# no. 40 (2025) STOPVI & LENCE

#### **JANUARY to MARCH**

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### WOMEN'S LAW CENTRE

#### **TABLE OF CONTENTS:**

- 2 JUSTICE WAS MADE IN THE CASE OF ANA MARIA: LIFE IMPRISONMENT FOR FEMICIDE
- 3 MOLDINDCONBANK GENEROUSLY SUPPORTS WLC BENEFICIARIES THROUGH SOLIDARITY AND ART
- 4 TOGETHER WE HELPED VICTORIA\* AND HER 4 CHILDREN
- 5 IN-DEPTH DISCUSSIONS FOR A STUDY ON THE CHALLENGES OF ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR WOMEN VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, INCLUDING THOSE FROM GROUPS WITH MULTIPLE VULNERABILITIES
- 6 TRANSFORMARE VOUCHER PROGRAMME SUPPORTS WOMEN SURVIVORS OF VIOLENCE TOWARDS ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE
- 7 GENDER EQUALITY PROMOTERS IN ACTION: 10 LOCAL INITIATIVES SUPPORTED BY WLC IN 10 DISTRICTS OF THE COUNTRY
- 11 TRAINING FOR JUSTICE SECTOR PROFESSIONALS ON RESPONDING TO CASES OF GENDER-BASED AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
- 13 WLC LAUNCHES A MENTORING PROGRAMME FOR NGOS PROVIDING LEGAL ASSISTANCE TO WOMEN VICTIMS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE
- 14 CREATIVE WORKSHOPS A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION FOR WLC BENEFICIARIES
- 15 "IF I DON'T HAVE IT, AT LEAST MAY THEY HAVE IT." DIANA IS FIGHTING FOR A BETTER FUTURE FOR HER FIVE CHILDREN
- **17 NEWS IN BRIEF**

## JUSTICE WAS MADE IN THE CASE OF ANA MARIA: LIFE IMPRISONMENT FOR FEMICIDE

On 9 January 2025, the court of first instance sentenced to life imprisonment the man accused of the kidnapping, rape and brutal murder of Ana Maria Guja, the 19-year-old pregnant girl from Orhei.

The court sentenced the accused to life imprisonment in a closed prison and ordered him to pay MDL 2 million in moral damages to Ana Maria's family, as well as more than MDL 531,000 for court costs.

Throughout the trial, the Women's Law Centre supported Ana Maria's family and provided legal representation in court.

"Ana Maria's case is a tragedy that could have been avoided, yet her sacrifice mobilised the whole society and led to the recognition of the concept of femicide in Moldovan legislation. However, we still have a lot of work to do to ensure that such tragedies never happen again." – Angelina Zaporojan Pîrgari, WLC Executive Director. It should be noted that following the tragedy, on 29 April 2024, WLC launched a public call to recognise the concept of "femicide" in Moldovan legislation. The call was signed by over 1,500 people and supported by 160 civil society organisations. As a result, the concept of "femicide" was introduced into the legislation in the summer of 2024.

WLC continues to support the process of reforming national legislation to bring it in line with the international standards for preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.





In this context, we advocated for the extension of the mandate of the Commission for monitoring and analysing cases of domestic violence resulting in death or serious bodily harm to victims, to encompass all cases of femicide, regardless of whether the perpetrator is a family member.

We also support the development of a study analysing the criminalisation of femicide at the European level and best law enforcement practices, and will support efforts to amend legislation to implement the concept of femicide.

## MOLDINDCONBANK GENEROUSLY SUPPORTS WLC BENEFICIARIES THROUGH SOLIDARITY AND ART

On 8 March, Moldindconbank continued to support women affected by violence, giving them the opportunity to express themselves through art and a chance for a better future, by donating **MDL 25,000** to the Women's Law Centre.

Part of the donation was used to provide women with the materials needed to create special greeting cards inspired by the themes of femininity, International Women's Day, and spring. These cards were then given to Moldindconbank's corporate clients as a symbol of respect and support for all women.

The other part of the funds will be directed to the **economic empowerment programme** for our women beneficiaries, which will help them to rebuild their lives and become financially independent. In 2024, thanks to Moldindconbank's support, nine WLC beneficiaries were able to take important steps towards a more secure and stable future. We are deeply grateful to Moldindconbank for the support provided to the WLC's mission and for supporting women affected by violence. Initiatives like this help our beneficiaries to regain confidence and strength to move forward.

