



**Safety and Accountability:
Improving Programmes for
Perpetrators of Domestic Violence
in the Republic of Moldova**

Project coordinator

Violeta Terguta

Chisinau 2024

This analytical study was carried out by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) via Ministry of Labour and Social Protection in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice, National Penitentiary Administration, National Probation Inspectorate, National Agency for the Prevention and Combating of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, Ministry of Internal Affairs, General Inspectorate of Police and Public Institution "Assistance Services for Victims of Domestic Violence".

The activity was carried out with the financial support of the governments of the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The content is the sole responsibility of UNFPA and does not necessarily reflect the views of the donors.

This analysis contributes to the implementation of the provisions of the National Program for the Prevention and Combating of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence for the years 2023-2027.

The study and the report are prepared by the European Network for the Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence (WWP EN).

Authors: Sandra Jovanović Belotić, Berta Vall and Malin Palm.

The research was supported by dedicated professionals from the Republic of Moldova: Aneta Bejenar (National Probation Inspectorate) and Elena Botezatu (National Penitentiary Administration).

Project Coordinator: Violeta Terguță, Programme Analyst on GBV, UNFPA Moldova.

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1. Introduction

Violence against women has been acknowledged internationally as a form of discrimination against women and as a violation of women's human rights. Data has shown that one in three women in the European Union (EU) has experienced some form of physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15 (FRA 2014). Domestic violence in particular affects women disproportionately; although men can also be the targets of intimate partner violence, women represent the great majority of victims and men the great majority of perpetrators.

With the aim to change attitudes and overcome gender stereotypes, the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) clearly emphasizes the need to involve boys and men in the prevention of violence against women (CoE, 2011). Before any boy or man becomes a potential perpetrator, there is ample space to allow them to thrive in respectful non-violent relations with women.

Included in Chapter III on "Prevention", Article 16 of the Istanbul Convention requires state parties to set up perpetrator programmes targeting both perpetrators of domestic violence and sex offenders (CoE, 2011). Research and practice in this field have shown that these interventions, whether based on voluntary or mandatory participation, can reduce the risks of further and more severe forms of abuse.

In the context of a country-by-country evaluation procedure, the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO, 2023) – the body in charge of monitoring the implementation of the Istanbul Convention by state parties – has observed a wide range of practices concerning this provision. Perpetrator programmes can be run by civil society organizations or by statutory agencies such as probation services and the penitentiary administration system. In all cases, they should give paramount importance to the victims' safety, and for this purpose, they need to be developed in close co-operation with women's support services and in line with international standards and best practice.

While taking stock of progress so far, this research aims at assessing the situation with regard to the treatment of perpetrators, primarily addressing gaps and shortcomings in the conception and application of measures targeting domestic abusers. Since Moldova voted for the direct applicability of the Istanbul Convention, the inter-institutional response to domestic violence also requires the establishment of high-quality perpetrator programmes (Article 16, "Preventive intervention and treatment programmes").

The recommendations in this study focus on strengthening the capacities of institutions in charge of establishing and running programmes for perpetrators, providing justice and implementing awareness-raising initiatives to counter violence against women and domestic violence, in line with the standards set forth in the Istanbul Convention.

2. Methodology

This analytical study was conducted by applying a mixed method approach, gathering both qualitative and quantitative data and covering all existing perpetrator programmes in Moldova.

The study includes:

- desk research;
- in-depth analysis, and
- identification of promising practices.

The study applied a participatory approach in which the main target groups of the research were included in the decision-making process of the project. The methodology of the study and research tools were shared with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the reference group,¹ and their feedback informed the methodology applied and tools used.

The study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the specific characteristics of the contexts in which perpetrator programmes are offered (e.g., in prison, probation, by institutions within the social system, both public and private (NGOs))?
2. How is the national curriculum for perpetrator programmes applied in different contexts in which perpetrator programmes are offered?
3. How is cooperation between victim services and perpetrator programmes established in each context in which perpetrator programmes are offered?
4. How is risk assessment approached in perpetrator programmes in different contexts?
5. What are the main challenges and recommendations for the development of perpetrator programmes in different contexts? How can the goals and objectives specific to perpetrator programmes outlined in the National Programme for Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence for 2023-2027 be most effectively achieved?
6. What are the main recommendations for improvement and steps forward in line with European and international recommendations for programmes for perpetrators?

