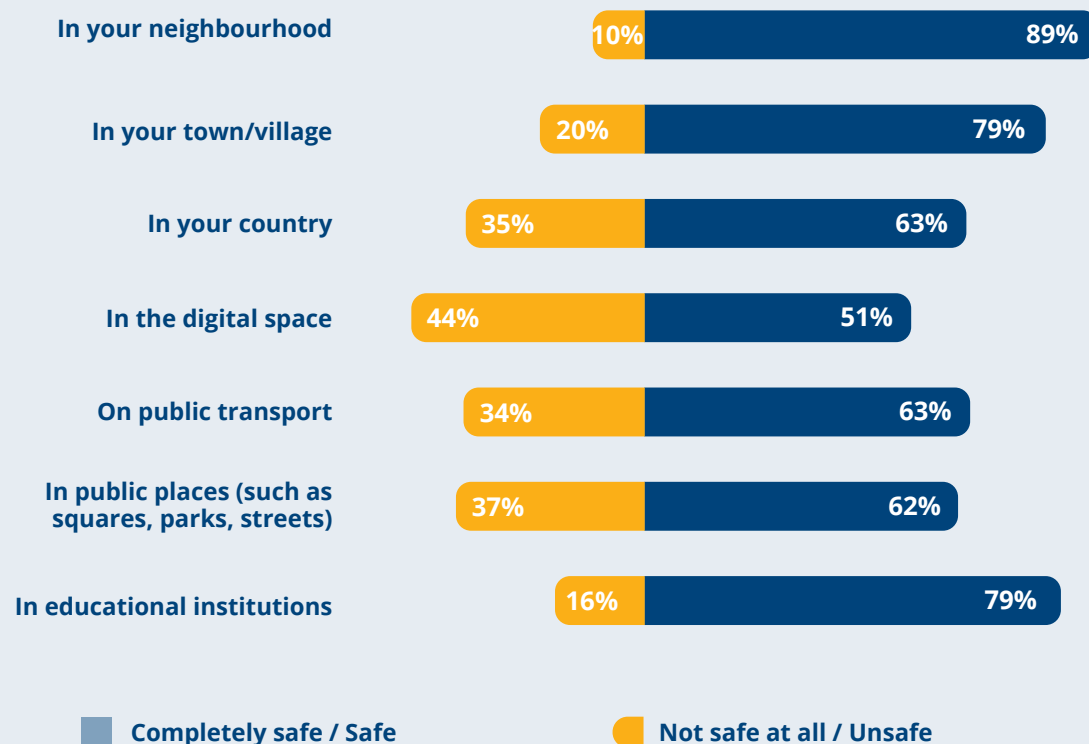
Feeling of Safety in Public Life

Young women and girls were asked to indicate how safe they feel in different locations within public life. The overall finding is that they feel less safe in larger and virtual spaces (such as the digital space). Specifically, 44% feel unsafe in the digital space, followed by 37% who feel unsafe in public places such as squares, parks, and streets, and 34% who feel unsafe when using public transport. In contrast, 89% of young women and girls feel safe in their neighbourhood, and 79% feel safe in their city/village and in educational institutions.

Chart 13:

Feeling of safety

To what extent do you feel safe as a young woman / girl...



Prevalence of Violence

Violence among youth is a key concerns not only in North Macedonia, but also across the Western Balkans and internationally. In the national context, violence is defined within the national strategic framework as: “all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation of a child, including sexual abuse.”² In the following section, violence is analysed more broadly through the findings of the research study.

² National Strategy for Prevention and Justice for Children in the Republic of North Macedonia (2022–2027) and Action Plan (2022–2023), available at: <http://dspdp.com.mk/vesti/promocija-na-nacionalnata-strategija-za-prevencija-i-pravda-za-decata-2022-2027/>

According to the survey results, 34% of respondents stated that they had experienced some form of gender-based violence, while 43% reported having witnessed gender-based violence. The findings indicate that verbal and psychological violence are the most widespread forms, whereas sexual violence and sexual harassment are the least reported. The largest share of respondents (33%) reported witnessing verbal violence, and 24% reported having personally experienced it. This is followed by psychological violence, with 24% reporting that they witnessed it and 16% reporting direct experience as survivors. These data suggest that such forms of violence are the most common, but also the most normalised in everyday communication. Young women and girls often do not recognise verbal insults, humiliation, or manipulation as violence, which highlights the need for increased awareness of emotional forms of abuse.

Physical violence was reported by 12% as survivors and 22% as witnesses, indicating that this type of violence is more recognisable, yet still subject to underreporting, particularly in cases of so-called “milder” forms.

Controlling behaviour by a partner was reported among respondents, with 13% having witnessed it and 7% having experienced it as survivors. This finding indicates the presence of controlling and manipulative behavioural patterns within intimate relationships, which are not always recognised as violence.

Economic violence is equally represented among respondents, with 8% reporting it as witnesses and 8% as survivors, indicating that young women and girls are already facing forms of financial control, dependency, or restriction of opportunities.

Regarding sexual harassment (7% survivors, 7% witnesses) and sexual violence (1% survivors, 2% witnesses), the data show relatively low reporting rates. However, these figures should be interpreted with caution, as sexual violence remains frequently underreported due to shame, fear, and social stigma.

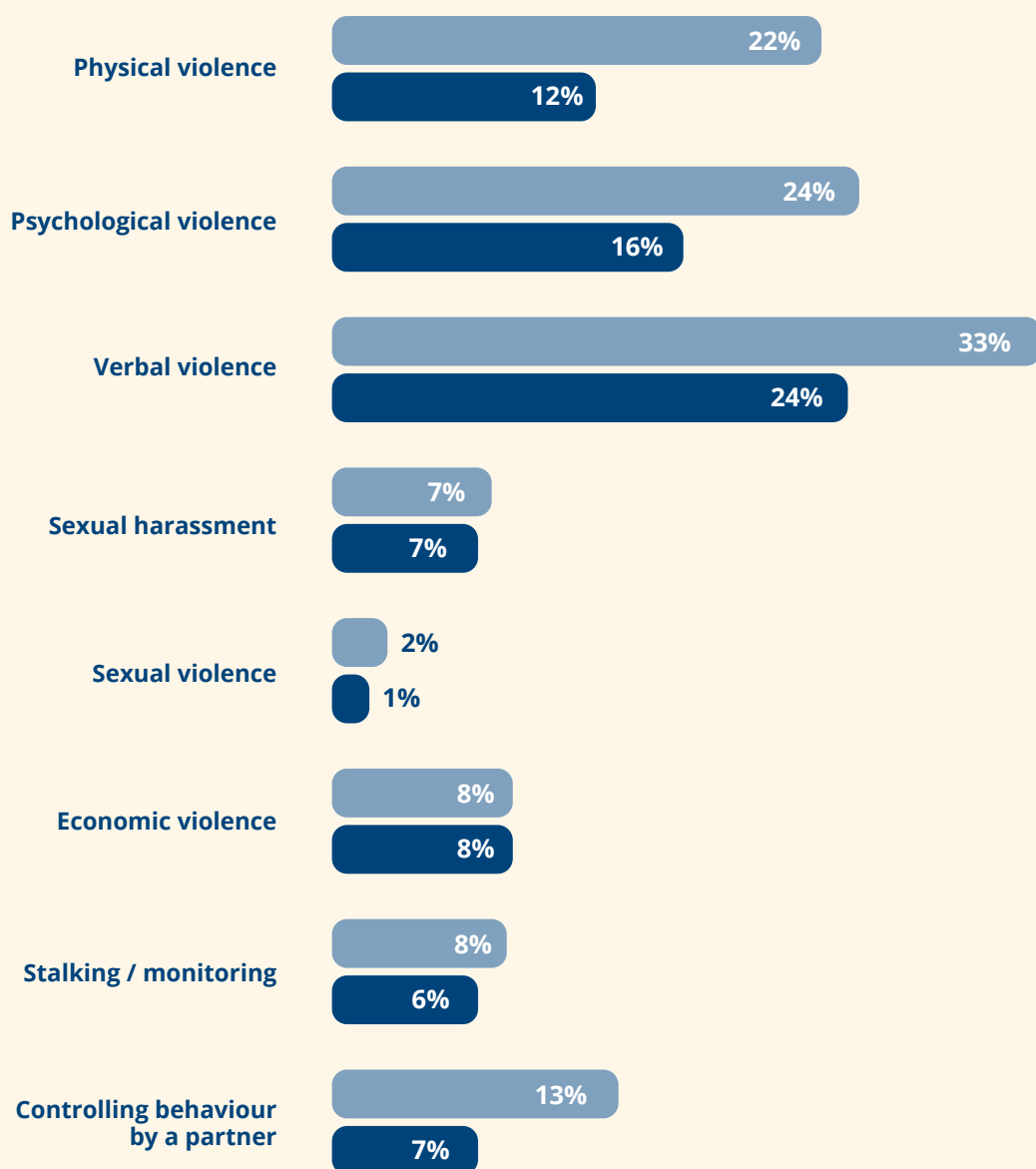
Finally, stalking and monitoring were reported by 6% of respondents as survivors and 8% as witnesses, which may be linked to the increasing forms of monitoring and control through social media, a form that young women and girls often underestimate.

The findings from the qualitative research indicate that the problem of violence is further deepened by the conservative mentality, cultural barriers, and insufficient education, which contribute to violence being seen as shameful and accepted as a normal part of everyday life. Therefore, the participants agree that the most common and most concerning forms of gender-based violence and/or harassment among young women and girls are psychological and digital violence, as these forms are the most hidden, the most difficult to recognise, and the least likely to be sanctioned.

Chart 14:

Prevalence of violence

Since the age of 15, have you ever been a survivor of any type of gender-based violence and/or harassment in public life (school, university, street, workplace, institutions)?
For each of the following forms of violence, please answer with yes, no, or I am not sure.



■ Witness ■ Survivor

Most forms of violence show higher prevalence among young Romani women and girls – 27% have experienced physical violence, 40% psychological violence, and a high 47% have experienced verbal violence. Sexual harassment is above average among young women and girls from rural areas (10%) and young Albanian women (10%).

Findings from the qualitative research confirm that certain groups of young women and girls are more vulnerable and exposed to greater risk. According to the opinion of participants in the focus group discussions, this most often includes girls who come from dysfunctional families, rural and closed communities, the Romani ethnic community, as well as women with different types of disabilities. Furthermore, economic dependence, low levels of education and the lack of awareness about what constitutes violence are among the most commonly mentioned factors that contribute to certain young women and girls being more exposed to gender-based violence and/or harassment. Among these groups, violence is often normalised and socially accepted, and access to institutions and services is limited. The lack of support and distrust in the system contribute to them rarely reporting cases of violence. Likewise, many young women and girls do not recognise psychological, economic, or digital violence, as there is insufficient education and no clear guidance on the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. This further hinders reporting and timely response.

Forms of Violence

The research findings show that different forms of violence occur in different settings, with psychological, verbal, and sexual violence being the most prevalent.

In the home, the most common forms are controlling behaviour and economic violence (49% and 65%), indicating the presence of dependence and control within intimate relationships. The home, although expected to be a safe space, emerges as the highest-risk environment for young women and girls in relation to intimate partner violence.

In public life, particularly on the street, the highest occurrence is observed for sexual harassment (64%) and stalking (68%), confirming that women are frequently exposed to unwanted comments, following, and harassment in their everyday movement. Public transport, parks, and cafés also represent high-risk environments for sexual harassment, especially during evening hours.

Educational institutions (schools and universities) show a high prevalence of psychological and verbal violence (up to 45%), indicating the presence of peer-to-peer bullying and discriminatory behaviours within the academic environment. Stalking (26%) is also present in schools, which may be linked to digital harassment or social exclusion. In the workplace, psychological (14%) and economic violence (15%) are reported, most commonly manifested as mobbing, pressure, or restrictions on professional opportunities. In the homes of friends and in student dormitories, although the percentages are lower, sexual harassment (43%) remains a significant risk.

These data indicate that violence against young women and girls is widespread and appears in different forms depending on the context and the environment in which it occurs.

Table 1:**Locations of violence**

Please indicate the places where you have experienced gender-based violence and/or harassment.