Together we are changing lives!







## TOGETHER WE HELPED VICTORIA\* AND HER 4 CHILDREN

Violence leaves deep scars that are not erased by distancing oneself from the perpetrator. Victoria has a long way to go to rebuild her life and provide her children with a better future.

Thanks to the kind-hearted people who donated, we were able to bring a ray of hope into her life and the lives of her four children. Thanks to your generosity, we were able to raise MDL 7,500. With these funds, we bought for Victoria a washing machine that she wanted so much. "From the bottom of my heart I thank the whole team and everyone who contributed. May God bless you and grant you tenfold in return."

We thank everyone who donated for Victoria and her children.





<sup>®</sup>Name changed to protect the identity of the individual.







Thousands of women and children from our country live with violence, fear and insecurity every day. In 2024, we recorded 1,198 requests for assistance to WLC from women affected by violence. Victoria is one of them.

#### MAKE A DONATION

#### AND GIVE WOMEN AND CHILDREN AFFECTED BY VIOLENCE A CHANCE.

Your contribution will help us provide legal, psychological, social counselling and economic empowerment opportunities for women affected by violence and their children. Together, we can give them hope.

IN-DEPTH DISCUSSIONS FOR A STUDY ON THE CHALLENGES OF ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR WOMEN VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, INCLUDING THOSE FROM GROUPS WITH MULTIPLE VULNERABILITIES



Between 27 February and 17 March 2025, the Women's Law Centre, in partnership with UN Women Moldova, organised 9 focus groups and 7 individual interviews with women survivors of violence, representatives of NGOs, service providers, development partners, lawyers, prosecutors, judges, police, prosecution and probation officers. The discussions were attended by 98 participants from 18 regions of the country.



The discussions are the first step in collecting data for a new study on "Challenges of access to justice for women victims of domestic violence, including those from groups with multiple vulnerabilities", which will be launched in July 2025.

The study's unique approach is based on the lived experiences of victims, so to make sure their voices are heard: 29 women from different regions, ages and backgrounds spoke about their experiences of violence and interactions with the criminal justice system in two focus groups and seven in-depth interviews.

Through this study, we aim to identify gaps in the system and find victim-centred solutions to improve access to justice for all women, including those from vulnerable groups. The activities were organised by the Women's Law Centre within the project, 'Women's Increased Leadership for Resilient and Peaceful Societies", implemented by UN Women with funding provided by the Government of Denmark.



TRANSFORMARE VOUCHER PROGRAMME SUPPORTS WOMEN SURVIVORS OF VIOLENCE TOWARDS ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE "I am very pleased and at the same time happy that I had the opportunity to benefit from the activities, trainings and support of everyone involved in this programme. Thank you for your attitude, dedication, responsibility and most importantly professionalism. Thanks to you I feel even more happy and fulfilled. Thank you very much to the WLC team and thank you to the Universe."

**Stela,** programme winner

The TransFormare voucher programme, launched in November 2024 by the Women's Law Centre in partnership with UN Women and with financial support from Sweden, has reached an important new milestone.

Twenty-one women from Soroca, Hînceşti, Teleneşti, Bălţi, Ştefan-Vodă, Căuşeni, Sîngerei, Donduşeni and Chişinău have been identified as winners who will receive cash vouchers worth up to MDL 50,000 each to start and de-



velop income-generating activities. The initiative is part of WLC's Economic Empowerment Programme supported by UN Women, which aims to support women and girls on their journey of transformation towards a free life free from violence.

Among the winners are women who will take VET courses in areas such as confectionery, tailoring, fashion design, hairdressing, manicure or professional makeup, and will be able to purchase the necessary equipment and tools to carry out their activities.

The projects supported include businesses in a wide range of fields, from clothing brands and speech therapy offices to veterinary services, beekeeping, language centres, women's gyms or the creation of folk costumes and murals.

#### Programme winner Tatiana shared:

"I am so grateful to you for the opportunity to participate in the programme and even more so for winning the voucher. You have given me wings to believe in myself and persevere. Thank you so much for being there for women who need guidance and support to help them regain their confidence, especially during difficult times. It is so important what you do."

Under the Economic Empowerment Programme, implemented in Soroca, Hînceşti, Teleneşti, Bălți and Ștefan-Vodă districts between November 2023 and November 2024, about **300 women and girls** participated in empowerment and information workshops, personal development and career guidance courses, orientation courses on income-generating activities and one-on-one mentoring sessions.