¹ The reference groups consisted of representatives from the National Inspectorate of Probation, National Inspectorate of Police, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Ministry of Justice, National Administration of Penitentiaries, UNFPA, Ministry of Internal Affairs, National Agency on Ending Violence against Women, and the Center for Assistance and Counseling for Domestic Violence Perpetrators

2.1. Methods

The methods used in this research were:

a) Desk research, which included gathering and reviewing several documents found on the internet or shared by relevant stakeholders. The desk review included several documents, such as: the Government of Moldova Minimum Standards of Quality of Services to Family Offenders (2014), National Curriculum for Perpetrator Programme (Bodrug-Lungu et al., 2017), Programme on psycho-social intervention for prisoners who have committed crimes of domestic violence (Order no. 202. 2021), National Programme for preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence for 2023-2027 (2023), National Action Plan for the implementation of the National Programme for Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence for 2023-2027, GREVIO Baseline Evaluation Report: Republic of Moldova (2023) and Regional Guidance on Working with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence and Early Intervention (UN Women/UNFPA, 2022).

b) Tailored questionnaires adapted from the Impact Programme Questionnaire (Vall, Pauncz, McKenzie, 2021), exploring several areas of perpetrator programmes such as: cooperation and context, victim support/partner contact, cooperation with other agencies, referral and intake, methodology, content of work of perpetrator programmes for domestic violence, quality assurance, documentation and evaluation.

c) Focus groups were held with professionals from probation and prison settings to further explore the results obtained in the questionnaires. In total, 5 focus groups were held.

d) Interviews with managers from probation and prison settings were conducted. In total, 3 interviews were held, with the main objective to obtain the managers' point of view on the questionnaire results.

e) Interviews were conducted with men who have participated in the perpetrator programme in probation and prison settings as well as with survivors whose partners have been in the programme for domestic violence offenders. The main objective of these interviews was to obtain direct information from first-hand participants of the programmes.

2.2. Procedure

Questionnaires were administered by local experts in January 2024. All questionnaires were distributed and filled out online. Questionnaires were written in Romanian language and were completed in either Romanian or Russian. Furthermore, statistics about perpetrators of domestic violence, perpetrator programmes and staff were collected from the Social Reintegration Directorate of the National Administration of Penitentiaries and the National Probation Inspectorate.

A total of 392 questionnaires were collected from professional staff, 338 of which were collected from the police, 38 from probation services,² 14 from penitentiaries³ and two from NGOs, public institutions that are or have been involved in programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence. Once statistics and questionnaires from perpetrator programmes were reviewed, the main findings were discussed during focus groups. Five focus group sessions were held in February 2024 with a total of 37 participants, of which 25 were professionals from probation offices and 12 from prisons. In addition to that, three interviews were held with managers from the National Probation Inspectorate, the National Administration of Penitentiary and civil society; four interviews with perpetrators who are undergoing or have gone through perpetrator programmes; and three interviews with survivors of domestic violence.

Figure 1: Participants distributed by each research action and by perpetrator programme context

	Number of responses to questionnaire	Focus groups (FG)		Number of interviews with managers/ coordinators	Number of interviews with perpetrators	Number of interviews with victims
		Number of FGs conducted	Number of participants in FGs			
Probation offices	38	3	25	1	2 ⁴	-
Prisons	14	2	12	1	2	-
NGOs	2	0	0	1	2	3
Police	338	0	0	0	N.A.	N.A.
Total	392	5	37	3	4	3

² Please note that all probation offices in the country were included in the research.

³ Please note that all prisons in the country who can work with male perpetrators of domestic violence were included in the research. The Republic of Moldova had 18 prisons; however, one is permanently closed. Furthermore, out of the 17 open prisons, one is a prison hospital, one a detention centre for juveniles and minors and one a women's prison. These prisons were not included in the research as they do not work with male perpetrators of domestic violence, which is the focus of the study.

⁴ Interviewed perpetrators were referred by the probation office to the programme provided by the Centre for Assistance and Counselling for Perpetrators of Domestic Violence, within the Public Institution 'Assistance Services for Victims of Domestic Violence', in partnership with the NGO 'Artemida'.

3. Results

3.1. Background

3.1.1 Legal and policy framework

The protection of victims of violence against women and domestic violence in Moldova still has notable room for improvement. The National Programme for Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (2023-2027), in an analysis of the situation, highlights a lack of specialized women's support services as well as insufficient capacities within existing services, while noting that funding for these services does not cover the needs. Additionally, existing services are mainly focused on providing urgent interventions, while there is a lack of longer-term services.

The core framework for the functioning of programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence is the Criminal Code of the Republic of Moldova, which criminalizes domestic violence and mandates participation in probationary programmes for perpetrators as one of the possible measures in cases of the conditional suspension of a sentence. The National Probation Inspectorate has initiated a proposal to amend Article 90 of the Criminal Code and make referrals to perpetrator programmes mandatory in cases of suspended sentences (GREVIO, 2023). Furthermore, Moldova ratified the Istanbul Convention in 2022, which obliges the government to set up and support programmes for perpetrators (Bureau des Traités). The Law No. 45/2007 on the Prevention and Combating of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, Article 15, defines an additional referral route to perpetrator programmes by way of a protection measure that can be imposed by the civil court (Republic of Moldova, 2007).

