Gender Equality Programme

BRIEF #2 | NOVEMBER 2026

Elimination of Violence against Women: Progress, gaps, and persistent challenges from the Black Sea region.

State of Play

As of 2026, intimate partner violence remains the most widespread form of violence against women across the 13 Member States of the BSEC Organisation[1]. Latest available data indicate that violence against women is not confined to a single country but represents a shared regional challenge requiring coordinated action and sustained political commitment.

Evidence shows that the BSEC13 have made greater progress in establishing legal frameworks than in achieving the societal transformation necessary to eliminate violence against women. Considerable data differences in the countries, reveal that legal frameworks alone are insufficient; social norms, access to support services, reporting mechanisms and institutional effectiveness also play crucial roles.

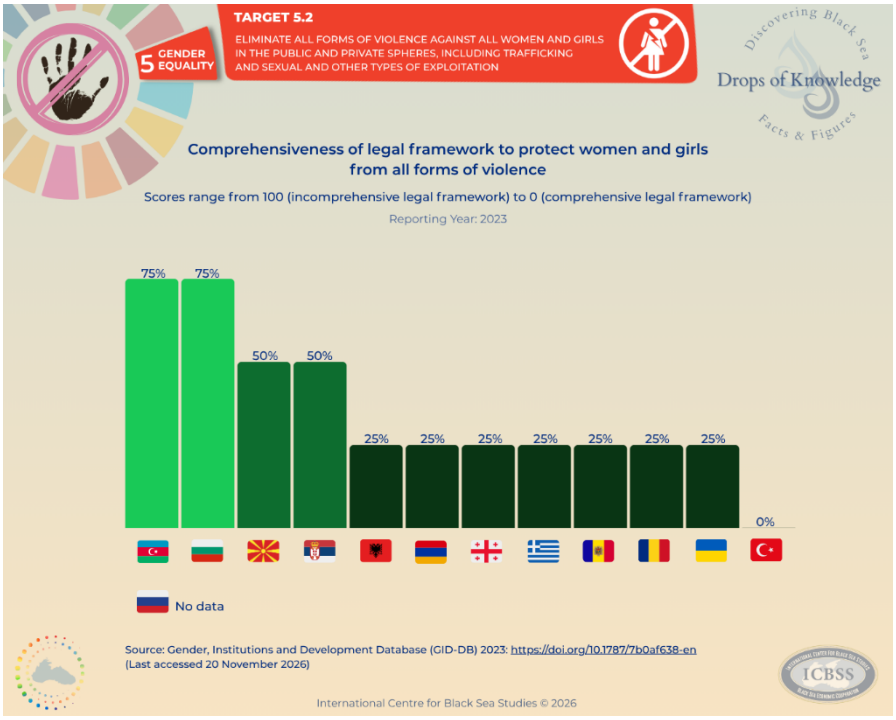
Legislative commitment is generally strong.

The **OECD Gender, Institutions and Development Database (GID-DB)**[2] monitors UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) **Indicator 5.1.1** on 'Whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor gender equality and women's empowerment'. According to the latest available data (2023), comprehensiveness of legal framework to protect women and girls from all forms of violence scores high among the BSEC13 [See Graph 1].

Türkiye scores best at 0, meaning the law is comprehensive, protecting women from the following forms of violence: honour crimes, intimate partner violence,

[1] BSEC Member States: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Republic of Moldova, Republic of North Macedonia, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Türkiye, Ukraine
[2] https://doi.org/10.1787/7b0af638-en

rape and sexual harassment; while there are no legal exceptions that reduce penalties for domestic violence and the law recognises marital rape. **Most BSEC countries** score 25, namely the law protects women against all forms of violence without legal exceptions, however, the approach is not fully comprehensive, e.g. there is a lack of specific provisions, not all types of violence covered, or not all places covered. **Azerbaijan** and **Bulgaria** score the lowest at 75, meaning that the law protects women from some but not from all of the following forms of violence: honour crime, intimate partner violence, rape and sexual harassment.



Graph 1. Comprehensiveness of legal frameworks to protect women and girls from all forms of violence, data from the 13 BSEC Member States. Source: OECD Gender, Institutions and Development Database (GID-DB)

Intimate partner violence remains the most widespread form of violence.