The Programme aims to enhance the economic independence of women who have experienced abuse by providing them with the financial resources, personal skills, tools and guidance necessary to start and develop income-generating activities that will help them regain their strength and build a better future for themselves and their children.

Going forward, the winners will benefit from the guidance and support of the WLC team to achieve their goals and turn their dreams into reality. Stay tuned for news about their achievements and successes!

## GENDER EQUALITY PROMOTERS IN ACTION: 10 LOCAL INITIATIVES SUPPORTED BY WLC IN 10 DISTRICTS OF THE COUNTRY

Ten territorial local initiative groups, which received WLC grants of USD 10,000 each to implement their own projects, continue to carry out various activities in several regions of the country.

These initiatives help to raise awareness about gender equality, engage local communities in dialogue and concrete actions, and support women in their personal and professional development.

The activities are carried out by the grantees of the project "Empowering Women, Local Communities and Refugees in Moldova" implemented by the Women's Law Centre and financially supported by the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF).



#### Criuleni & Orhei

The local team turned Forum Theatre into a tool for promoting gender equality and fighting stereotypes.

Students from the 7th grade of the Hruşova secondary school created an interactive theatre play inspired by the results of a local survey on gender myths.

More than 200 students and teachers participated in the performances, which took place in villages such as Oniţcani, Hruşova and Boşcana, giving them the opportunity to propose solutions and contribute to constructive debates on gender equality.

With each performance, Forum Theatre became a space for reflection and frank dialogue about gender equality, turning the audience into active participants and agents of change.

The tour continues in Criuleni, giving young people new opportunities to engage and make their voices heard.











#### laloveni & Orhei

Twenty women from laloveni participated in the training "Introduction to Social Entrepreneurship", organised as part of the local initiative "Equality through Involvement and Empowerment" of the laloveni and Orhei team.

During two days, 15 and 16 February, the participants learned about social entrepreneurship, identifying community problems and turning ideas into practical solutions. With the support of trainers, they discussed social enterprise registration, marketing, resource management and social business planning. The training ended with a workshop where the participants presented their business ideas, including handmade products and eco-friendly solutions, demonstrating enthusiasm and creativity.

This is just the beginning of the journey to creating more equitable and engaged communities!







#### Soroca

The "Fathers' School" in Soroca is becoming a living example of family involvement and responsibility, offering fathers a friendly space where they can learn about gender equality and improve their relationship with their children. The project is part of the local initiative "Strong Men for Women's and Men's Equality", in which a sports hall in Soroca was renovated and turned into a space for personal and family development activities.

For three months, a group of ten fathers met weekly to take part in interactive training sessions, both one-on-one, for couples and for parents and children. The training sessions covered topics such as parental responsibilities, preventing gender stereotyping, effective family communication and the importance of emotional involvement in parenting.

On 13 February 2025, an event was held to showcase best practice in training the first group of fathers. The event was attended by representatives of the local



authorities and the Education Department, who praised the positive changes brought about by this initiative.

The participating fathers shared their impressions: "I learnt how important it is to be emotionally present with children", said one of the fathers, while another added: "We succeeded in debunking the stereotypes about traditional family roles and realised that raising children is not only a mother's responsibility".

The enthusiasm of the first group of fathers inspired the second group, which has already started the "Fathers' School" training sessions. Thus, small changes in the family can lead to big changes in the community, helping to promote gender equality and build healthier and more balanced family relationships.







#### 📕 Ştefan Vodă

Twenty young women from the villages of Palanca and Ștefan Vodă will become more confident in their abilities and in their choice of future profession.

The first step to development is self-knowledge. Discovering what you really enjoy doing can pave the way to a fulfilling and personally satisfying career.

This message was delivered to a group of girls from Palanca village during a selfdiscovery activity on "What am I doing today? What will I do tomorrow?", organised on 14 March by the local Ștefan Vodă team as part of the "Make an informed career choice" initiative.

#### Florești

Twenty policemen and policewomen from Florești district will become agents of change in the community by participating in the training of trainers programme on gender equality and non-discrimination, organised under the project "Partnership for Equal Opportunities and Non-Discrimination".

The programme aimed to raise awareness and encourage community engagement in promoting equal opportunities and combating discrimination.