The development of programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence is repeatedly recognized through Government Decision No. 496/2014, which approved Framework Regulation for the Counselling Centres for Family Aggressors and the minimum quality standards (2014).⁵ This document states that local administrative authorities can set up programmes for perpetrators (Assistance and Counselling Centres for Family Aggressors) as a social service and defines these centres as expert services that target different populations of perpetrators of domestic violence, including male and female adult perpetrators.

The development of perpetrator programmes is recognized as a key element in combating violence against women in the National Strategy for Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and

⁵ Annex 2 of the Government Decision No. 496 regarding the minimum quality standards for services provided within the Assistance and Counselling Centre for Family Aggressors from June 30, 2014, Chapter II, Section 2, Standard II - Admission, access link: https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=64111&lang=ro

Domestic Violence (2018-2023), and the National Programme for Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (2023-2027) (2023). The goal of the National Programme is the safety and respect of all women. The National Programme identifies the lack of perpetrator programmes and their insufficient geographical coverage as one of the gaps in ensuring victims' protection. Furthermore, it emphasizes the lack of mechanisms for informing victims when perpetrators of domestic violence are released from prison. One of its objectives relates to prosecution, including holding liable and re-educating perpetrators of domestic violence. The monitoring and evaluation framework shows that by 2027, Moldova aims to have established probation programmes and services that teach domestic perpetrators to adopt non-violent behaviour.

The Action Plan for the implementation of the National Programme includes, among others, developing training programmes for professionals who offer assistance services to victims of domestic violence and services for domestic violence perpetrators (Republic of Moldova, 2023), the development of analytical studies on programmes for perpetrators, and encouraging perpetrators to participate in programmes focused on reducing violent behaviour.

3.1.2. Programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence in Moldova

In the Republic of Moldova, domestic violence perpetrators can access or may be required to participate in probation programs, correctional programs, and counselling programs. Probation programs fall under the jurisdiction of the probation authority; correctional programs for perpetrators in prisons are managed by the National Penitentiary Administration; counselling programs are currently provided by non-governmental organizations. According to Government Decision 496/2014, the Centre that provides counselling services is a specialized social institution, which can be either public or private (NGO). The number of non government institutions conducting perpetrator programmes has decreased significantly over the past year, even though it never met the needs for this kind of services in the country. A 2022 mapping (UN Women/UNFPA) and GREVIO Baseline Evaluation Report (2023) have identified four active NGOs, while this study found just one active programme in 2024. There is a national curriculum (Bodrug-Lungu et al., 2017) for programmes for perpetrators, which is used in probation services and community-based perpetrator programmes, while the penitentiary system uses their own. Both the national curriculum and the curriculum for perpetrator programmes in penitentiaries are designed for male perpetrators. While the national curriculum is specifically designed for male perpetrators of violence in intimate partner relationships, the penitentiary programme has a broader focus and is designed for male perpetrators of domestic

violence.⁶ The national curriculum originates from the DULUTH model, adapted to the Moldovan context.

Perpetrator programmes are mandatory upon court decision, as one of the obligations in the cases of conditional suspension of the sentence in criminal proceedings, or as one of the protection measures in civil proceedings. The police can recommend that perpetrators undergo perpetrator programmes, and the court can decide to mandate participation. Perpetrators can also be recommended to attend programmes by other institutions such as victim services or child protection services, or they may attend voluntarily by self-referral. In the recommendations for the implementation of the Article 16 of the Istanbul Convention, the Council of Europe indicates the importance of ensuring wide accessibility of programmes and that both mandatory and voluntary routes are available in a country (Hester & Lilley, 2016). Moldova's legal system complies with this recommendation, as both mandatory and voluntary routes are available and offered to perpetrators within civil and criminal proceedings. However, as noted by the GREVIO baseline evaluation report (2023), these measures are not consistently enforced, as they depend on whether the judge will apply that measure, while the lack of available programmes and stable public funding present a challenge for widespread accessibility of programmes. The low accessibility of programmes in Moldova was also recognized as one of the priorities in the research conducted in the Eastern Partnership Region, which outlines the need to ensure stable funding and at least one active programme in every region in the country (Un Women/UNFPA, 2022). The same problem was identified in the National Programme for Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (2023-2027), which envisages an increase of the number of active programmes (Republic of Moldova, 2023).

The number of perpetrators undergoing programmes has increased quite significantly, from 155 in 2022 to 193 in 2023. Almost half of these attend perpetrator programmes in prison, and the rest in probation or community services.

⁶ Domestic violence includes male perpetration of violence against their partners or ex-partners, but also violence against other family members (children, parents, siblings, etc.).

Figure 2: Number of perpetrators that attended programme for perpetrators of domestic violence in 2022 and 2023

Programme provider	2022	2023
Prison	69	91
Probation	2	8
Community	84 (of which 80 referred from probation services)	96 (of which 72 referred from probation services)
Total:	155	193

The probation system referred most of their perpetrators to community-based programmes. Perpetrator programmes were only implemented directly by the probation office in Hincesti in 2023 and Cantemir in 2022. A total of 72 perpetrators in 2023 and 80 perpetrators in 2022 were referred by probation services to non government organisations for perpetrator programmes, accounting for 95% of the perpetrators going through the community-based perpetrator programme in 2022 and 77% in 2023.