Where you experienced the violence	Physical violence (N=72)	Psychological violence (N=96)	Verbal violence (N=141)	Sexual harassment (N=39)	Sexual violence (N=7)	Economic violence (N=48)	Stalking/ monitoring (N=38)	Controlling partner behaviour (N=39)
At home	24%	24%	18%	15%	14%	65%	13%	49%
In the neighbourhood	14%	8%	14%	13%	43%	8%	11%	3%
School	38%	45%	39%	13%		6%	26%	15%
University	4%	5%	4%	5%	14%	4%	3%	
Hospital	7%	1%	3%	5%	14%	2%		5%
Park	11%	7%	20%	26%	29%	8%	26%	15%
Street	21%	35%	53%	64%	29%	2%	68%	26%
Café, restaurant or club	10%	11%	21%	13%	29%		18%	31%
Parking area	10%	5%	9%	15%	43%	2%	3%	3%
Public transport	8%	9%	6%	13%		2%	3%	8%
Police station	3%	1%	1%	3%	14%			
Friend's home	8%	5%	4%	3%		4%	3%	23%
Workplace	4%	7%	11%	5%	29%	15%	5%	13%
Dormitory/ student residence	6%	4%	2%	3%			8%	5%

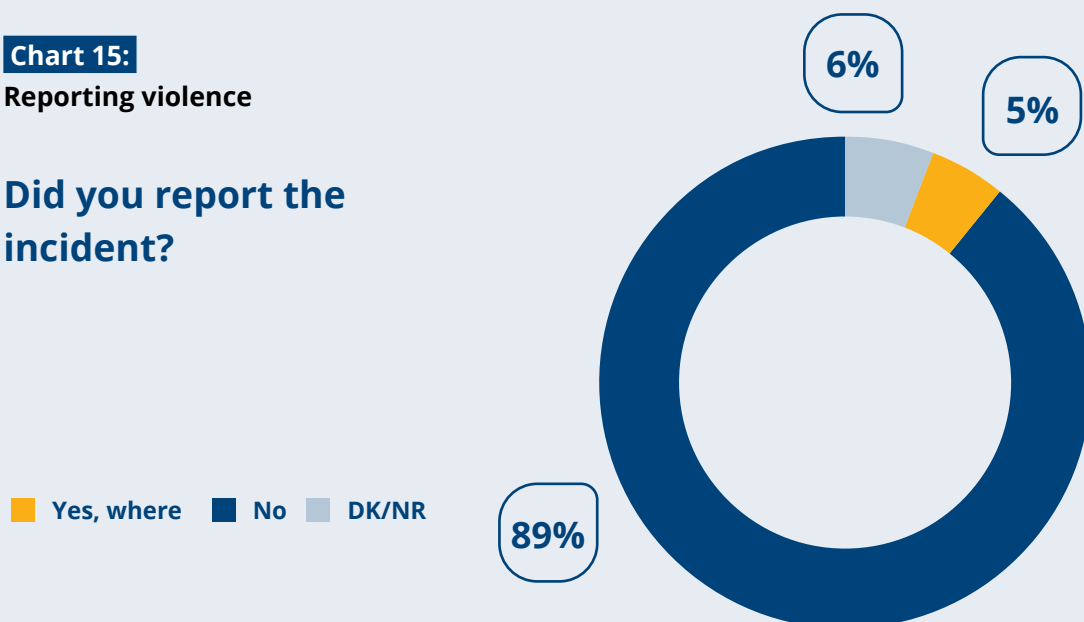
Reporting Violence

A high percentage of young women and girls (89%) who have experienced (34% of respondents) or witnessed gender-based violence and/or harassment (43%) did not report it. This data is alarming and shows that violence most often remains hidden.

In the context of the previous findings (which show high prevalence of psychological, verbal and sexual harassment), this means that a large number of women endure violence without seeking support. This result shows that survivors are often left alone in the process of dealing with violence.

Chart 15:
Reporting violence

Did you report the incident?



The qualitative research confirms the low level of reporting of violence. Organisations can significantly contribute to increasing reporting and building trust in institutions by creating real and visible examples of success, long-term support, and clear communication with the public. Participants emphasise the importance of promoting positive stories – cases in which survivors received protection and justice was achieved – as this builds the belief that the system can function. At the same time, serious and continuous media campaigns are needed, rather than short-term actions, in order to raise awareness and encourage a response among the public.

Reasons for Not Reporting

The most common reason for not reporting violence among young women and girls who have experienced or witnessed an incident of gender-based violence and/or harassment is fear (31%) – which may stem from retaliation by the perpetrator, loss of privacy, judgement from the community, or distrust in the outcome of the procedure. This shows that women do not feel protected either legally or socially. The second most common factor is distrust in institutions (27%), which points to the systemic weakness of institutions (police, social services, courts) and the perception that they will not take any action or will be ineffective, while an additional 21% of young women and girls indicated shame as a reason for not reporting the incident, which shows that societal norms and stigma around survivors of violence are still strongly present. Young women and girls fear judgement, blame, or damage to their reputation.

A significant share of respondents do not know where and how to report – 16% of young women and girls who did not report the incident stated that the reason was insufficient information about where to report it, which indicates a lack of public promotion of available services and channels (SOS helplines, support centres).

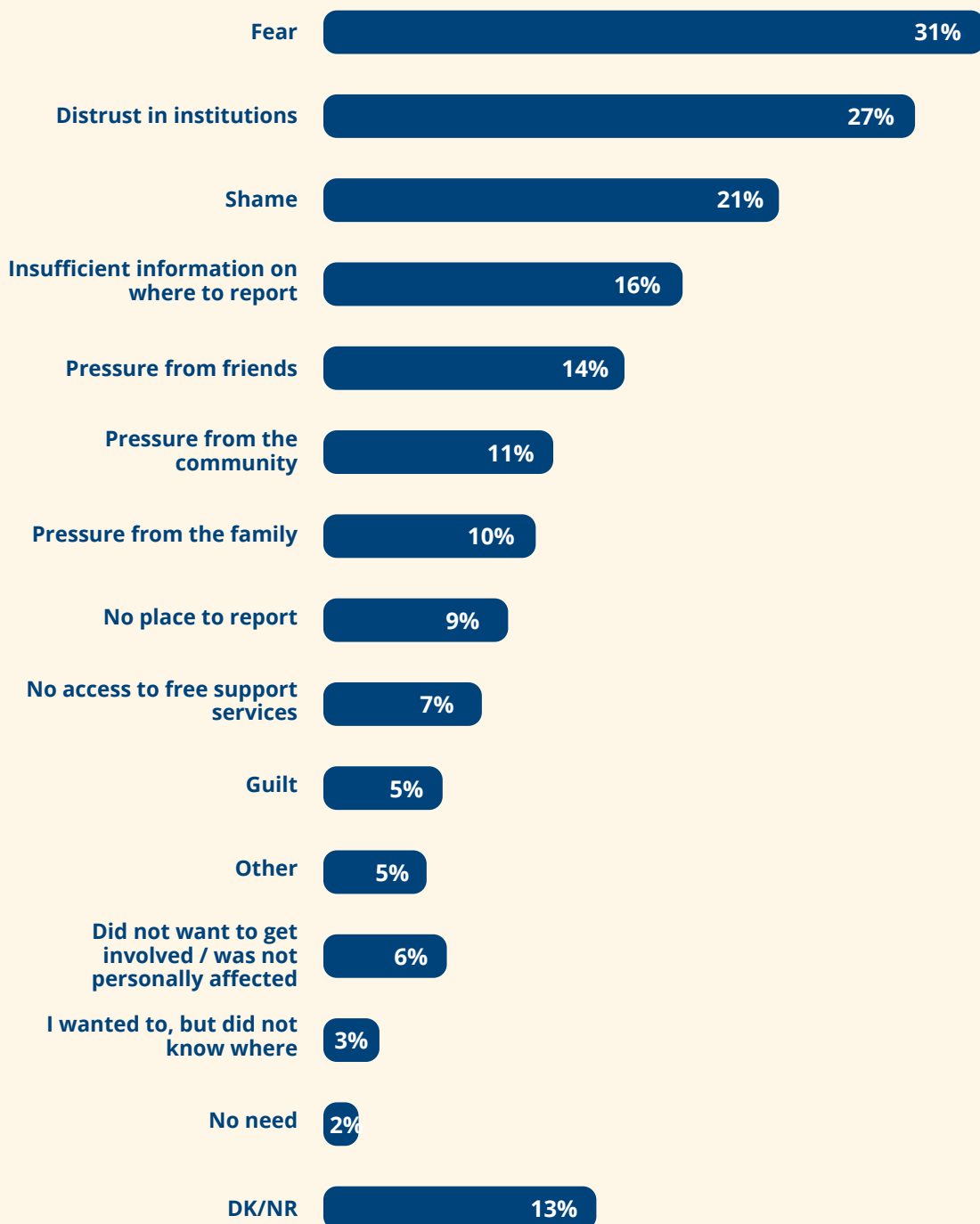
Participants from civil society organisations in the focus group discussions also emphasised this problem, noting that many young women and girls are not sufficiently informed about what they should do, especially when they do not trust the police, which often leads civil society organisations to assume this role.

The pressure that young women and girls feel not to report the incident appears at different levels and, according to respondents' statements, comes from friends (14%), the community (11%) and the family (10%).

Chart 16:

Reasons for not reporting

Why did you not report the gender-based violence and/or harassment?



The findings from the quantitative research were also confirmed in the group discussions. According to the participants in the qualitative research, the main reasons why young women and girls do not report gender-based violence and/or harassment are fear, shame, and distrust in institutions. Fear of retaliation, judgment from the community, and the possibility that the perpetrator may find out that the survivor reported the incident increases insecurity and risk. Shame, feelings of guilt and fear of public stigma lead survivors to remain silent. Distrust in institutions and the belief that reporting will not result in protection or accountability further discourages them. An important factor is also economic dependence – many girls have nowhere to go or lack the means to become independent. All of this creates a cycle of silence that can only be broken through greater trust in the system, effective protection and a shift in societal attitudes towards survivors.

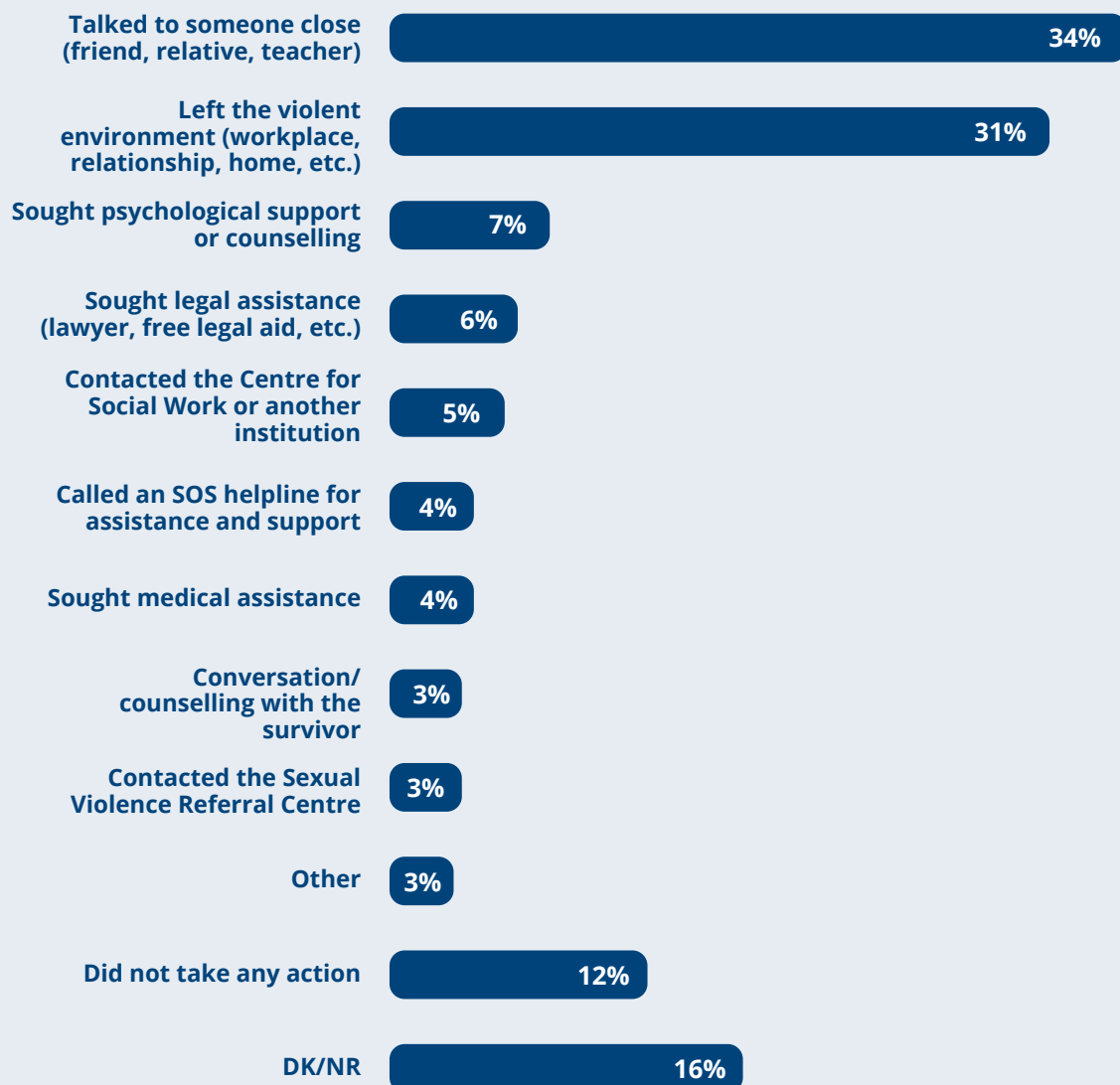
Coping Mechanisms

The most common reaction after experiencing an incident (as a survivor or as a witness) among young women and girls is seeking emotional support within informal networks – 34% of respondents who experienced an incident of gender-based violence and/or harassment stated that they spoke with someone close to them (a friend, relative, or teacher).