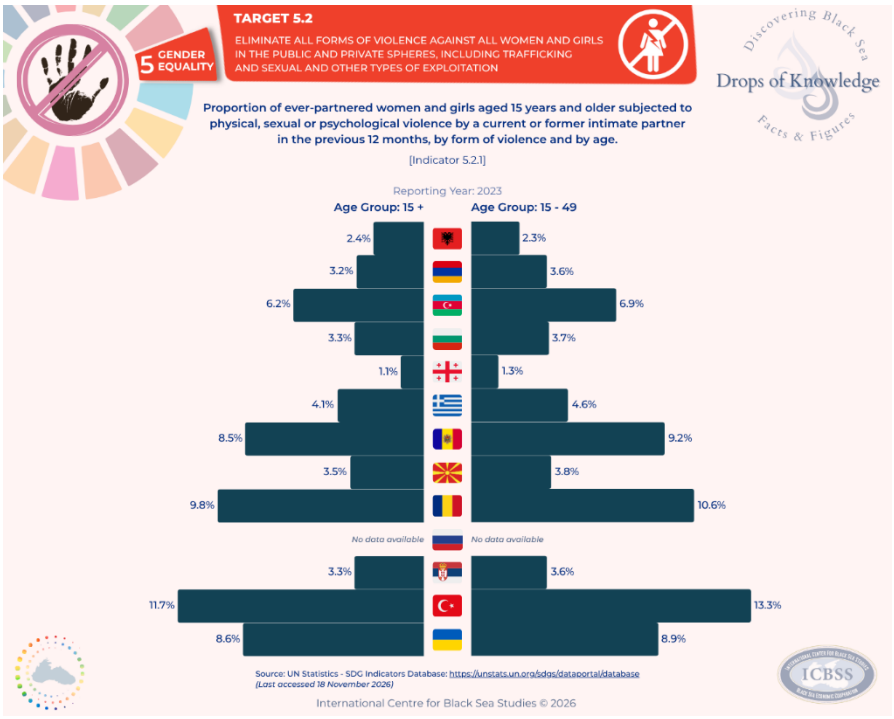
Despite the BSEC countries' legal performance, data reveal a different reality, *"exposing a chain of failure – from the first act of violence to the absence of justice"* (UN WOMEN)[3].

The UNSDG **Target 5.2** calls for the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual

[3] https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/media-advisory/2026/11/media-advisory-international-day-for-the-elimination-of-violence-against-women-and-16-days-of-activism-2026

and other types of exploitation[4]. Latest available data indicate that significant challenges persist across the 13 countries of the wider Black Sea region.

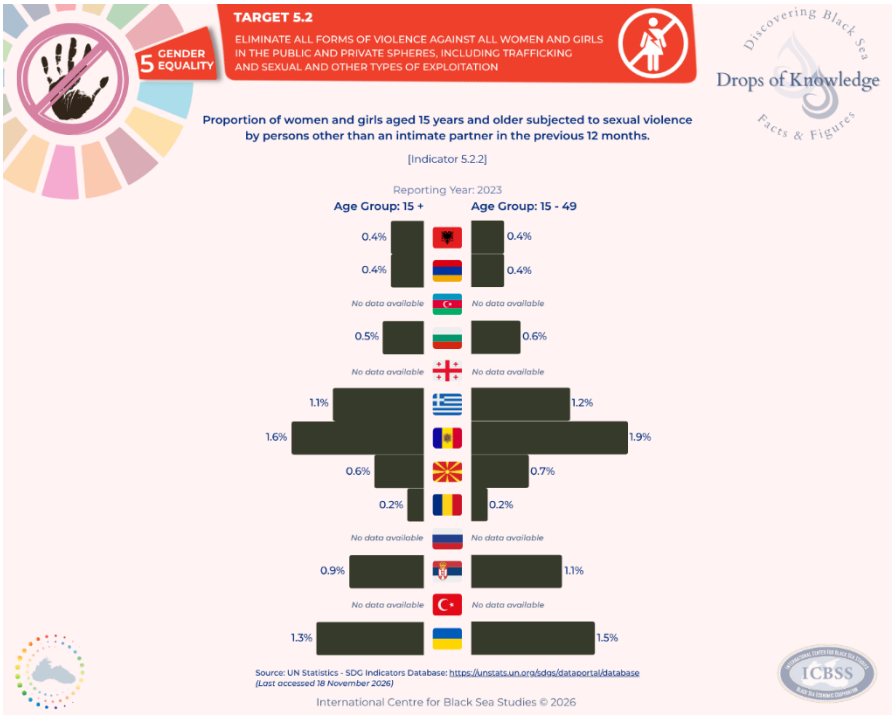
According to UNSDG **Indicator 5.2.1** data for 2023, **intimate partner violence** continues to affect women throughout the region. The percentage of women aged 15 years and older who experienced physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner during the previous 12 months ranges from the lowest 1.1% in **Georgia** to the highest 11.7% in **Türkiye**. Among women aged 15 - 49, rates are even higher, reaching 13.3% in **Türkiye**, 10.6% in **Romania**, 9.2% in the **Republic of Moldova** and 8.9% in **Ukraine** [See Graph 2].