Despite the increase in the number of perpetrators that are referred to programmes, the share of perpetrators attending programmes is very low compared to the overall number of perpetrators convicted of the crime of domestic violence or identified by the police. Observations from the GREVIO evaluation report, indicating that insufficient percentages of men convicted of domestic violence are referred to programmes (2023), were confirmed in this study.

Figure 3: Percentage of male perpetrators convicted/registered of domestic violence who are referred to perpetrator programmes

Referring entity	2022	2023
Prison ⁷	24%	35%
Probation ⁸	4%	4%
Police ⁹	3%	2%

⁷ Data received from the Social Reintegration Directorate

⁸ Data received from the National Probation Inspectorate. It includes persons convicted according to different legal bases (article 201/1 CP, article 320/1 CP, article 78/1 CC)

⁹ Data received from the Ministry of Internal Affairs. It refers to cases in which the police has recommended to courts to oblige the perpetrator to undergo a specialized programme for reducing violent behaviour.

As presented in the table, very few perpetrators who are identified by the system are referred to perpetrator programmes, although there are legal pathways to do so. Percentages of male perpetrators referred to programmes are very low for probation (only 4% of perpetrators are referred), and the situation is similar in cases of police recommendations to courts to mandate perpetrator programmes (2-3%). The main reason for the low referral rates seems to be the lack of available programmes in the country, and this was consistently highlighted by professionals in the probation services and police through interviews and survey responses. The situation in prisons is better, as they refer more perpetrators to specialized programmes for domestic violence, and this percentage reflects a positive trend over the time.

Counselling programs are currently active in only one city in the country, Drochia. This program is provided by the Centre for Assistance and Counselling for Domestic Violence Perpetrators within the Public Institution "Assistance Services for Victims of Domestic Violence." The Centre collaborates actively with the NGO Artemida. The Centre for Assistance and Counselling for Domestic Violence Perpetrators has seen a rapid increase in the number of perpetrators enrolled in its programs, from 55 in 2021 to 64 in 2022 and 96 in 2023. In the first 9 months of 2024, 135 perpetrators received assistance. The majority of perpetrators are referred by the probation service. This is partially explained by the fact that the other three NGOs that used to provide perpetrator programmes shut down. Within a three-year period, only one client self-referred by his own initiative to the Centre for Assistance and Counselling for Domestic Violence Perpetrators programme in 2023.

The funding of perpetrator programmes in Moldova is a challenge. According to the Framework Regulation for the Counselling Centres for Family Aggressors and the minimum quality standards, programmes for perpetrators are financially supported by the local governments, donations, grants or other sources (2014). In its recommendations, GREVIO (2023) has highlighted that it needs to be ensured that local governments are granted sufficient resources to organize programmes that follow the principles of the Istanbul Convention. Programmes in the community run by non government organisations face a severe lack of funding, which has resulted in the closure of most programmes. For example, the budget of the Centre for Assistance and Counselling for Domestic Violence Perpetrators within the Public Institution "Assistance Services for Victims of Domestic Violence" was 773.6 thousand lei in 2021, 846.5 thousand lei in 2022, 709.5 thousand lei in 2023, and 700.0 thousand lei in 2024. These funds were allocated from the state budget. In this context, the contribution of the Centre for Assistance and Counselling for Domestic Violence Perpetrators, as well as international

organizations, is and will continue to be essential for the successful implementation of perpetrator programs.

Prisons and probation systems do not have a budget earmarked for running programmes for perpetrators. Instead, they rely on existing staff to implement them. This might present a challenge for running programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence, especially in providing long term programmes to a higher percentage of men who use domestic violence.

3.2. Programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence in prison

There are a total of 17 penitentiary institutions in Moldova, one of which is a prison for women, one a detention centre for juveniles and minors, and one a prison hospital. Six of the penitentiary institutions are located in the proximity of Chisinau Municipality and the remaining 11 are located throughout the entire territory of the Republic of Moldova, including two in the Transnistrian Region. The National Administration of Penitentiaries (NAP) is the administrative authority subordinated to the Ministry of Justice, which exercises the powers and implements the state policy in the field of the enforcement of custodial sentences.

Each prison institution has spaces designed and equipped with the very basics of the necessary equipment and consumables for conducting educational and training activities. Psycho-social and educational activities are planned by a multidisciplinary team consisting of an educator, psychologist and social worker, according to the needs and risks identified in the assessment process of the convict. Participation in these activities is mandatory for every convict. Procedurally, the activities are indicated in an individual resocialization plan, which is a component of the individual sentence execution programme.