The second most common step taken is leaving the violent environment (a workplace, relationship, home, etc.) – 31% of survivors and witnesses took this step, indicating that a significant proportion of young women and girls choose to protect themselves independently. Seeking psychological support or counselling is a positive step, yet only a small share of survivors and witnesses of gender-based violence (7%) reported doing so.

Chart 17:
Steps taken

What did you do after the incident?



Gaps in Institutional and Legal Protection

The responses of the young women and girls who were survivors or witnesses of gender-based violence and/or harassment indicate that what is most lacking in institutional handling of such cases is appropriate sanctioning, survivor protection, and prompt reaction, which point to systemic inefficiency and a lack of trust in institutions.

The most frequent concern is that perpetrators are not sanctioned strictly enough or in a timely manner — this was stated by 65% of respondents who were survivors or witnesses of gender-based violence and/or harassment. This creates a sense of impunity, reduces trust in the justice system, and discourages survivors from reporting.

Additionally, 56% of respondents who were survivors or witnesses believe that protection and support for the survivor are lacking. This indicates that institutions do not provide sufficient psychological, legal, or physical protection to survivors.

Respondents also believe that institutions react slowly or ineffectively — a shortcoming noted by 55% of those who were survivors or witnesses of gender-based violence. According to the opinion of young women and girls who have experienced or witnessed gender-based violence and/or harassment, procedures are often delayed, services are unresponsive, and coordination between institutions is lacking. Timely reaction is crucial to preventing further harm, yet in practice it is often missing.

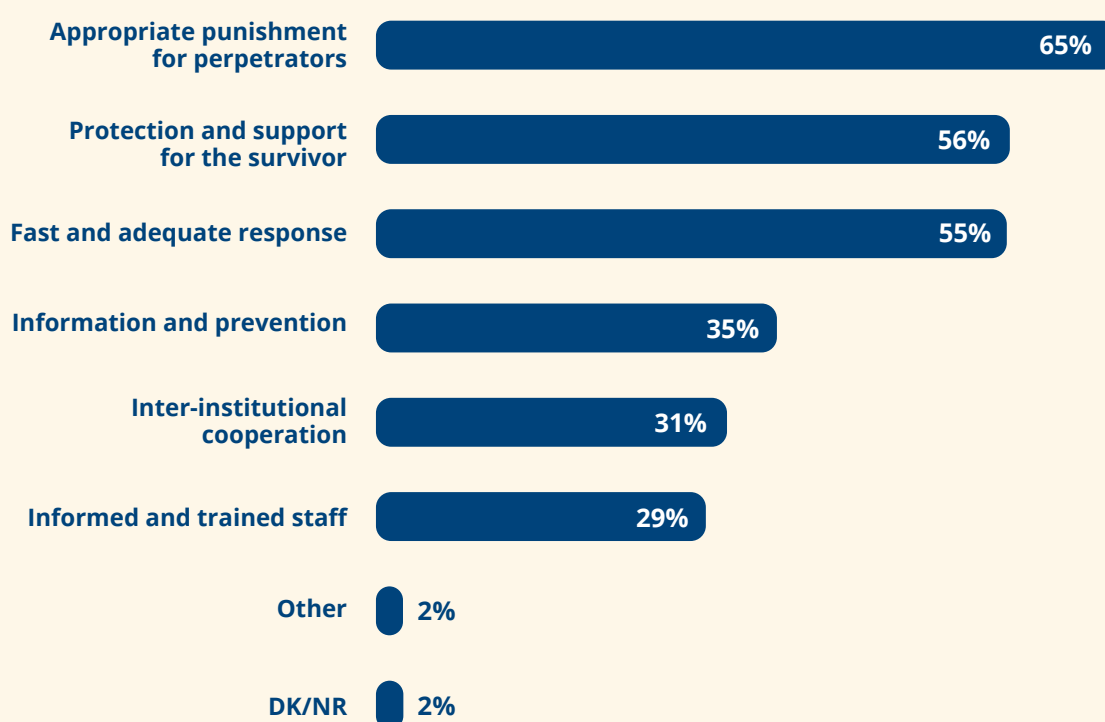
The findings from the qualitative research highlight the issue of timely response. According to participants in the focus group discussions, what is most lacking in institutional handling of cases is a fast and timely reaction, as well as a serious and sensitive approach towards survivors. It was emphasised that many young women and girls feel that institutions do not perceive the abusive situation as a serious problem, which undermines their trust and encourages them to hide the violence or not report it.

Information and prevention (35%), inter-institutional cooperation (31%), and informed and trained staff (29%) were identified as additional gaps in institutional response in cases of gender-based violence and/or harassment.

Chart 18:

Gaps in institutional and legal protection

In your view, what is most lacking in institutional handling of cases of gender-based violence and/or harassment?



Factors for Increased Safety

Regarding the question of which factors would contribute to greater safety for young women and girls in public life, the results show that respondents most frequently emphasise the need for more proactive institutions, faster response times, and increased police presence, as well as educational and informational activities that would shift societal attitudes towards violence.

The most frequently mentioned measure is faster response from relevant institutions (48%). This confirms the perception that current institutions respond slowly, which increases feelings of insecurity.

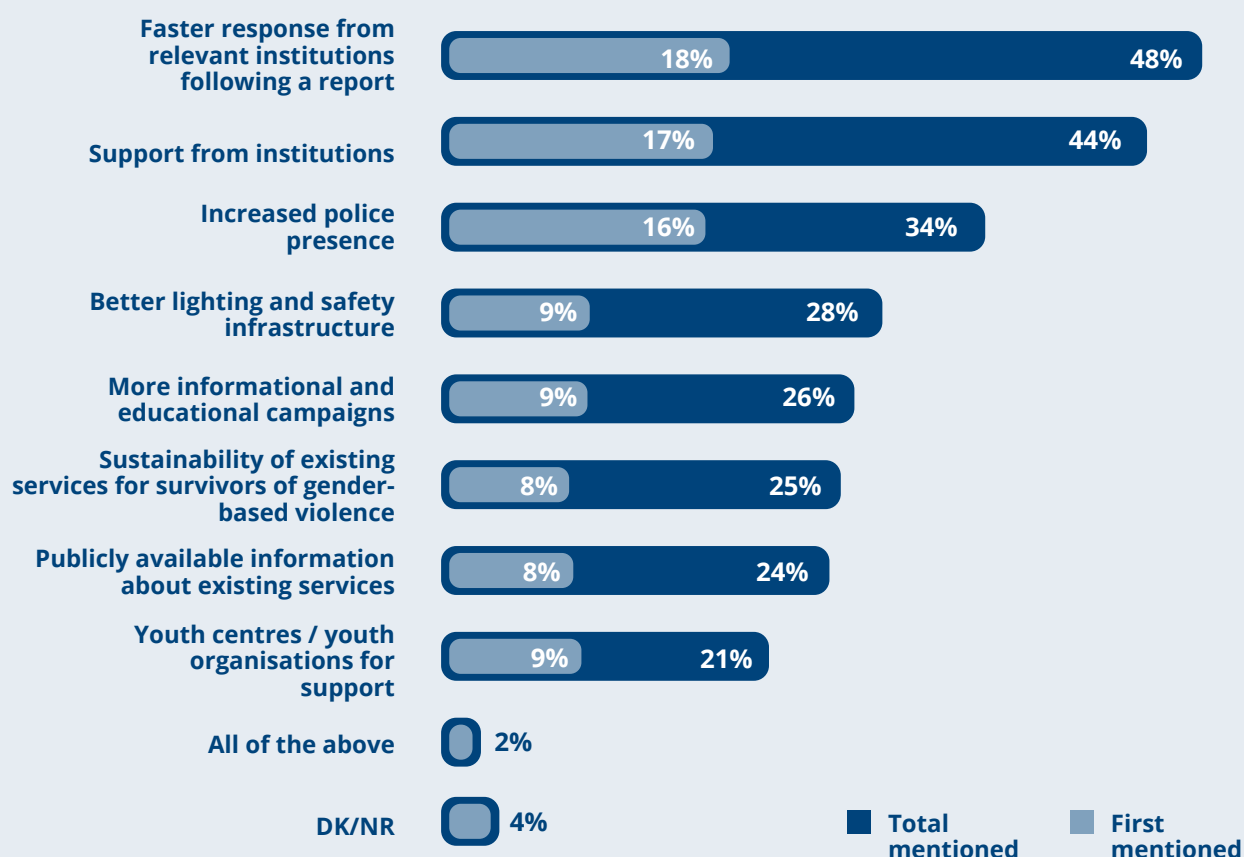
Support from institutions (social services, police, judiciary) is the second most frequently mentioned measure (46%), indicating that young women expect continuous institutional support, not only at the moment of reporting, but also afterwards—psychological, legal, and social.

Increased police presence and better lighting and safety infrastructure (CCTV) are mentioned by 34% and 33% of young women and girls, respectively.

Chart 19:

Factors for increased safety

What would help increase the safety of young women and girls in public life?



Accessibility of Institutions

The question of how institutions can become more accessible and more trustworthy for young women and girls – an issue that is crucial for improving the institutional response to gender-based violence and/or harassment – was addressed directly to the young women and girls.

The results reflect their perception of what is missing from the institutional approach to the needs of young women and girls. The highest-ranked priorities are confidentiality, easy access, and open communication, indicating a lack of transparency and approachability between institutions and young women and girls.

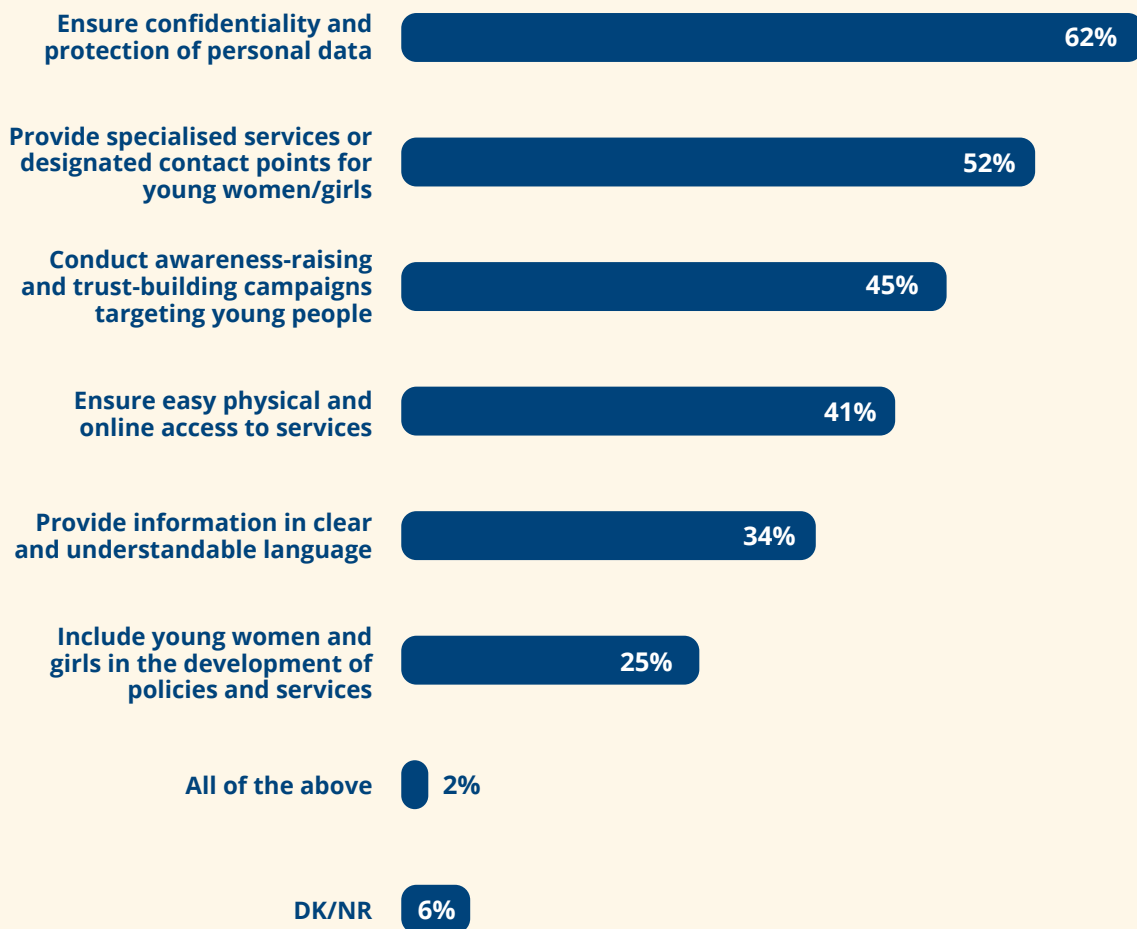
The most frequent response is that institutions shall guarantee confidentiality and the protection of personal data, which shows that young women and girls do not feel safe sharing personal information when reporting violence or seeking help. The lack of trust in the personal-data protection system undermines their willingness to seek institutional support.