Graph 2. UNSDG Indicator 5.2.1. Proportion of women and girls subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age (%)

For the same year (2023), UNSDG **Indicator 5.2.2** that measures sexual **violence committed by persons other than an intimate partner**, shows lower reported levels, ranging from 0.2% in **Romania** to 1.9% in the **Republic of Moldova** among women aged 15-49. Romania ranks the lowest at 0.2% and the Republic of Moldova the highest at 1.6% among women 15 years and older. **Ukraine** ranks the second highest in both age categories at 1.5% and 1.3% respectively [See Graph 3].

[4] https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal/database



Graph 3. UNSDG Indicators 5.2.2. Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months (%)

Femicide data reveal a different dimension of the problem.

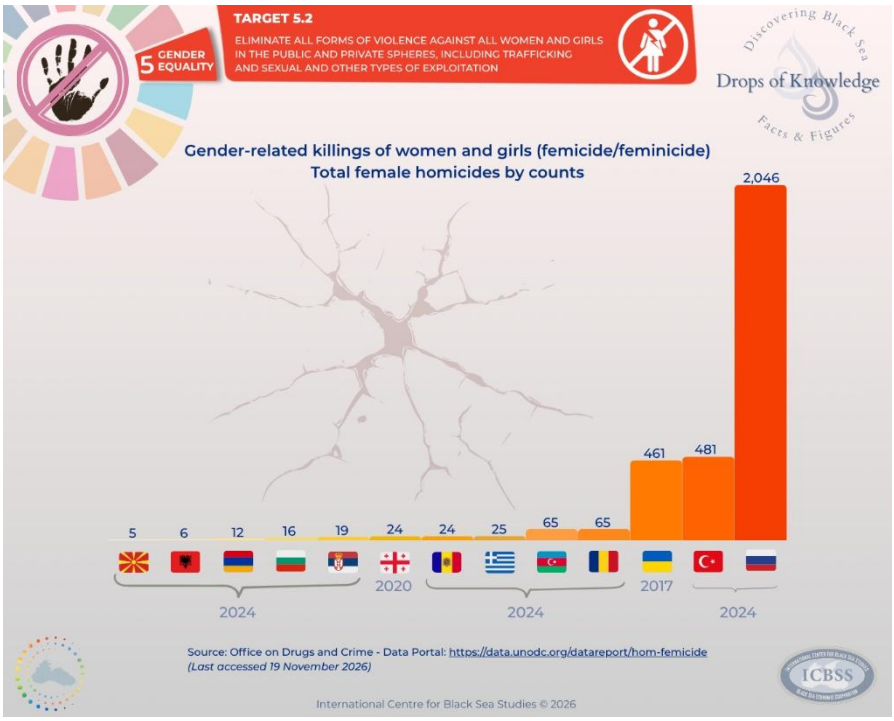
The most brutal and extreme manifestation of gender-based violence is femicide, the gender-related motivation of killings of women and girls. However, unlike for other forms of violence against women, there is not yet a global or regional standardised statistical approach to define and produce relevant metrics on such killings of women and girls[5].

To address this gap, in 2022, the **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)**[6] jointly with UN Women developed a *"statistical framework on gender-sensitive crime statistics, with a focus on the gender-related killing of women and girls (femicide/feminicide)"*. The **Statistical Framework**[7] is aimed at providing a statistical definition of the gender-related killing of women and girls (femicide/feminicide) that can clearly identify data and statistics that accurately count such killings.

[5] https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/Statistical_framework_femicide_2022.pdf
[6] https://www.unodc.org/unodc/index.html
[7] https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/Statistical_framework_femicide_2022.pdf

According to the UNODC Statistical Framework, **femicide** refers to the root causes that characterise the specific context in which such killings take place, such as stereotyped gender roles, discrimination towards women and girls, inequality and unequal power relations between women and men in society. These factors can trigger violence by perpetrators when a woman's behaviour is perceived not to be in line with social norms or stereotyped gender roles.