The programme for perpetrators of domestic violence was implemented in 14 out of 17 prisons in Moldova (excepting the prison hospital, prison for women and detention centre for juveniles and minors, none of which engage this target group). The programme was developed and piloted in 2020 and adjusted in 2021 based on the conclusions from the pilot phase. The programme is designed for male perpetrators of domestic violence, a term that encompasses violence in family relationships, including violence against an intimate partner, child to parent violence, violence toward children, or violence toward other family members. This might present a challenge, as different types of domestic violence require a specific approach. For example, while tackling intimate partner violence, programmes need to focus on masculinity, gender stereotypes, coercive control, intimacy and

sexuality, which is not appropriate in cases of child to parent violence. A “one size fits all” approach to programmes presents a risk that the intervention will not tackle the root causes of each type of violence and will instead focus mainly on the general and crosscutting aspects of violence, such as managing emotions and conflict resolution. On the other hand, the research indicates that the more tailored the intervention is, the better the outcomes (Butters et al., 2021; Travers et al., 2021).

Penitentiary institutions provide a specialized programme for perpetrators of sexual violence. The penitentiary system also provides a Rehabilitation Programme for Female Victims of Gender-based Violence for women who have been sentenced to prison for acts of violence against their abuser. This programme is run in the women’s prison and was piloted in the second half of 2022 for 12 women for a period of seven months.

Programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence are fairly new in the prison system. Half of the programmes in penitentiary institutions started in 2020, and the number of prisons offering programmes has continuously increased (5 more prisons offered perpetrator programmes in 2021; 1 in 2022; and 3 prisons in 2023).

All penitentiary institutions offer programmes to inmates who are convicted of domestic violence crimes. Most of them (11 of 14 prisons) also offer programmes to inmates convicted of other crimes in cases where domestic violence is identified as a problem by the prison staff. One of the prison psychologists explained in the focus group that when an inmate arrives at prison, they conduct an initial assessment. If they have been sentenced for acts of violence, the prison psychologists try to find out if there has been domestic violence as well. Prisoners sentenced for violent crimes go through the general programme for violent perpetrators, but if they find out that there has also been domestic violence, then the inmate will take the specialized domestic violence programme as well. It is considered by the prison psychologists as a way of preventing future domestic violence. This presents good practice, as it ensures that domestic violence is tackled in all cases, regardless of the type of the crime for which the person is convicted. However, this practice does not seem to be applied in all prison institutions.

The penitentiary system has taken numerous steps to establish programmes for different types of perpetrators, in accordance with the Article 16 of the Istanbul Convention. It is encouraging that the prison system is implementing specific programmes for perpetrators of sexual violence and male perpetrators of domestic violence as well as a programme for female victims of gender-based violence who have been sentenced to prison for acts of violence against their abuser.

However, the existing programme for male perpetrators of domestic violence is designed for all types of domestic violence, which bears a risk that that the content of the programme will not respond to the specific needs of the subgroups (e.g., male perpetrators of intimate partner violence, or perpetrators of violence toward other family members).

3.2.1. Characteristics of the programme

In line with international standards (WWP EN, 2023), most prisons have eligibility criteria that define what kind of perpetrators can be admitted to the programme. In most Moldovan prisons, these criteria include that the inmate demonstrates a minimum level of motivation to participate in the programme, signs an agreement for programme participation, and is cognitively able to follow the programme. In approximately half of the cases, the professionals working in the penitentiary apply criteria that the perpetrator must demonstrate a minimum level of accountability for his abuse, fulfil the facilitator's requirements for group work and agree to limited confidentiality (e.g., that any future violence needs to be reported).

The prison programme also applies exclusionary criteria. Most commonly, perpetrators are suspended from the programme if they fail to participate or cooperate, break the agreement or contract or are violent against group members or facilitators.

Many interviewed professionals who work in programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence in the penitentiary system highlighted the lack of motivation for change and low accountability of perpetrators as severe challenges in their work. They describe that most perpetrators do not feel responsible for the violence they have committed and that they engage in programmes mainly because it might have a positive impact on their sentence. This was confirmed in the interviews with perpetrators who have engaged in programmes; their motivation for change was generally low and derived primarily from a hope to receive milder sentences or early parole if they complete the programme.

The lack of internal motivation for change at the start of the programme is a challenge also commonly faced across Europe, where many men need some kind of external pressure or motivation to

undertake programmes (McGinn et al., 2017). Programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence have adopted approaches which help them to use the initial external motivation of the man to keep him in the programme, while working on the development of the internal motivation for change and a better life. Approaches such as motivational interviewing have demonstrated to be successful in these cases, increasing the motivation of the beneficiaries but also the outcomes of the intervention (Santoriso, et al., 2020; Silva, Cunha, Caridade, 2023). This process requires time, which again highlights the necessity of the programme being long enough.