During the final training session, the participants learnt how to plan and implement awareness-raising activities, practiced evaluation and monitoring methods, discussed the challenges and solutions to promote gender equality in policing. They also developed concrete action plans to be implemented in the community, contributing to a more respectful, equal and inclusive society.





#### Glodeni

The project "Empowering Women and Local Communities in the Glodeni District" ended on 20 March 2025 with a debriefing event attended by mayors, public authorities and members of multidisciplinary teams.

Through information sessions, training workshops and collaboration with authorities, the local team succeeded in bringing the issue of domestic and gender-based violence to the forefront by actively engaging the public.





Among the important results of this initiative:

- UA flash mob in the town centre of Glodeni, which was attended by more than 50 people and raised public awareness of the issue of domestic violence.
- 10 information sessions in 10 localities of the district with the participation of multidisciplinary teams.
- 2 training workshops attended by more than 50 professionals to strengthen knowledge and intervention capacity in cases of domestic violence.
- 10 collaboration agreements signed with LPAs to support initiatives to prevent gender-based violence.









#### Dondușeni

The students of the Theoretical Lyceum "Alexei Mateevici" from Donduşeni proved that change starts with each of us.

On 18 March 2025, this desire to get involved was fully manifested at the students' awarding event, where we celebrated their achievements and the results of the local initiative "Gender EQUALity – EQUAL opportunities for a more harmonious life".

Seventy lyceum students participated in information sessions on gender equality, and the most active ones were awarded.

Solomeea Negrescu, Chair of the Student Council, emphasised the positive impact of the project: "This project gave us the courage to speak openly about equality and mutual respect. The information campaign had a real impact on our colleagues. We had frank discussions where every opinion was respected and we realised that, regardless of gender, each of us has the right to follow our dreams."

#### Căușeni

The local team from Căuşeni organised two training workshops for young people, on 22 January and 19 February 2025, as part of the "Out Loud about Gender Equality" initiative. The participants had interactive discussions and hands-on activities, exchanged ideas and shared their visions on how they can bring positive change to the community.

These young people are not just talking about change, they are ready to act! They are motivated to learn how to prevent domestic violence, fight stereotypes and promote gender equality, becoming true agents of change.









#### Cimișlia

The local team organised on 14 February and 25-26 February 2 workshops with representatives of local public administrations and civil society to develop a Gender Equality Plan for Cimişlia district.

The initiative aims to combat discrimination and promote equal opportunities through policies that support education, employment, health and participation in decision-making.

The workshops facilitated the identification of challenges, the exchange of good practices and the proposal of concrete solutions to be reflected in the Gender Equality Plan.

## TRAINING FOR JUSTICE SECTOR PROFESSIONALS ON RESPONDING TO CASES OF GENDER-BASED AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The ineffective intervention of state institutions in domestic violence cases has been highlighted in numerous studies conducted by the WLC, so building the capacity of professionals to respond effectively to such cases remains an urgent need.

The lack of knowledge or understanding of the law, coupled with prejudices and stereotypes held by professionals, jeopardise the physical and psychological safety and lives of victims of domestic violence. Building the capacity of these professionals remains a key priority of the WLC strategy.



Between 3 and 7 February, **17 non**commissioned police officers from several districts of Moldova participated in a training course on best practices in police response to domestic violence. The course was organised by the WLC in partnership with the Integrated Law Enforcement Training Centre of the MIA Academy "Ștefan cel Mare", with financial support from The Sigrid Rausing Trust.













On 7 February and 13-14 March, **89 judicial assistants, court clerks and prosecutors' consultants** attended training courses on women's access to justice, the application of the Istanbul Convention and the specifics of investigating and prosecuting crimes of domestic violence and violence against women.

On 28 February and 27-28 March, **49 judges and prosecutors** participated in training courses on women's access to justice and the specifics of investigating and prosecuting crimes of violence against women, children, domestic violence and femicide.

The training sessions were organised by the Women's Law Centre in partnership with the National Institute of Justice, with financial support from Sweden and the Oak Foundation, channelled through ARC Romania.







The aim of these trainings is to contribute to changing professionals' attitudes towards domestic violence, understanding its origins and changing their way of thinking. At the same time, we encourage a cross-sectoral approach to cases of domestic violence, cooperation and communication between professionals in their interventions, and referral of identified cases to specialised services.