2024 data from the **UNODC Data Portal**[8] reveal that lethal violence against women remains a serious concern throughout the wider Black Sea region. Recorded female homicide counts ranged from 5 cases in **North Macedonia** and 6 in **Albania** to 481 in **Türkiye** and 2,046 in the **Russian Federation**. Other countries also reported significant numbers, including **Ukraine** (461), **Azerbaijan** (65), **Greece** (25), and **Romania** (65) [See Graph 4].



Graph 4. Gender-related killings of women and girls (femicides) by counts across the 13 BSEC Member States. Source: UNODC Data Portal

A comparison between the indicators reveals that these do not always move in the same direction. Legal frameworks in the BSEC region are, in some cases, stronger than actual outcomes. **Türkiye** illustrates this particularly well, as it has the most comprehensive legal framework, yet records the highest frequency of

[8] https://data.unodc.org/datareport/hom-femicide

intimate partner violence and one of the highest numbers of female homicides (481 cases).

This can be interpreted from two different perspectives. Countries with strong legislation may report higher numbers of incidents because women are more aware of their rights, have greater confidence in reporting violence, and benefit from more robust data collection systems. In contrast, lower reported rates may reflect underreporting rather than lower actual incidences. The fact remains that the persistence of relatively high rates of intimate partner violence and femicides indicates that legal protection has not yet fully translated into prevention and protection in practice.

This suggests that **legislation is a necessary but insufficient condition** for reducing violence against women. As highlighted by UN WOMEN, *"for many women, remaining silent is not a choice, but a consequence of the risks they face in speaking out."*[9]

Social norms sustain the problem.

The **2023 Gender Social Norms Index** (GSNI)[10] quantifies biases against women, capturing people's attitudes on women's roles along four key dimensions: political, educational, economic and physical integrity.

Under the dimension of physical integrity, indicator 'Proxy for intimate partner violence' measures the percentage of people who consider it is justifiable for a man to beat his wife under certain circumstances. The indicator does not measure the frequency of violence itself but rather the social norms and attitudes that may enable or tolerate intimate partner violence.

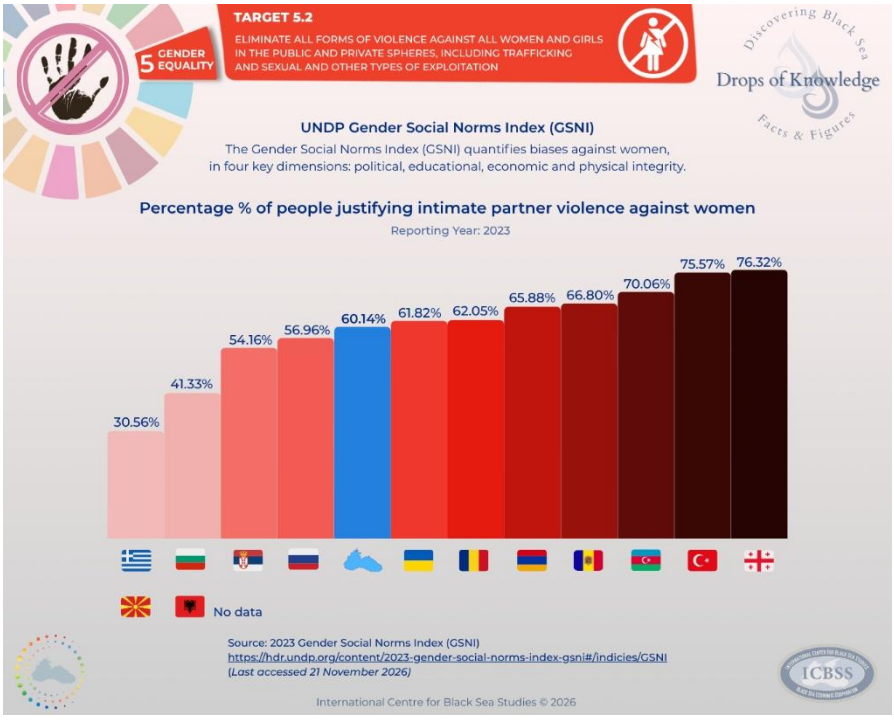
The results for the BSEC13 suggest that **tolerance of intimate partner violence** remains alarmingly high across the Black Sea region, with an **average of approximately 60%** of respondents expressing attitudes that justify wife-beating in at least some circumstances [See Graph 5].