Figure 3: Percentage of perpetrators who finish or drop out the programme

	Men finishing programmes	Men dropping out of programmes	Men not finishing programmes for objective reasons ¹⁰
2022	75%	22%	3%
2023	78%	16%	6%

Despite the impression that many interviewed professionals share regarding the low motivation of perpetrators, the drop-out rates in Moldovan prisons are below the average drop-out rates of other programmes in Europe. In studies that analyze drop-out rates, available data shows a huge disparity in such rates, ranging from 6% to 64% (Vall, et al., 2023). In Moldova, it seems that the existing external motivation of perpetrators to engage in programmes is strong enough to keep them through a 13-session programme. However, this may or may not lead to improved programme outcomes related to changing violent behaviour.

3.2.2. Curriculum

The penitentiary programme consists of 13 sessions of 60 minutes each over a period of 3 months, with some minor variations to adjust to individual needs and circumstances. The duration of this programme is much shorter than the period recommended by the European Standards for Perpetrator Programmes (WWP EN, 2023), which corresponds to a minimum of six months (51 hours for group work interventions or 27 hours for one-to-one interventions). It is widely acknowledged that

¹⁰ These reasons are release or transfer to another penitentiary.

behaviour change is a long-term process that requires time for intervention and space between sessions to assimilate learnings and experiences (Bennett & Williams, 2001; Home Office, 2023).

Despite being short in duration compared to international standards, the specialists conducting perpetrator programmes in penitentiary institutions believe that the length of the programme is adequate. The overwhelming majority of staff respondents from prisons find the duration of the sessions adequate (94.7%) as well as the programme length (89.5%). The psychologists reasoned that, in general, 13 sessions are enough to make the perpetrators aware of their behaviour and keep them motivated throughout the programme, and that if the programme were longer, the risk for drop-out would be higher. A common opinion was that perpetrators would get bored if the programme were longer. In some cases, the length of the prison sentence also limits the possibilities for longer programmes.

If the programme were 30 sessions, I would be left without any participants...it's too long.

The convicts will get bored.

Prison psychologist

The position of professionals in the penitentiary system seems to reflect their primary focus on the need to keep perpetrators in the programme, which is likely connected to the perception of perpetrators' low motivation and accountability. It also seems that minimizing drop-out rates has become such a focus that reflections about the outcomes of the programme and how to improve them stay in the background. The short programme duration raises concerns, as it is likely not possible to reach real and sustainable behaviour change within that time period, especially for the target group of perpetrators who are in the prison system (and may have committed repeated or severe acts of violence). Furthermore, professionals' opinion on this matter may reflect a lack of skills to conduct longer and more in-depth programmes, which is connected to insufficient training of staff.

All programmes conduct group sessions, and most also conduct individual sessions after the intake phase. Group sessions are typically conducted in closed groups on a weekly basis. These sessions are intended to be facilitated by a team of two professionals, but due to lack of staff and time, they are often facilitated by one person. Only one programme uses a mixed-gender team of facilitators, despite it being considered best practice (WWP EN, 2023).

Individual sessions also take place on a weekly basis, for an average 30-60 minutes per session. The individual sessions are usually conducted by a single male or female facilitator.

The specialists conducting perpetrator programmes in prisons describe their professional approaches mainly as cognitive behavioural therapy/(social) training and psychoeducational. The prison curriculum takes a gender-sensitive approach (Republic of Moldova, 2021). Among other things, the curriculum describes domestic violence and the threat of assault as mechanisms for the realization of power and control to deprive women of freedom and the possibility of self-realization; it also identifies the cause of domestic violence as always being the unequal position of women and men in society.

The curriculum of the perpetrator programme in penitentiaries aims to achieve accountability and change violent behaviour. It outlines the following specific objectives, which were also mentioned by the respondents to the questionnaires (Republic of Moldova, 2021):

- Knowing the types of abuse and their characteristics;
- Identifying the consequences of resorting to stereotypes regarding domestic violence;
- Adopting non-violent behaviour in intimate relationships, giving up negative stereotypes;
- Understanding positive relationships and patterns of positive attitudes in a couple; and
- Changing violent behaviours.

The programme covers 13 themes (Republic of Moldova, 2021):

1. Introduction to the programme: Establishing collaborative relationships
2. Types and consequences of abuse
3. Domestic violence and its effects on children
4. The cyclical nature of domestic violence: Phases and methods of avoidance
5. What I think, What I feel and How I act
6. Myth and reality about violence
7. Conflict
8. Jealousy
9. Difficult relationships, not difficult people
10. How do I manage emotions?
11. Optimizing communication
12. Life without violence
13. Programme evaluation

The curriculum describes domestic violence through a gender-sensitive lens and sees violence against women as the result of societal factors and gender inequality. It also recognizes different types of violence beyond physical and sexual violence that may be more subtle yet equally devastating, such as psychological and economical violence and neglect. The content of each session is clearly described, with precise instructions for the facilitators and materials to be used. The programme follows the

natural flow of forming a group and begins by supporting group development, defining expectations and group rules, and introducing the work.