More than half (52%) of young women and girls expect institutions to provide a personalised and sensitive approach, and 45% also expect institutions to conduct campaigns aimed at increasing awareness and trust among young people. Four in ten young women and girls (41%) further expect institutions to ensure easy physical and online access to services, without complicated procedures.

Chart 20:

Ways to make institutions more accessible

How can institutions become more accessible and more trustworthy for young women and girls?



Online Environment and Technology-Facilitated Violence

Prevalence of Violence in the Digital Space

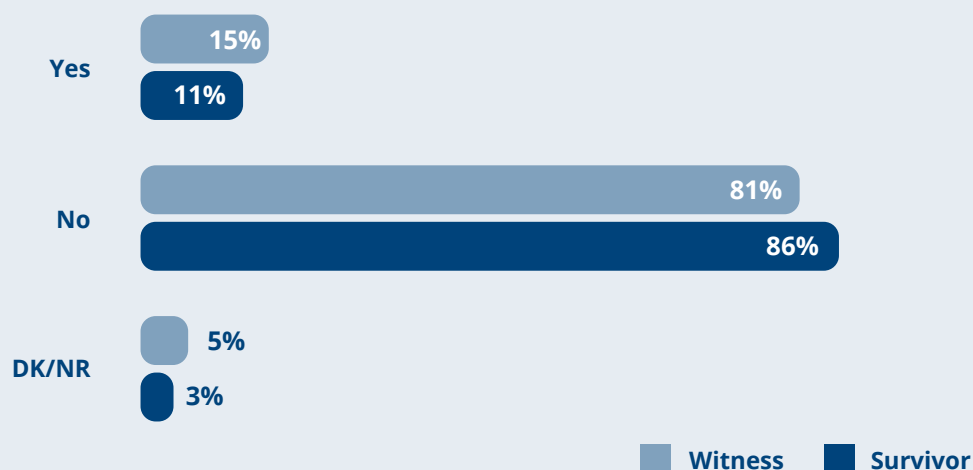
The findings indicate that a significant number of young women and girls in North Macedonia have either directly or indirectly experienced violence in the digital space (such as social media, SMS messages, e-mail, forums, phone calls, GPS trackers, etc.) since their teenage years. Although most respondents stated that they had not been survivors of such incidents, there is a strong likelihood of underreporting—particularly in cases of psychological, verbal, and economic abuse online.

Around one in ten respondents personally experienced some form of violence after the age of 15, while 15% witnessed violence against another person in the digital space. These percentages confirm that violence in digital environments is real and present, even when it is not directed at the respondent herself.

Chart 21:

Experience with violence in the digital space

Since the age of 15, have you ever been a survivor of any form of technology-facilitated gender-based violence and/or harassment (on social media, SMS messages, e-mail, forums, phone calls, GPS trackers, etc.)?



According to the findings from the qualitative research, technology-facilitated violence is becoming an increasingly common and serious phenomenon, particularly among young women and girls. All participants stated that, to a lesser or greater extent, they had witnessed some form of digital violence, such as abusive comments, threats, fake profiles, and the sharing or editing of photos without consent. Furthermore, civil society organisations additionally noted that such cases most often involve underage girls, who do not fully understand the seriousness of the situation and are unaware of the potential consequences.

Forms of Violence in the Digital Space

With regard to online forms of gender-based violence and harassment, which are increasingly common among young women and girls, the results show that the most frequent forms include fake profiles, abusive comments, and unwanted messages, which indicate a serious safety concern for young women and girls in digital environments.

The most common form of digital harassment is the creation of a fake profile – half of the young women and girls who had experienced (55%) or witnessed (54%) gender-based violence reported that someone had created a fake profile using their photo or identity. This compromises privacy and security and often constitutes a form of psychological violence and manipulation.

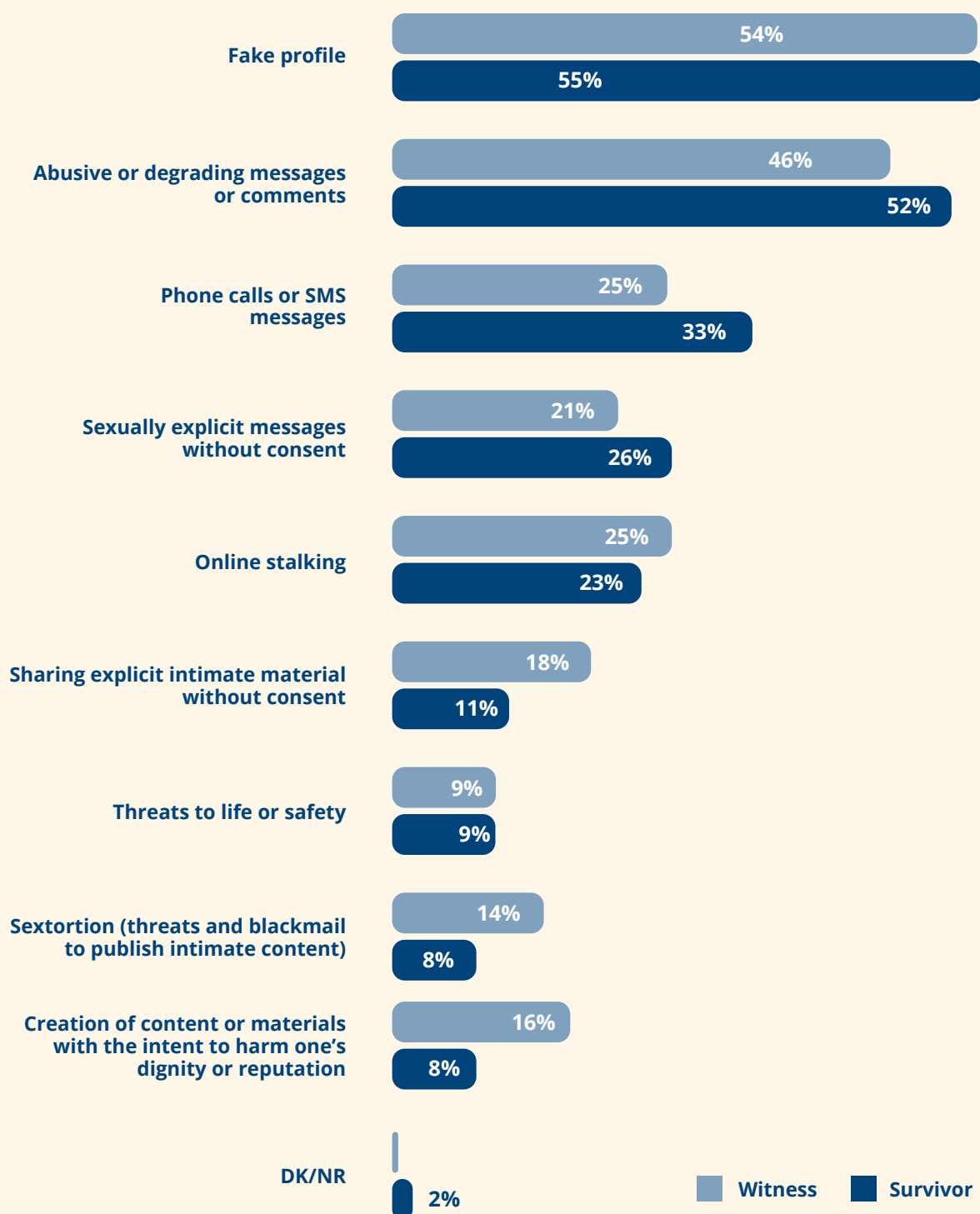
Abusive or humiliating comments are also a widespread form of gender-based violence and/or harassment, experienced by 45% of survivors and witnessed by 50% of respondents who had observed this type of violence and/or harassment in the digital space.

The fact that forms of gender-based violence and/or harassment extend beyond social media is confirmed by the finding that one-third (33%) of young women and girls who had been survivors, and one-quarter (25%) of those who had witnessed digital violence, reported that it occurred via phone calls or SMS messages.

Chart 22:

Forms of GBV in the Digital Space

Which of the following forms of gender-based violence and/or harassment have you experienced or witnessed online?



Overall, all participants in the focus groups emphasised that digital violence is an increasingly common and serious phenomenon, especially among young people and women. All participants stated that, to a lesser or greater extent, they had witnessed some form of digital violence, such as abusive comments, threats, fake profiles, and the sharing or editing of photographs without consent.

Platforms

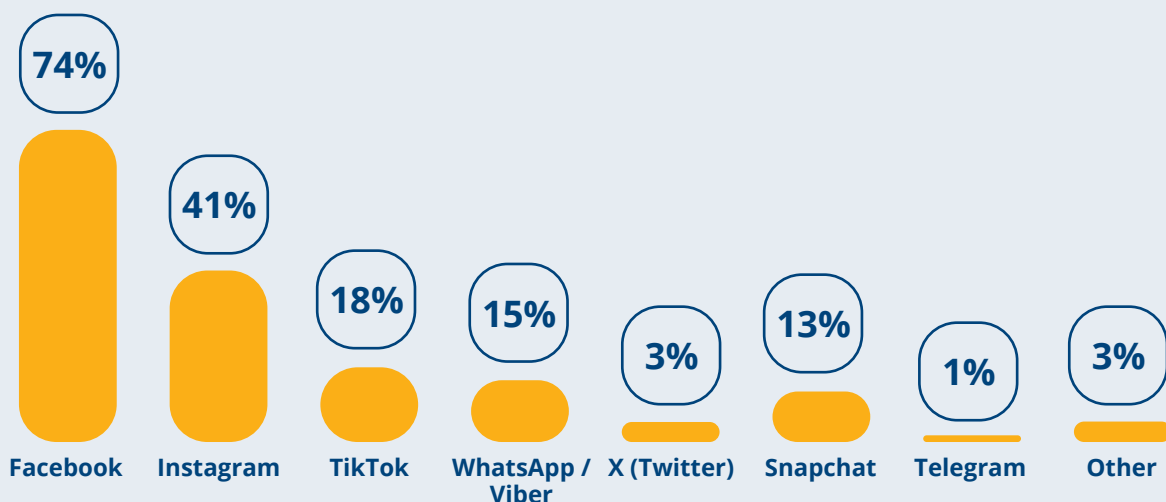
Facebook remains the most common place where online harassment occurs – 74% of the surveyed young women and girls who had experienced or witnessed technology-facilitated gender-based violence identified this social network as the platform where it took place. The platform is popular across wider age groups, which makes it vulnerable to misuse and hate speech, particularly due to public comments, groups, and the possibility of creating fake profiles.

The second most frequently mentioned platform is Instagram – 41% of respondents identified this social network as the place where the violence and/or harassment occurred. Harassment on Instagram most often happens through direct messages,

Chart 23:

Platform where violence was experienced/witnessed

On which platforms have you experienced or witnessed gender-based violence and/or harassment?



comments, and the unauthorised sharing of photographs. This confirms the link between the visual nature of the platform and various forms of violence.

Although the percentage is lower (18%), TikTok represents a growing space for harassment, especially through negative comments and the mocking of videos.

According to the insights of participants in the focus group discussions, technology-facilitated violence is present across all online platforms, particularly on those most commonly used by young people, such as TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook and Telegram—that is, platforms through which various types of content are shared, including photographs, videos, and other materials.

Reporting Violence

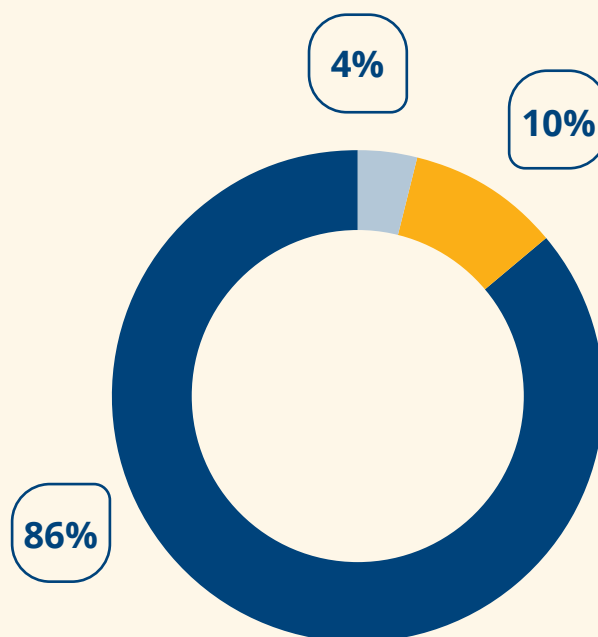
Similarly to the cases of violence occurring in public life, a high percentage of young women and girls (86%) who have experienced or witnessed technology-facilitated gender-based violence and/or harassment did not report the incident. Only one in ten reported the incident, most often to the police or directly on the social media platform where the violence and/or harassment took place.