Georgia and **Türkiye** score the highest bias at 76.32% and 75.57% respectively. It is worth noting that **Georgia** reports relatively low numbers of intimate partner violence (Graph 2) suggesting a substantial gap between reported violence and underlying social behaviours; while **Türkiye**, which has the most comprehensive

[9] https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/media-advisory/2026/11/media-advisory-international-day-for-the-elimination-of-violence-against-women-and-16-days-of-activism-2026
[10] https://hdr.undp.org/content/2023-gender-social-norms-index-gsni#/indicies/GSNI

legal framework, scores the highest in intimate partner violence, exposing the influence of persistent social norms on behaviour.

Greece has the lowest GSNI score at 30.6%, followed by **Bulgaria** at 41.33. **Most BSEC countries** score between 55% to 65%, meaning that approximately 6 in 10 people across the Black Sea believe it is justifiable for a man to beat his wife.



Graph 5. Percentage of people justifying intimate partner violence against women across the 13 BSEC Member States. Source: 2023 Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI)

In Conclusion

Evidence from the UN Women shows that most survivors of physical or sexual violence never seek help, only a small proportion turn to the police, and help-seeking rates are declining in many countries. Data from the 13 BSEC countries confirm this trend.

The BSEC region has made significant progress in developing legal frameworks to combat violence against women, yet the frequency of intimate partner violence and the increase of femicides indicate that legislative advancement is not always translated into improved outcomes.

The latest available data show that violence within intimate relationships remains a major social challenge, affecting women of all ages and backgrounds across the Black Sea region. Femicides continue to occur across all BSEC Member States,

indicating that violence against women can escalate to its most fatal form. The Gender Social Norms Index reveals that discriminatory behaviours towards violence against women remain widespread across the region. The coexistence of comprehensive legal frameworks and high levels of acceptance of violence in several countries highlights that legislative reforms alone are insufficient.

Differences in reporting mechanisms, social stigma and access to support services may contribute to underreporting, suggesting that the actual scale of the problem could be considerably higher. Evidence points to a persistent implementation gap, highlighting the urgent need to complement legal protection with increased prevention measures, survivor-centred support services, effective legal frameworks and enforcement practices, improved data collection, and enhanced public awareness efforts.

Eliminating violence against women requires coordinated action from all involved; governments, health services, educational professionals, civil society organisations, communities. It also demands addressing the underlying social norms, inequalities, and discriminatory behaviours that enable and perpetuate violence against women.

On this International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, it is worth stressing that, despite progress in acknowledging and monitoring the problem, much remains to be done across the 13 BSEC countries to address and eliminate it.

RESOURCES

- **OECD Gender, Institutions and Development Database (GID-DB)** https://doi.org/10.1787/7b0af638-en
- **UNSDG Indicators Database** https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal/database
- **UN WOMEN** https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/media-advisory/2026/11/media-advisory-international-day-for-the-elimination-of-violence-against-women-and-16-days-of-activism-2026
- **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)** https://www.unodc.org/unodc/index.html
- **Statistical framework for measuring the gender-related killing of women and girls** https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/Statistical_framework_femicide_2022.pdf

- **UNODC Data Portal** https://data.unodc.org/datareport/hom-femicide
- **2023 Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI)** https://hdr.undp.org/content/2023-gender-social-norms-index-gsni#/indicies/GSNI

Gender Equality Programme: The Gender Equality Programme (GEP) was launched by the ICBSS in March 2026, on the occasion of International Women's Day (8 March). The Programme uses data, information, and statistics to study, assess and monitor the current status and progress of gender equality across the 13 Member States of the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation. Through this science-based approach, the Gender Equality Programme aims to raise awareness and contribute to policy advocacy and stakeholder mobilisation.

About the ICBSS: The International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) was founded in 1998 as a non-profit organisation. It has since fulfilled a dual function. On the one hand, it is an independent research and training institution focusing on the wider Black Sea region. On the other hand, it is a related body of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), and its think-tank. Thus, the ICBSS pursues applied, policy-oriented research, promotes knowledge on the Black Sea region both within and outside its boundaries, and offers policy advice with the aim of fostering multilateral cooperation among the BSEC member states as well as with their international partners.

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