WLC LAUNCHES A MENTORING PROGRAMME FOR NGOS PROVIDING LEGAL ASSISTANCE TO WOMEN VICTIMS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

In February, WLC launched a unique mentoring programme for NGOs from Moldova. The programme aims to build capacity, optimise internal working practices and increase efficiency in providing primary and qualified legal assistance to victims of genderbased violence.



The mentorship process will be based on a practical and participatory approach, starting with a detailed assessment of the realities of the organizations and continuing with tailored support adapted to the needs and specifics of each team.

The programme aims to both deepen knowledge of international legislation and standards in providing primary and qualified legal assistance to victims of domestic violence, as well as practical mentoring in case management.

The mentoring programme is organised by WLC as part of the project "Women's Increased Leadership for Resilient and Peaceful Societies", implemented by UN Women Moldova and funded by the Government of Denmark.

Stay tuned for more information about the selected organisations and upcoming events!

## MENTORING ----PROGRAMME

for NGOs providing legal assistance to women victims of gender-based violence



## CREATIVE WORKSHOPS -A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION FOR WLC BENEFICIARIES

At the Women's Law Centre, creative workshops have become a tradition that brings comfort and joy to women and children who have gone through difficult times. These activities are not only relaxing, but also create moments of togetherness and priceless memories.





In February, we organised a special workshop where our beneficiaries made beaded key chains. The atmosphere was full of sincere smiles and positive emotions, and the results speak for themselves – not only marvellous handmade creations, but also a deep connection between the participants.

With spring approaching, the creative workshop dedicated to making mărțişor brooches gave our beneficiaries hope and inspiration. The exquisite mărțişors created by the women became symbols of hope, rebirth and new beginnings.









## "IF I DON'T HAVE IT, AT LEAST MAY THEY HAVE IT." DIANA IS FIGHTING FOR A BETTER FUTURE FOR HER FIVE CHILDREN

Diana has five children whom she is raising alone. She lives in a village in the district of Anenii Noi, in a modest house she inherited from her parents. On the outside she looks like an ordinary woman, but inside she is a fortress that has withstood 15 years of violence.



#### Family life turned into a nightmare

Diana met her ex-partner when she was 21. "He seemed like a nice man at first," she says, "but soon the truth came out". Quarrels, violence and the man's addiction to alcohol turned their family life into a nightmare. After the birth of their first child, the abuse became constant.

"We used to fight all the time. I would go to my parents' house. He would come and apologise. He would tell me that everything would be fine, that he would change." Diana recalls how every time she tried to leave, he would convince her to come back. For the sake of the children, Diana would give him another chance, but the



relationship did not improve. The man continued to drink alcohol and be violent towards Diana.

#### The children learnt too early what suffering was

Five children were born from their 15year relationship. Five souls who were born into a home where love should have been the foundation, but grew up in the shadow of fear. They didn't choose to live this way. They didn't choose to see their mother's tears and feel fear when they heard their father's footsteps.

Life became harder and harder. "When he would leave for the shop or go out with friends, I knew what was waiting for me in the evening – he would come home drunk. I would try to put the children to bed earlier so they wouldn't see... Often the children were present. One day he came home and started chasing me. I sat in the garden and waited for him to fall asleep before I went into the house. I sat there thinking, "Why do I need such a life? My children will not thank me for such a father".

#### The last straw

There were times when he threatened her with a knife. "I decided this was the last straw, I couldn't take it anymore. I ran away at 1 a.m. to our neighbours' house. I called the police. I decided to call the helpline and that's how I got help and was able to move on."



At the Women's Law Centre, Diana receives legal support, psychological counselling and social assistance. With the support of the WLC team, she obtained several protection orders against the perpetrator. Unfortunately, her former cohabitant repeatedly violated them. A WLC lawyer is representing Diana's interests in court. Several criminal cases are currently pending against the perpetrator.

"He would not stop. One night he came and set fire to the hay. In the middle of winter we were left without fodder. I sold our two cows. Those animals fed us. He left five children without food and he didn't care." That night he trashed the whole house. "He poured petrol on the firewood to set it on fire, he stuffed the chimney with clothes so that we would suffocate. He smashed the cupboards, the washing machine, everything in his path."

#### A cry for help

Diana is a fighter and works hard to secure a better future for her children. "I try my best to keep them out of need but it's hard, I'm on my own, I don't have any help." With no regular income, Diana struggles to get by. "There are times when we don't even have bread in the house, but if I'm in debt, I can't go and borrow again."