Chart 24:

Reporting violence in the digital space

Did you report the incident of gender-based violence and/or harassment that you experienced or witnessed?

■ Yes ■ No ■ DK/NR



The results indicate that the majority of young women and girls do not report the violence they have experienced, most often due to emotional barriers, lack of trust in institutions, and insufficient information. These findings confirm the persistent culture of silence and stigma surrounding gender-based violence in Macedonian society.

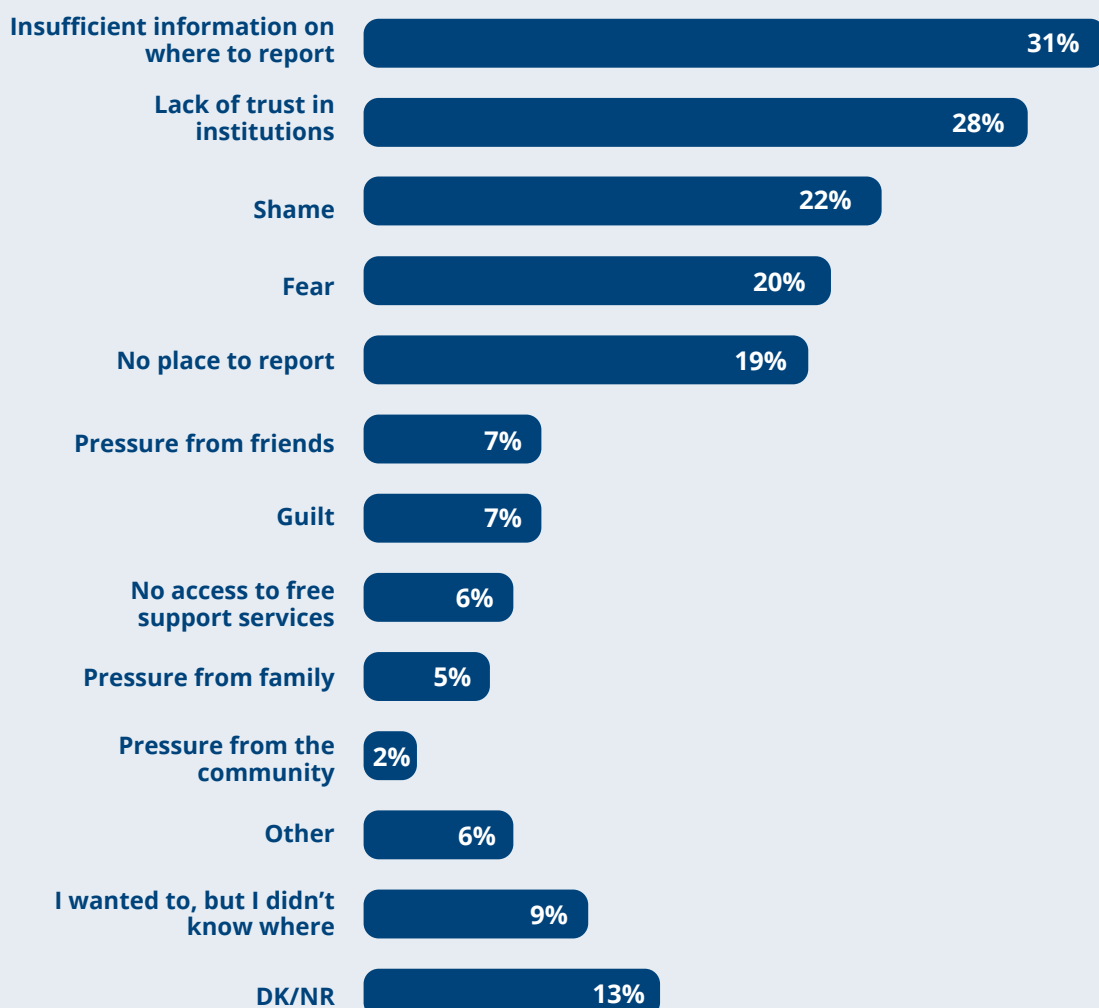
The most frequently cited reason for not reporting the violence is the lack of information on where to report it (31%), which points to a serious gap in public awareness of the existing mechanisms and institutions where violence can be reported.

Almost one third of respondents (28%) stated that they did not report the incident because they do not trust the institutions, indicating a perception that the system is ineffective, slow, or does not provide real protection.

Chart 25:

Reasons for not reporting

For what reasons did you not report the technology-facilitated gender-based violence and/or harassment?



The results from this question clearly indicate that fear, shame, and the lack of trust in institutions are the three most significant factors preventing young women from reporting gender-based violence. The insufficient information on reporting procedures and available services further reinforces the silence surrounding such cases. Therefore, it is essential for institutions to undertake coordinated activities to improve visibility, transparency, and support for survivors, as well as to establish campaigns that will foster trust and encourage reporting.

Findings from the qualitative research regarding whether young women and girls feel confident reporting digital violence to institutions likewise indicate that the level of trust is very low, and that the reporting of such cases is rare. Most participants agreed that the main reason for this is the lack of information and education among young people about what constitutes digital violence and where it can be reported. Participants also pointed out that even when digital violence is reported, concrete measures are rarely taken, and survivors are most often advised simply to ignore the abusive behaviour. The lack of clear reporting mechanisms, combined with slow police responses and lengthy court procedures, creates a sense of helplessness and discouragement among young women and girls. An additional challenge is the difficulty of securing evidence, as some social-media platforms do not cooperate with the Macedonian institutions, which further complicates the process of sanctioning perpetrators.

Coping Mechanisms

When asked what actions they undertook after experiencing an incident of violence and/or harassment, more than half of the respondents (56%) stated that they attempted to remove the source of harassment on their own. This confirms the lack of trust in institutional mechanisms and highlights the need for accessible digital reporting tools.

Almost one in three respondents (30%) reported that they sought help from a friend or family member, which confirms that survivors most often rely on informal support rather than institutions.

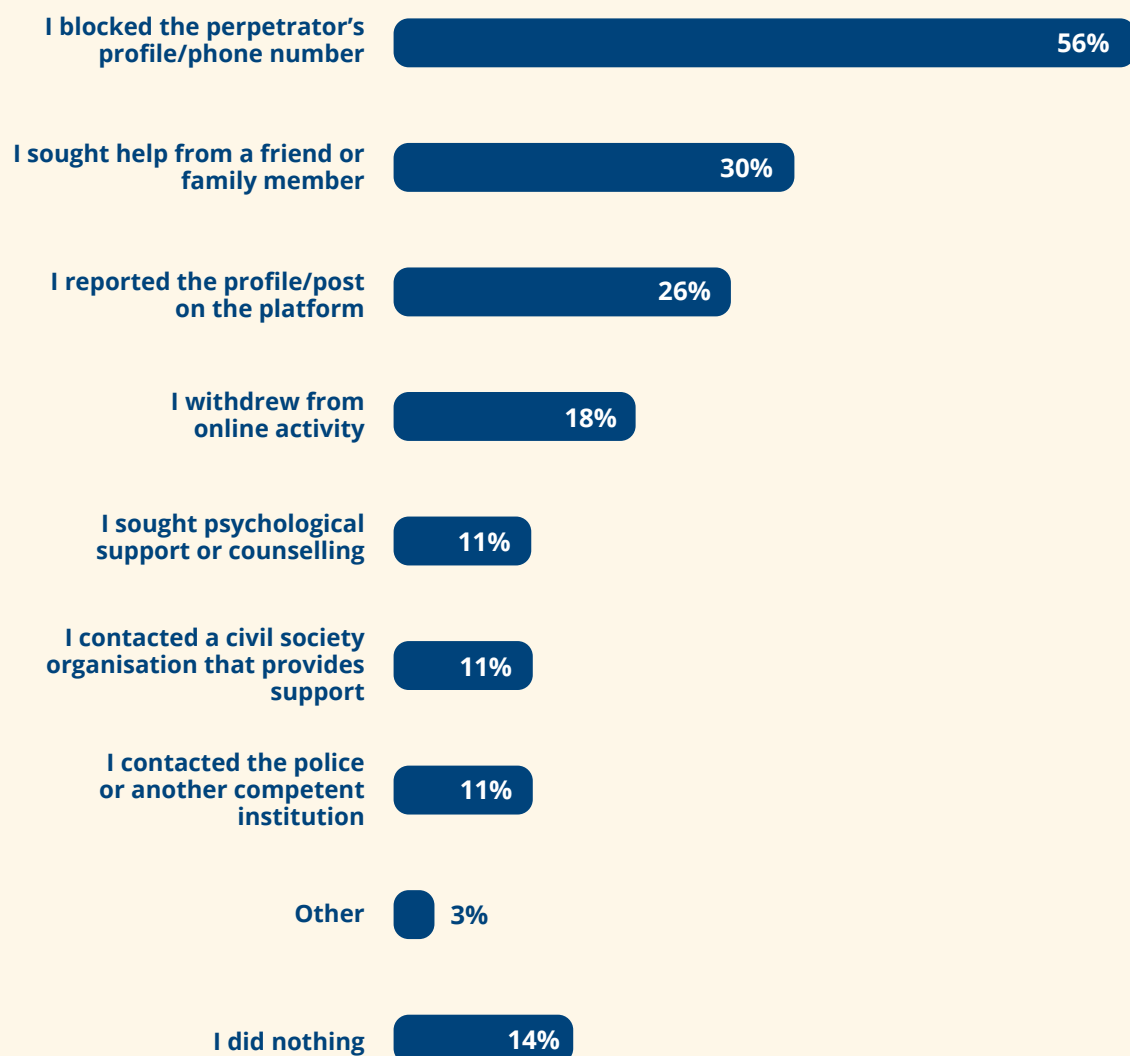
A quarter of the respondents (26%) used the platform's built-in tools, such as reporting content or a profile.

A significant number of young women and girls (18%) withdrew from online activity after experiencing the incident—that is, they responded by self-restriction, which indicates the psychological impact of the violence and a sense of helplessness.

Chart 26:

Actions taken

What actions did you take after experiencing technology-facilitated gender-based violence and/or harassment in the digital space?



Factors Contributing to GBV in the Digital Space

The findings show that online violence is not an isolated, random occurrence, but a systemic problem driven by a lack of sanctions, weak regulation, and cultural tolerance of violence. The combination of anonymity, rapid dissemination of content, and limited awareness creates an environment in which violence is easily reproduced. The factors that contribute most to technology-facilitated gender-based violence include the absence of sanctions, the anonymity of perpetrators, and the ease with which abusive content spreads. At the same time, young women and girls also recognise the influence of broader social factors—such as peer pressure and the normalisation of violent or abusive online behaviour.

When asked which factors contribute to gender-based violence and/or harassment in the digital space, half of respondents (50%) stated that insufficient sanctions and the non-sanctioning of perpetrators create a strong perception of impunity. Without meaningful consequences, perpetrators continue such behaviour.

The second most frequently cited factor is online anonymity (41%), which enables perpetrators to act without fear of being identified, thereby encouraging aggressive and abusive conduct.

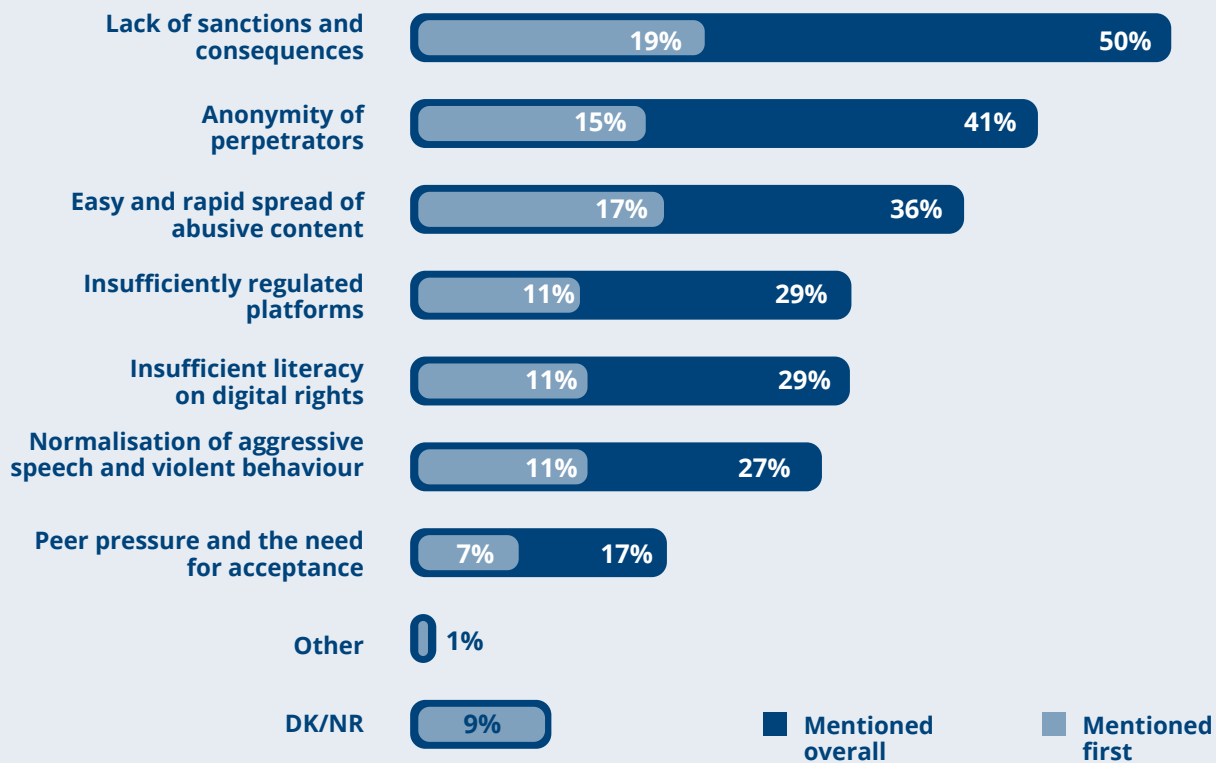
More than one-third of respondents (39%) stated that the rapid spread of abusive content is a factor contributing to technology-facilitated gender-based violence and/or harassment, which is particularly enabled through the circulation of images, comments, and videos on social media, where the consequences for the survivor are immediate and often irreversible, as such content can be distributed within minutes.