However, the content of the programme reflects the challenge of creating an intervention that is relevant for diverse types of perpetrators, which led to leaving out some crucial components for each target group. For example, for working with male perpetrators of violence against their partners, there is a lack of focus on masculinity, gender roles, sexualized violence, power and control, and fathering. On the other hand, for perpetrators of violence against children, there is again a lack of focus on masculinity and gender roles, but also on parenting styles and competencies, while the focus on jealousy and the cyclic nature of violence might not be suitable for this target group. In general, the curriculum lacks focus on the accountability of perpetrators and technology-facilitated violence.

The programme has a strong psycho-educational component, focusing on teaching perpetrators about certain relevant concepts. However, the educational aspect dominates over the experiential aspect of the intervention, which would allow participants to emotionally connect with the content, thereby facilitating change. Furthermore, every topic is covered only in one session, while fully understanding and accepting those concepts usually requires repetition, their mainstreaming throughout the programme, and more time. The impression is also that the programme could benefit from using more interactive approaches and materials (such as videos, vignettes with stories, illustrations, etc.).

The majority of prison psychologists find the content of the programme adequate, while one-third find it *“good enough but could be improved”*. Some of the comments were: *“The programme is quite successful – it is well structured, easy to implement, the subjects are appropriate and clear”*; and *“It is a suitable programme for people from penitentiary institutions. It contains clear tasks and exercises specific to the age of the inmates”*. The respondents stressed that they often do not follow the programme to the letter but adjust it to fit the specific participants. They also explained that many of the inmates are not fond of exercises, and in these cases, the facilitators chose to use other ways of discussing the topics. A concrete suggestion for improvement was to have more interactive material, such as videos.

The programme duration is significantly shorter than that suggested by international standards, which likely limits its impact and ability to achieve long-term change. The attitudes of the interviewed professionals who find the duration of the programme adequate likely reflect their concerns regarding the motivation of perpetrators and their potential drop-out from programmes. Moreover, the content of the programme does not address the specific needs of perpetrators of different types of domestic violence, thereby highlighting a need to develop tailored programmes for various target groups. Additionally, the curriculum primarily focuses on psychoeducation, aimed at increasing knowledge about relevant topics, while the opportunities for experiential learning should be further developed.

3.2.3. Staff

The Social Reintegration Service of the Moldovan penitentiary system has professionals who are responsible for ensuring the resocialization process for persons deprived of liberty, respecting the rights of convicted persons with the fundamental goal of social reintegration by organizing and carrying out educational, psychological and social assistance activities, by offering qualified help to convicted persons in order to reduce the risk of committing new crimes and preparing for release.

There are three types of professionals in the Social Reintegration Service with different competencies and responsibilities: psychologists, specialists in education and social workers. Psychologists are responsible for providing qualified assistance to persons deprived of liberty and addressing psychological problems to reduce the risk of recidivism and reintegration into society. Psychologists also implement domestic violence perpetrator programmes.

In 2023, there were 35 psychologist positions in the 17 penitentiary institutions, of which 29 were filled. All psychologists participate in the annual training courses at the NAP Training Centre, through which they are trained in delivering behaviour change programmes.¹¹ Within this course, behaviour change among perpetrators of domestic violence is addressed. However, the time dedicated to the course is just six training hours, and the focus of this course is not solely on domestic violence perpetration. While acknowledging that psychologists in the penitentiary system have a wide range of skills related to working with convicts that can also be applied to their work with domestic violence perpetrators, the length of this specialized training is likely insufficient to equip them with specific competencies to effectively address domestic violence perpetrators. For instance, the European

¹¹ NAP has trained 34 professionals since they started programme implementation. 29 of these professionals are still working for the penitentiary (5 professionals have retired or resigned). However, only 22 of them are currently active.

Standards for Perpetrator Programmes indicate that staff should have at least 84 hours of specialized training before starting to work with perpetrators of domestic violence (WWP EN, 2023). Despite that, the research reveals that 11 of the 14 respondents consider that they have adequate training and knowledge needed to run the programme for perpetrators of domestic violence.

Most respondent-psychologists state that they are not psychologically affected by working in the field of domestic violence and that there is little space for self-care to deal with the impact of working with domestic violence. Three of the 14 respondents replied that they are heavily affected psychologically but have no space for self-care.

As for quality assurance, the most frequent measure is the continued education of staff and weekly team sessions. The majority of specialists answered that it is the continuous training of the penitentiary staff that is needed the most.

The manager of the Social Reintegration Service highlighted that high turnover of staff, intense workload of professionals and lack of specific training for conducting programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence are existing challenges in this service. The intense workload was also recognized by some professionals participating in the focus groups, who flagged that it might influence their ability to deliver this programme in a proper manner. Some professionals noted that despite their heavy workload, they are highly motivated to conduct the programme for perpetrators of domestic violence, and they prioritize it over other tasks. Furthermore, some professionals recognize the challenge that they are psychologists who deliver different kinds of programmes on different topics, which makes it hard to specialize and develop more profound expertise on all of them. This could present an obstacle for the effective delivery of programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence.