Six human beings souls crammed into just two rooms. They live with many hardships and difficulties with only love to compensate for everything they lack. As the youngest child in the family is only a year old, Diana cannot go to work yet. "I want to work, to have a stable salary so that I can little by little do work on the house... build a wall, put up a chimney." "I would really like to do another room, to have at least three of them... The children are growing up and they need personal space, especially the girl. The boy is big now, and he needs his own personal space." All Diana wants is to give her children a decent life and a happy childhood.

#### How can you help?

We are reaching out to everyone who can help this brave mum. By helping Diana, we are helping five children to have the minimum living conditions.

> DONATE NOW and help us make Diana's dream come true.



## **NEWS IN BRIEF**

On 27 March 2025, a new tragedy stirred public opinion in Moldova. In Soroca district, a man killed his wife and mother-in-law and then fled the scene of the crime. The man's body was found later and there are clear indications that he had committed suicide. Police confirmed that the victims had multiple injuries and signs of violent death.

Such crimes are not isolated, they are often the culmination of prior experiences of domestic violence. Femicide reflects a deeply entrenched culture of misogyny and gender inequality in which perpetrators use violence to assert their power and control over victims.

To prevent such tragedies, we need to understand and address the root causes of femicide. Gender inequality, fuelled by patriarchal norms and a culture that devalues women, creates the perfect environment for violence to continue.

According to the 2022 and 2023 Fatality Reports, there are a number of **risk factors that can lead to femicide**.

- Concealing violence: The reluctance to disclose or report domestic violence, including hiding this fact from close relatives.
- Inadequate penalties for aggressors: Applying punishments that fail to discourage perpetrators from committing acts of violence.
- Mental health issues: The presence of mental health problems among both perpetrators and victims.
- Lack of counseling services: Insufficient access to counseling services for those involved in domestic violence, tailored to their rehabilitation needs.
- Persistence of violence over time: The continuation of violence as a recurring issue.
- Addictions affecting both parties: The struggles with substance abuse or other vices faced by both the aggressor and the victim.
- Financial dependency: The victim's financial dependence on the aggressor.

WLC continues to advocate for the inclusion of the concept of "femicide" in the Criminal Code in order to impose harsher penalties for perpetrators of such crimes.

Equality of rights, responsibilities and opportunities is essential in all spheres of life. In the "Good Morning" TV show on the public TV station Moldova 1, Angelina Zaporojan-Pîrgari, WLC Executive Director, and Petru Golban, teacher of Education for Society, discussed the situation and challenges in the field of gender equality in the Republic of Moldova.



Watch the show here.

In February 2025, WLC submitted to the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova an expert opinion in which we present our opinion on the draft law amending some regulatory acts in order to improve the legal framework for the protection of the rights of minor children.

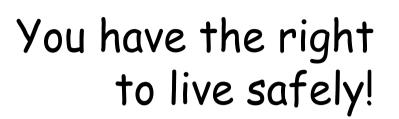
- At present, the national legislation does not contain explicit provisions to ensure that violence against a child or the person having custody of the child is taken into account when deciding on residential custody (physical custody) of the child and when establishing visitation arrangements for the child by the domestic perpetrator.
- The current provisions of the Family Code on the establishment and implementation of a visitation schedule between the child and the non-custodial parent remain insufficient to ensure protection from violence and to prevent children's involvement in family conflicts.
- There are no provisions establishing the obligation of the guardianship authority to prohibit or limit contact with the child, including by changing the child visitation schedule, based on the restrictions imposed on the domestic perpetrator by an emergency restraining order or protection order.

• The existing regulations are inadequate to protect children during visits with the perpetrator parent. Many parents, especially mothers, face safety concerns during these visits. In addition, there are no penalties for a parent who fails to comply with the visitation schedule.

#### We believe that the bill needs to be reviewed and amended. What are we proposing?

- Adopt clear measures that take into account a history of domestic violence when establishing visitation and custody rights;
- Establish regulations that protect children and victims of violence during visits with a perpetrator parent;
- Ensure prompt intervention by authorities to prevent family conflict and related trauma, etc.

The full text of the opinion is available **here**.





#### WHO ARE WE?

**WOMEN'S LAW CENTRE (WLC)** is a non-governmental organisation founded by a group of women-lawyers from Moldova. WLC advocates for equality between women and men in the public and family life and helps prevent and combat domestic violence and gender-based violence against women.

The newsletter is issued with the financial support of Sweden and the OAK Foundation (via ARC).

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