A significant share of respondents also highlighted poorly regulated online platforms (29%), insufficient literacy regarding digital rights (27%), and the normalisation of aggressive speech and violent behaviour (27%) as factors contributing to gender-based violence and/or harassment in the digital space.

Chart 27:

Factors contributing to GBV in the digital space

Which factors contribute to gender-based violence and/or harassment in the digital space?



Factors for Increased Safety

The results clearly show that young women and girls want an integrated system of prevention and support—one that includes institutional response, clear platform rules, technological protection tools, and continuous education.

Young women and girls recognise the role of institutions – 51% of respondents stated that support from institutions (educational institutions, social services, police, judiciary) would help increase safety in the digital space.

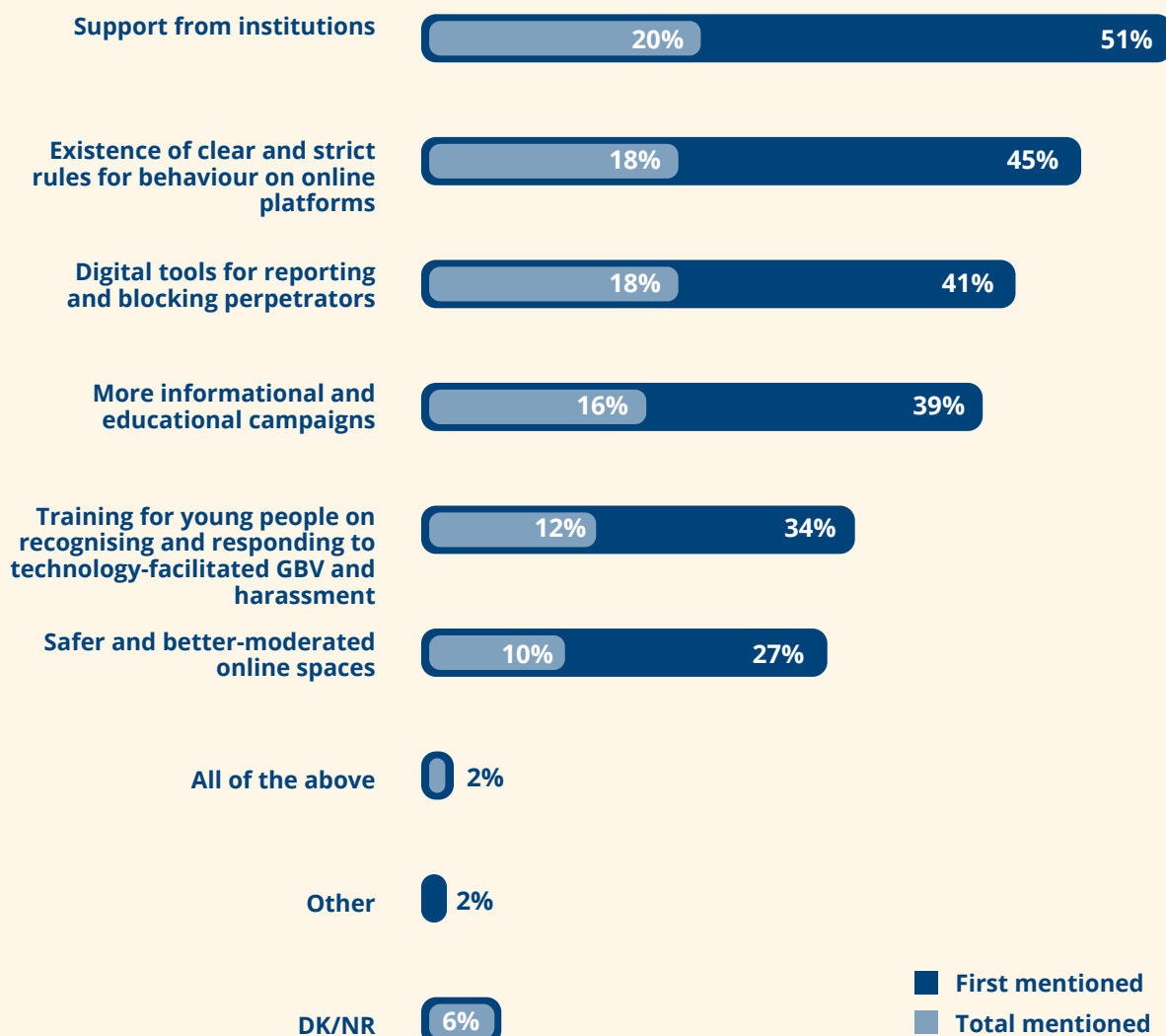
Young women and girls also call for stricter moderation and policies on social media platforms that would prevent the spread of abusive content and sanction violent behaviour – 45% of respondents stated that clear and strict rules of conduct on online platforms are necessary.

Young women and girls believe that practical and accessible mechanisms for rapid response would contribute to greater safety in the digital environment – 43% stated that the existence of digital tools for reporting and blocking perpetrators is an effective measure in addressing technology-facilitated gender-based violence and harassment.

Chart 28:

Factors for increased safety

What would help improve the safety of young women and girls in the digital space?



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Conclusions

1. The research indicates that gender-based violence is a deeply rooted and often unrecognised phenomenon, which persists due to the lack of sanctions, institutional inefficiency, and the normalisation of violent behaviour. Gender-based and technology-facilitated violence against young women and girls represents a serious and growing problem that requires a systemic and coordinated response. The safety of young women and girls is a multidimensional issue that demands simultaneous institutional, infrastructural, and educational approaches.
2. The data confirm that institutional trust among young women is partial and limited. Although awareness among young people is increasing and the topic is gaining visibility in the public sphere, absence of trust in institutions and their slow reaction remain key obstacles to effectively addressing violence. Young women tend to place more trust in institutions with which they have direct, everyday contact (education and health institutions), as well as the police and the Centres for Social Work, while the judiciary and the prosecution service are perceived as ineffective, inaccessible, and lacking empathy.
3. The institutions in which young women and girls express the lowest level of trust are identified as those with the most significant shortcomings in appropriately sanctioning perpetrators. Systemic weaknesses, slow procedures, and insufficient sensitivity among officials reduce survivors' willingness to report violence, where the greatest gaps are observed in the sanctioning of perpetrators, the provision of support to survivors, and the speed of institutional response. The lack of sensitised staff, poor coordination between institutions, and a limited legal framework further complicate the issue.
4. Young women and girls expect institutions to be more accessible, more transparent, and more sensitive to their needs, taking into account key priorities such as ensuring confidentiality, simple access to services, specialised support, and clear and direct communication, in line with a survivor-centred approach.

5. Civil society organisations enjoy higher levels of trust and provide psychological, legal, and material support (such as shelter and accommodation for survivors); however, their capacities are limited, particularly in rural areas. Nevertheless, the increased engagement of civil society organisations, positive examples from schools, and various education and support initiatives represent an important foundation for improvement.
6. A significant number of young women and girls have direct or indirect experience with violence since their teenage years. Although most stated that they had not been survivors, there is a strong likelihood of underreporting, especially in cases of psychological, verbal, and economic harassment and abuse. Young women and girls are increasingly exposed to various forms of gender-based violence and/or harassment—particularly psychological, verbal, economic, and technology-facilitated violence—which, although highly prevalent, remain the least recognised and the least sanctioned.
7. Patriarchal attitudes and norms, along with low levels of awareness (knowledge), contribute to the normalisation of violence, and often to its minimisation, especially within the family and intimate partner relationships.
8. Violence occurs everywhere, but the home, the street, and public life represent the highest-risk environments where young women face different forms of violence. In the home, controlling and economic forms of violence are the most prevalent. On the street, the highest occurrence of sexual harassment and stalking is recorded, confirming women's sense of insecurity in public life. Schools and universities are hotspots for psychological and verbal violence.
9. Fear, shame, and distrust in institutions are the three most significant factors that prevent young women and girls from reporting gender-based violence. Insufficient information about procedures and available services are additional factors that contribute to the low likelihood of reporting. Fear of judgement, retaliation, and stigma, combined with economic dependence and the lack of safe mechanisms for anonymous reporting, discourage survivors from seeking help.
10. Young women and girls mainly respond through avoidance and self-protection strategies rather than through institutional channels. They most often react within their personal or informal support networks, while institutional reporting and help-seeking remain rare.
11. Technology-facilitated violence is becoming an increasingly common and serious form of abuse, predominantly affecting young women and girls. The most frequent forms of violence in the digital space include the creation of fake profiles, insulting comments and unwanted messages, and social media

- platforms are the primary environments where young women and girls experience or witness gender-based violence and/or harassment.
12. The combination of anonymity, rapid dissemination, and lack of awareness creates an environment in which technology-facilitated gender-based violence and/or harassment is easily reproduced.
 13. Reporting online violence is very rare due to distrust in institutions, insufficient information and recognition of what constitutes violence, and ineffective protection mechanisms.
 14. Young women and girls expect an integrated system of prevention and support in cases of technology-facilitated gender-based violence and/or harassment, which includes institutional response, clear platform rules, technological protection tools, and continuous education.

Recommendations

Related to Conclusions 3, 4, 5 and 6: Strengthening institutional effectiveness and non-institutional support

1. Establish clear protocols for institutional response, mandatory training for officials, and rapid intervention. To increase safety, a fast and effective institutional reaction upon reporting is essential, together with continuous support and strengthened protection systems, including greater police presence in public life.
2. Efficiency and multisectoral cooperation of institutions which shall ensure a faster and more coordinated response through providing trained staff in every police station, prosecution office, and centre for social work for sensitive and professional handling of cases of violence, as well as sufficient human and financial resources for functional services such as shelters and free psychological assistance and support.
3. Provide non-institutional support for survivors of gender-based violence and/or harassment through support of civil society organisations and youth centres that work directly with survivors.
4. Introduce programmes for working with perpetrators, enabling resocialisation and reducing the risk of repeated violence.

Related to Conclusions 7 and 8: Introduction of comprehensive educational programmes

5. Mandatory educational programmes in schools: Introducing education on gender roles, violence prevention, and sexual education from an early age, with active involvement of parents for emotional and practical support for children, and through integrating approaches that actively involve men and boys by promoting positive masculinity, empathy, and respect for gender equality.
6. Develop targeted programmes and activities for young people that guide them toward positive and educational engagement.
7. Educational programmes for recognising, preventing, and reporting gender-based violence and/or harassment, sexual education, with active participation of parents.
8. Strengthen public awareness through campaigns and positive examples, with the aim of fostering trust among survivors and promoting a culture of accountability and zero tolerance for violence.

Related to Conclusions 12, 13, 14 and 15: Prevention and protection from gender-based violence in the digital space

9. Young women and girls should receive continuous education on digital literacy. In addition, they should receive continuous education on how to report gender-based violence and abuse of personal data. They shall be informed about the role of competent institutions such as schools, the police, and the Ombudsman, as well as the procedures for reporting gender-based violence and/or harassment, including technology-facilitated gender-based violence.
10. Digital support platform: brings together survivors, professionals, and institutions in one place, enabling the sharing of experiences, information on available resources and practical guidance, including anonymous options for protection and empowerment of survivors. Expand awareness-raising and educational efforts through youth-friendly channels, including mobile applications and social-media platforms, to effectively engage young people in preventing gender-based violence.

ANNEXES

Annex 1 – Questionnaire

Questionnaire

Interview duration:

Start of fieldwork:

End of fieldwork:

I. INTRODUCTION

Good morning / Good afternoon / Good evening. My name is ... and I am working for Indago from Skopje, an independent agency for market and public-opinion research. We are currently conducting a study on the experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by young women and girls aged 18 to 29 in relation to gender-based violence—both in public life and in the digital environment.

The purpose of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of the different forms of violence, as well as the obstacles to accessing protection, support, and justice.

Your participation is fully anonymous and voluntary, and all collected data shall be used exclusively for research purposes. The survey takes approximately 30 minutes.

Would you like to participate?

Before we begin, I will read to you the definition of gender-based violence: “Gender-based violence against women” is violence directed against a woman because she is a woman, or violence that disproportionately affects her. Gender-based violence against women encompasses both the causes and the consequences of unequal power relations between women and men, as a result of a social rather than an individual problem.

II. SAMPLE

Age

III. QUOTAS

Total net: n=600 interviews

IV. QUESTIONNAIRE

S01 [S] Statistical region

INT: SELECT THE REGION WHERE THE INTERVIEW IS CONDUCTED

1. Vardar Region
2. East Region
3. Southwest Region
4. Southeast Region
5. Pelagonia Region
6. Polog Region
7. Northeast Region
8. Skopje Region

Base: all respondents

S02 [S] Where do you live?

1. Urban area (city)
2. Rural area (village/rural settlement)

S03. [S] How old are you?

1. _____ years
2. Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]

S03a. [S] Age categories:

1. 18-21
2. 22-25
3. 26-29

IV. QUESTIONNAIRE

PRESENCE OF VIOLENCE IN DIFFERENT SOCIAL CONTEXTS

A01. [S] How often have you felt unsafe in the public life because you are a woman or a girl?

1. Very often
2. Sometimes
3. Rarely
4. Never
5. Don't know / Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]

Single answer

A02. [S] Since the age of 15, have you ever avoided an activity or a place due to fear of gender-based violence and/or harassment?

1. Yes
2. No
3. I do not remember
4. Don't know / Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]

Single answer

A03. [S] To what extent do you trust the following institutions and organisations (, , when it comes to protection from gender-based violence or harassment?

	I have full trust (1)	I have partial trust (2)	I neither trust nor distrust (3)	I have no trust at all (4)	Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ] (5)
Educational institutions	1	2	3	4	5
Healthcare institutions	1	2	3	4	5
Police	1	2	3	4	5
Social Work Centres	1	2	3	4	5
Civil society organisations	1	2	3	4	5
Public Prosecutor's Office	1	2	3	4	5
Courts	1	2	3	4	5

A04. [M – up to 3 answers, rotate answer order] Which institutions and/or organisations do you think should have a key role in addressing gender-based violence and/or harassment? Select up to 3 answers

1. Police
2. Courts
3. Social Services / Social Work Centre
4. Local self-government / Municipality
5. Public Prosecutor's Office
6. Educational institutions
7. Healthcare institutions
8. Civil society organisations
9. Media
10. Other : _____
11. Don't know / Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]

Up to 3 answers allowed

A05. [S] Do you think that institutions in our country respond appropriately when it comes to preventing and sanctioning gender-based violence and/or harassment against young women or girls?

1. Yes, fully
2. Partially
3. No
4. Don't know / Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]

Single answer

A06. [S] Do you think you have enough information to recognise gender-based violence and/or harassment and to seek protection?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Partially
4. Don't know / Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]

Single answer

A07. [M – rotate answers] What are the most common reasons why gender-based violence and/or harassment is not reported?

1. Fear
2. Shame
3. Guilt
4. Lack of trust in institutions
5. Pressure from the family
6. Pressure from the community
7. Pressure from friends
8. Nowhere to report it
9. Lack of access to free support services (free psychological or legal support, etc.)
10. Insufficient information on where to report it
11. Other: _____
12. Don't know / Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]

Multiple answers possible

A08. [S] Do you think that there are accessible, youth-friendly and gender-sensitive support services for survivors of gender-based violence and/or harassment?

1. Yes, I think they exist and are accessible
2. Yes, they exist, but I think they are not sufficiently accessible
3. No, I think they do not exist
4. Don't know / cannot assess [DO NOT READ!!]
5. Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ!!!]

Single answer

A09. [S in order – rotate statements]. How much do you agree with the following statements, where 1 means “strongly disagree” and 5 means “strongly agree”?

	Strongly disagree	Strongly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]
Domestic violence is a private matter and should be resolved within the family.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Violence against women/girls is often provoked by the survivor herself.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Women/girls who say they have been abused often make up or exaggerate claims of abuse or rape.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Women/girls are more often raped by strangers than by someone they know.	1	2	3	4	5	6
If a partner or husband/boyfriend is violent towards his wife/girlfriend, other people outside the family should intervene.	1	2	3	4	5	6
It is important for a man to show his partner who is the head of the relationship.	1	2	3	4	5	6

	Strongly disagree	Strongly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]
A woman should have the right to choose her own friends, even if her partner disagrees.	1	2	3	4	5	6
It is the woman's obligation to have sexual relations with her husband/partner even when she does not want to.	1	2	3	4	5	6
An unwanted comment with sexual connotation is not sexual harassment.	1	2	3	4	5	6
If a girl argues or defends herself, it only worsens the boy's behaviour.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Girls who dress provocatively attract violent behaviour.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Girls and young women from certain ethnic groups are more exposed to the risk of gender-based violence and/or harassment.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Girls and young women with lower socio-economic status are more exposed to gender-based violence and/or harassment.	1	2	3	4	5	6

	Strongly disagree	Strongly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]
The ethnic background of girls and young women influences how they are treated when they are survivors of gender-based violence and/or harassment.	1	2	3	4	5	6
The socio-economic status of girls and young women influences how they are treated when they are survivors of gender-based violence.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Girls and young women from rural areas are more exposed to the risk of gender-based violence.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Girls and young women with disabilities are more exposed to the risk of gender-based violence.	1	2	3	4	5	6

One answer per row

FORMS AND PREVALENCE OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND/OR HARASSMENT

A10. [M – up to 3 answers – rotate options]

What is the biggest problem you are currently facing?

1. Financial problems / economic insecurity
2. Problems related to mental health (stress, anxiety, depression, etc.)
3. Feeling unsafe in public life
4. Feeling unsafe at home
5. Feeling unsafe online (online harassment, cyberbullying, or sexual harassment)
6. Violence or controlling behaviour by a partner
7. Discrimination
8. Limited access to education / development opportunities
9. Use or misuse of alcohol, drugs, or medication (by her or by someone close)
10. Peer violence (social exclusion, peer pressure, etc.)
11. Other (what?) _____
12. Don't know / Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]

Up to 3 answers allowed.

A11. [S] To what extent do you feel safe as a woman/girl...

	Completely safe	Safe	Unsafe	Not safe at all	Don't know / Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]
1) ...in your neighbourhood?	1	2	3	4	9
2) ...in your town/ village?	1	2	3	4	9
3) ...in your country?	1	2	3	4	9
4) ...in the digital space?	1	2	3	4	9
5) ..on public transport?	1	2	3	4	9
6) ...in public places (such as squares, parks, streets and roads, walking areas and cycling paths)?	1	2	3	4	9
7) in educational institutions?	1		2	3	4

One answer per row

A12. [S] Have you ever (since the age of 15) been a survivor of any form of gender-based violence and/or harassment in public life (school, university, street, workplace, institutions)?

For each of the following forms of violence, please answer with yes, no, or not sure

	Yes (1)	No (2)	Not sure (3)	Refuses to answer (DO NOT READ) (4)
1) Physical violence (hitting, pushing, punching, pulling, etc.)	1	2	3	4
2) Psychological violence (insults, belittling, manipulation, blackmail, threats)	1	2	3	4
3) Verbal violence (yelling, swearing, catcalling, humiliat)	1	2	3	4
4) Sexual harassment (unwanted comments, gestures, non-consensual touching, pressure for sexual relations)	1	2	3	4
5) Sexual violence (forced sexual contact, rape)	1	2	3	4
6) Economic violence (control or restriction of finances, conditioning access to money)	1	2	3	4
7) Stalking / monitoring (physical stalking, being present without your consent)	1	2	3	4
8) Controlling behaviour by a partner (control over movement, choice of friends, monitoring phone communication, clothing or behaviour)	1	2	3	4

One answer per row

Base: respondents with code 1 to any statement of A12

A13. [M – rotate answers] Please tell me where you experienced gender-based violence and/or harassment.

Scripter: Ask for each statement from A18 with answer 1 separately

1. At home
2. In the neighbourhood
3. At school
4. At university
5. In a hospital
6. In a park
7. On the street
8. In a café, restaurant or club
9. In a parking area
10. On public transport
11. At a police station
12. In a friend's house
13. At the workplace
14. In a dormitory / student residence
15. Other _____
16. Don't know / Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]

Multiple answers possible.

Base: all respondents

A14. [S] Have you ever (since the age of 15) witnessed any form of gender-based violence and/or harassment in public life (school, university, street, workplace, institutions)

For each of the following forms of violence, please answer yes, no, or not sure

	Yes (1)	No (2)	Not sure (3)	Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ] (4)
1) Physical violence (hitting, pushing, striking, pulling, etc.)	1	2	3	4
2) Psychological violence (insults, belittling, manipulation, blackmail, threats)	1	2	3	4
3) Verbal violence (yelling, swearing, catcalling, humiliation)	1	2	3	4
4) Sexual harassment (unwanted comments or gestures, unwanted touching, pressure for sexual acts)	1	2	3	4
5) Sexual violence (forced sexual contact, rape)	1	2	3	4
6) Economic violence (control or restriction of finances, conditioning access to money)	1	2	3	4
7) Stalking / monitoring (physical following, presence without your consent)	1	2	3	4
8) Controlling behaviour by a partner (controlling movement, choice of friends, monitoring phone communication, controlling clothing or behaviour)	1	2	3	4

Base: respondents with code 1 on all statements from A14

A15. [M – rotation of answers] Please tell me where you witnessed gender-based violence.

Scripter: Ask for each statement from A20 with answer 1 separately

1. At home
2. In the neighbourhood
3. At school
4. At university
5. In a hospital
6. In a park
7. On the street
8. In a café, restaurant or club
9. In a parking area
10. On public transport
11. In a police station
12. In a friend's house
13. At the workplace
14. In a dormitory / student residence
15. Other _____
16. Don't know / Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]

Multiple answers possible

Base: respondents who answered 1) Yes in A18 and A14

A16. [S] Did you report the incident?

1. Yes, where _____
2. No
3. Don't know / Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]

Single answer

Base: respondents who answered 1) in A12 and A14

A17. [M – rotation of answers] What actions did you take after experiencing the incident?

1. I reported it to the police
2. I contacted the Centre for Social Work or another institution
3. I sought medical assistance
4. I sought psychological support or counselling
5. I sought legal assistance (lawyer, free legal aid, etc.)
6. I talked to someone close (friend, relative, teacher, et.)
7. I left the violent environment (workplace, relationship, home, etc.)
8. I called an SOS helpline for assistance and support
9. I contacted the Sexual Violence Referral Centre
10. Other (please specify): _____
11. Don't know / Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]

Multiple answers possible

Base: respondents who answered 2) in A16

A18. [M – rotation of answers] Why did you not report the gender-based violence and/or harassment?

1. Fear
2. Shame
3. Guilt
4. Lack of trust in institutions
5. Pressure from family
6. Pressure from the community
7. Pressure from friends
8. Nowhere to report
9. No access to free support (free psychological or legal support, etc.)
10. Insufficient information on where to report
11. Other: _____
12. I wanted to, but did not know where
13. Don't know / Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]

Multiple answers possible

Base: respondents who answered 1) in A12 and A14

A19. [M – rotation of answers] In your opinion, what is most lacking in the institutional response in cases of gender-based violence and/or harassment?

1. Prompt and appropriate response
2. Protection and support for the survivor
3. Informed and trained staff
4. Adequate sanctions for perpetrators
5. Information and prevention
6. Inter-institutional cooperation
7. Other: _____
8. Don't know / Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]

Multiple answers possible

A20. [M – up to 3 answers, rotation of answers] What would help improve the safety of young women and girls in public life?

1. Better lighting and safety infrastructure, such as video surveillance
2. Increased police presence
3. Faster reaction by competent institutions on reports
4. More informational and educational campaigns on recognising and preventing gender-based violence and harassment
5. Publicly available information on existing services for survivors of gender-based violence
6. Support from institutions (social services, police, judiciary) – counselling, possibilities for anonymous reporting, legal protection, fair treatment, etc.
7. Sustainability of existing services for survivors of gender-based violence and harassment, and opening of additional specialised services
8. Youth centres/organisations for reporting and assistance
9. Other (please specify): _____
10. Don't know / Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]

Up to 3 answers possible

A21. [M] How can institutions become more accessible and more trustworthy for young women and girls?

1. By providing information in clear and understandable language
2. By having specialised services or contact persons for young women/girls
3. By guaranteeing confidentiality and protection of personal data
4. By conducting awareness-raising campaigns to build trust among young people
5. By ensuring easy physical and online access to services (without complex procedures)
6. By involving young women and girls in the development of policies and services
7. Other: _____
8. Don't know / Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]

Multiple answers possible

ONLINE ENVIRONMENT AND TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED VIOLENCE

A22. [S] Since the age of 15, have you ever been a survivor of any form of gender-based violence and/or harassment in the digital space (on social media, SMS messages, e-mail, forums, phone calls, GPS trackers, etc.)?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know / Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]

One answer

Base: respondents who answered 1) in A22

A23. [M – rotation of answers] Which of the following forms of gender-based violence and/or harassment have you experienced in the digital space?

1. Offensive or degrading messages or comments
2. Sexually explicit messages sent without consent
3. Sharing of explicit intimate videos or photographs without permission
4. Online stalking
5. Phone calls or SMS messages
6. Threats to life or safety
7. Creation of sexual content or materials using artificial intelligence without consent
8. Sextortion (threats or blackmail to publish intimate content)

9. Fake profile
10. Other (please specify): _____
11. Don't know / Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]

Multiple answers possible

A24. [S] Since the age of 15, have you ever witnessed any form of gender-based violence and/or harassment in the digital space (on social media, messages, e-mail, forums, etc.)?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know / Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]

One answer

Base: respondents who answered 1) in A24

A25. [M - rotation of answers] Which of the following forms of gender-based violence and/or harassment in the digital space have you witnessed?

1. Offensive or degrading messages or comments
2. Sexually explicit messages sent without consent
3. Sharing of explicit intimate videos or photographs without permission
4. Online stalking
5. Phone calls or SMS messages
6. Threats to life or safety
7. Creation of private photos, content or video materials with sexual content using artificial intelligence without consent
8. Sextortion (threats or blackmail to publish intimate content)
9. Fake profile
10. Other (please specify): _____
11. Don't know / Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]

Multiple answers possible

Base: respondents who answered 1) in A22 and A24

A26. [M] On which platforms have you experienced or witnessed gender-based violence and/or harassment?

1. Facebook
2. Instagram
3. TikTok
4. WhatsApp / Viber
5. X (Twitter)
6. Snapchat
7. YouTube
8. Discord
9. Telegram
10. Other: _____
11. Don't know / Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]

Multiple answers possible

Base: respondents who answered 1) in A22 and A24

A27. [S] Have you reported the incident of gender-based violence and/or harassment that you experienced or witnessed?

1. Yes – Where: _____
2. No
3. Don't know / Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]

One answer

Base: respondents who answered 2) in A22 and A24

A28. [M- rotate the answers] For which reasons did you not report the gender-based violence and/or harassment in the digital space?

1. Fear
2. Shame
3. Guilt
4. Lack of trust in institutions
5. Pressure from family
6. Pressure from the community/environment
7. Pressure from friends
8. There is nowhere to report it

9. Lack of access to free support (e.g., free psychological or legal assistance, etc.)
10. Insufficient information about where to report
11. Other: _____
12. I wanted to, but I did not know where
13. Don't know / Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]

Multiple answers possible

Base: respondents who answered 1) in A22

A29. [M – rotate answers] What actions did you take after experiencing gender-based violence and/or harassment in the digital space?

1. I blocked the perpetrator's profile/phone number
2. I reported the profile/post on the social media platform
3. I sought help from a friend or family member
4. I contacted the police or another institution
5. I contacted a civil society organisation working on this issue
6. I sought psychological support or counselling
7. I withdrew from online activity (deleted my profile, stopped using platforms)
8. I did not take any action
9. Other (please specify): _____
10. I don't know / Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]

Multiple answers possible

A30. [M – up to 3 answers, rotate answers] Which factors contribute to gender-based violence and/or harassment in the digital space?

1. Anonymity of perpetrators
2. Insufficiently regulated platforms
3. Lack of sanctions and consequences
4. Easy and rapid spread of abusive content
5. Insufficient literacy on digital rights
6. Peer pressure and the need for acceptance
7. Normalisation of aggressive speech and violent online behaviour
8. Other: _____
9. I don't know / Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]

Up to 3 answers possible

A31. [M – up to 3 answers, rotate answers] What would help increase the safety of young women and girls in the digital space?

1. Digital tools for reporting and blocking perpetrators
2. Support from institutions (educational institutions, social services, police, judiciary), such as counselling and psychological support, anonymous reporting options, legal protection and fair treatment
3. Training for young people on recognising and addressing digital violence
4. Clear and strict rules of conduct on online platforms
5. Safer and better-moderated online spaces for young people
6. More informative and educational campaigns for recognising and preventing digital violence
7. Other (please specify): _____
8. I don't know / Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]

Up to 3 answers possible

DEMOGRAPHY

S04. [M] Do you have any type of disability or health condition that affects your daily functioning?

1. Visual impairment (full or partial)
2. Hearing impairment
3. Physical disability
4. Intellectual disability
5. Neurodevelopmental disability (e.g. autism spectrum, ADHD, etc.)
6. Psycho-social condition (e.g. depression, anxiety, PTSD, etc.)
7. Chronic illness affecting daily functioning
8. Substance use or substance misuse (alcohol, drugs or medication)
9. Other (please specify): _____
10. I do not have any disability [S]
11. I prefer not to answer [S]

Multiple answers possible

S05. [S] What is your ethnic affiliation?

1. Macedonian
2. Albanian
3. Roma
4. Other (please specify): _____
5. Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]

One answer

S06. [S] What is the highest level of education you have completed?

1. No formal education
2. Primary education
3. Secondary education
4. Higher education
5. Master's degree
6. Doctorate (PhD)
7. Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]

One answer

S07. [S] What is your current employment status?

1. Employed full-time
2. Occasionally employed / informal employment
3. Unemployed
4. Student / pupil
5. Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]

One answer

S08. [S] What is the total monthly income of your household?

1. Up to 24,000 MKD
2. 24,001–34,000 MKD
3. 34,001–44,000 MKD
4. 44,001–54,000 MKD
5. 54,001–64,000 MKD
6. Above 64,001 MKD
7. Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]

One answer

S09. [S] What is your personal monthly income?

1. I do not have any income
2. Up to 24,000 MKD
3. 24,001–34,000 MKD
4. 34,001–44,000 MKD
5. 44,001–54,000 MKD
6. 54,001–64,000 MKD
7. Above 64,001 MKD
8. Refuses to answer [DO NOT READ]

One answer

END OF QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for your participation in the research

Annex 2 – Focus Group Discussion Guide

Number of groups and number of participants per group: our (4) focus groups, 8–10 participants per group

Location: Skopje (four focus groups)

Target group: Professionals / Organisations

Phase 1: Introduction (5 min.)

(A brief explanation of the purpose of the discussion, the rules of the discussion, and encouragement of participants to actively engage in the conversation)

Moderator: Good afternoon and welcome to today's focus group discussion. Thank you for taking the time to join us today and for participating in this planned discussion. My name is (...) and today we will talk about **your views and opinions regarding the perceptions and challenges faced by young women and girls aged 18 to 29 in relation to gender-based violence and/or harassment, both in public life and in the digital environment.**

We will be recording the discussion, simply because it is not possible to remember everything that will be said, and all information is very important for us. I will not be calling on you individually to share your opinions; however, you are expected to actively engage in the discussion topics that will be opened today. All your opinions are extremely valuable to us, regardless of how different they may be. Our goal is not to reach a single, unified position, but rather to hear all perspectives — including different, contrasting, and even opposing views.

Once again, please feel free to participate openly, but I would kindly ask you not to interrupt each other and to avoid speaking at the same time. If several people talk simultaneously, the recording cannot capture the discussion accurately, and later on we will not be able to clearly understand or analyse what was said. Therefore, I kindly ask that we speak one at a time.

I would now like to ask you to briefly introduce yourselves. Please, each of you, introduce yourself individually:

- ▶ **A short introduction of the participants**
- ▶ **Your name and surname**
- ▶ **The organisation you represent**
- ▶ **The main focus or mandate of your organisation.**

* * *

Phase 2: Perceptions and Institutional Trust (15 min.)

- ▶ **How does your organisation perceive the issue of gender-based violence and/or harassment against young women and girls?** Do you consider that this problem has increased, decreased, or remained at the same level compared to 2024?
- ▶ **To what extent do you think young women and girls trust the institutions** (police, courts, social welfare centres, healthcare, and education institutions)? *What are the reasons behind this level of trust or distrust?*
- ▶ **In your view, which institutions or organisations should have a key role in the different aspects of addressing gender-based violence and/or harassment?** Why?
 - ✓ in prevention and education
 - ✓ in detection and reporting
 - ✓ in protection and support for survivors
 - ✓ in sanctioning and holding perpetrators accountable
 - ✓ in inter-institutional coordination
- ▶ **Based on your experience, what is most lacking (if you believe something is lacking) in the institutional response** (for example: timely reaction, sensitive approach, coordination, specialised services, support for survivors, confidentiality)?

Phase 3: Forms and Prevalence of Violence (20 min.)

- ▶ **Which forms of gender-based violence and/or harassment do you most frequently encounter in your work with young women and girls (physical, psychological, verbal, sexual, economic, digital, other)?** *Moderator follow-up: Why these forms in particular? Are there forms that are less visible but still present? Please explain.*
- ▶ **Do you think that certain groups of girls and young women are at higher risk of gender-based violence and/or harassment than others?** **Moderator follow-up:** *If yes, which groups would you highlight and why? (For example: girls from rural areas, ethnic communities, those from families with lower socio-economic status, girls with disabilities.) In what ways are these groups more exposed? Do institutions and organisations sufficiently recognise these specific vulnerabilities?*
- ▶ **Where do these forms of violence most often occur?** **Moderator follow-up:** *In public life (streets, public transport, schools, universities)? Within the family or intimate relationships? In the digital environment? Please explain?*

- ▶ **How do organisations identify and document the problem? Moderator follow-up:** *Do you have your own mechanisms for identifying cases? Do girls and women approach you directly? What barriers do you face in reporting or providing support?*
- ▶ **In your opinion, what is the “invisible part” of the problem – violence that is often ignored, not reported, or not recognised as such? Moderator follow-up:** *Do you think there are behaviours that young women and girls do not recognise as violence (for example: controlling behaviour from a partner, degrading jokes, sexualised comments)?*
- ▶ **Which forms of gender-based violence and/or harassment are most often minimised or not taken seriously by institutions or society? When an institution (police, courts, social work centres) considers verbal or psychological violence as “not serious enough” and does not take action. When society (the community, the family, the media) perceives controlling behaviour in relationships, sexualised comments, degrading jokes, or unwanted physical contact as something “normal” or “just a joke”.**

Phase 4: Reporting and barriers (15 min.)

- ▶ **In your opinion, what are the most common reasons why young women and girls do not report cases of gender-based violence and/or harassment? Moderator follow-up:** *Is this most often due to fear (of the perpetrator, of consequences, of stigma)? Do you think there is a sense of shame or guilt? How much does mistrust in institutions play a role? Is there insufficient information about where and how incidents can be reported? Are there cultural or family pressures that discourage girls from reporting?*
- ▶ **How can organisations contribute to increasing reporting and strengthening trust in institutions? Moderator follow-up:** *Which activities or programmes would help girls feel encouraged and safe to report?*
- ▶ **If not mentioned, ask: Does your organisation have experience in creating mechanisms for anonymous reporting? How can cooperation between organisations and institutions be improved for more effective support? In your view, do public campaigns and education have a real impact?**
- ▶ **Which support services do you consider most important (legal, psychological, medical, others)? Which type of support do survivors most often request? Which services do you consider least accessible? Are there sufficient specialised services for young women (e.g. youth centres, online counselling)? How can organisations help fill the gaps where institutions do not provide adequate support?**

Phase 5: Digital violence (10 min.)

- ▶ **Does your organisation encounter cases of technology-facilitated gender-based violence and/or harassment?** *If yes, which types are most common (for example: abusive messages, fake profiles, threats, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, online stalking)?*
- ▶ **Which platforms do you consider most high-risk for young women and girls?** **Moderator follow-up:** *Which forms of harassment are most common on those platforms? Is there a difference between public and private channels (groups, messages, comments)?*
- ▶ **Do young women and girls have sufficient trust to report technology-facilitated violence to institutions?** *If yes, where is it most often reported? If not, why not? Please explain.*
- ▶ **How can organisations facilitate support for survivors of technology-facilitated violence?** *How can protection in the digital space be improved (what can institutions, civil society organisations, media, etc., do)?*

Phase 6: Solutions and recommendations (20 min.)

- ▶ **Which preventive measures would be most effective in increasing safety in public life?** *What types of infrastructural measures in public areas would be useful (lighting, security cameras, police presence)? Which educational and information activities would have the greatest impact?*
- ▶ **What could be done in the digital space to increase safety (reporting tools, platform moderation, educational programmes)?** Please explain.
- ▶ **How can institutions become more accessible and more trustworthy for young women and girls?** *What should they change in their work practices (simplified procedures, confidentiality, rapid response)? Is there a need for more specialised services or designated contact persons? How can institutions build long-term trust with young women and girls?*
- ▶ **How can civil society organisations collaborate more effectively with institutions and with the community?** *What are the main challenges in collaboration today?*
- ▶ **If you could propose one key measure or initiative that would make the greatest difference, which one would it be and which problem would it solve?** **(Moderator:** *What would this measure look like in practice (which activities, which institutions or organisations would be involved)? What would be required for its implementation (resources, political will, partnerships)?*

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