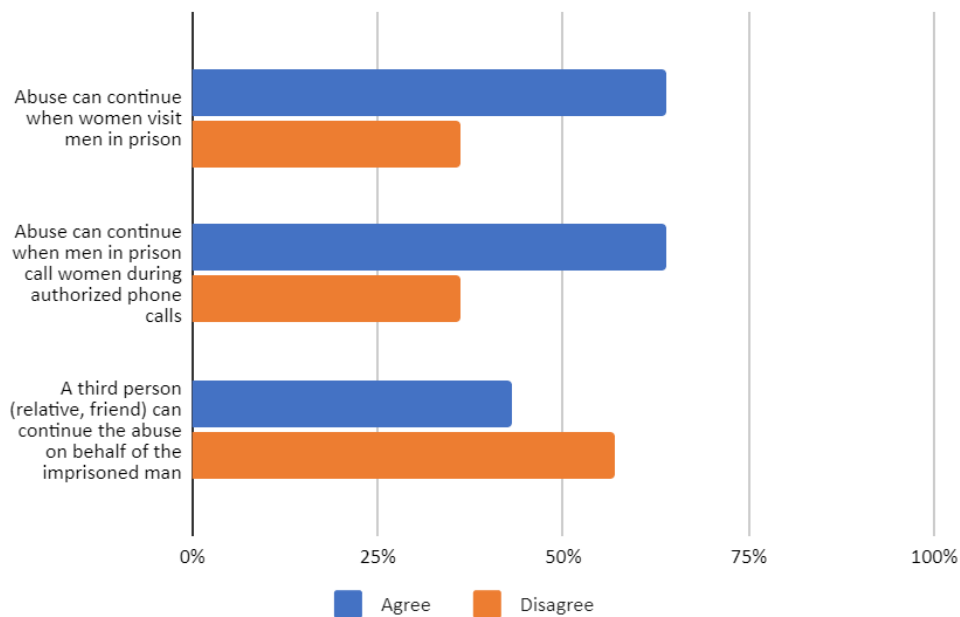
The penitentiary system has trained almost all their staff in conducting programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence and seems to currently have the capacities to deliver these programmes. However, the duration of the course on behavioural change is very short (just six hours), which likely affects the skills of professionals to respond well to this specific group of convicts. Furthermore, the course is not tailored to working with perpetrators of domestic violence. It is also noted that professionals implementing treatment programmes have an intense workload and that there is high staff turnover, which might affect their capacities to implement programmes effectively. As a result, extending the duration of the programme to increase its impact and alignment with the international standards would pose additional workload demands on professionals.

3.2.4. Safety of Victims

The Istanbul Convention, in Article 16, clearly states that programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence need to be set up in a way that prioritizes safety and human rights of victims, and that they should be, where appropriate, implemented in close cooperation with specialist support services for victims (CoE, 2011a). Knowing that the enrolment of the perpetrator in a programme might influence the victim's decision to stay or leave the relationship and thus potentially expose her to a greater risk, and knowing also that perpetrators might use their enrolment in the programme in a manipulative way that enables further abuse (CoE, 2011c; Hester & Lilley, 2016), it is crucial that programmes are designed to address these risks (WWP EN, 2023). International standards and best practices indicate that in all cases, perpetrator programmes must have close cooperation with the organization/unit or professional that works with victims (WWP EN, 2023; Home Office, 2023; Respect, 2023; Relive, n.d.).

The programme within the prison system in Moldova lacks the aspect of coordinated work with organizations or professionals who support victims. It is a common assumption that as the perpetrator is in prison, the victim is safe, and the violence cannot continue. However, research in the field and victims' experiences show that the violence can indeed continue even if the perpetrator is in prison (Bonomi et al., 2011 & 2018). This could happen during visits, phone calls, or even through a "third person" who can take on the role of the perpetrator. Psychologists from Moldova prisons were generally aware of these risks and could recall a few cases where verbal abuse and threats had continued during phone calls or visits.

Figure 4: Views of the prison psychologists on the possibility of continued violence while the perpetrator is in prison (n=14)



The majority of prison psychologists would find it useful (50%) or very useful (36%) to have information from victims, as it would provide them with more information about the violence and potential risks, and they could ensure that the victim is informed when the perpetrator leaves prison. Other benefits that were mentioned were being more able to include the perspective of the victim in the programme for perpetrators of domestic violence and ensuring that any potential ongoing violence is identified and addressed.

One of the key reasons that programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence should cooperate with services that are in contact with victims is to be able to conduct comprehensive and continuous assessments of the risk of violence and to mitigate it. Risk assessment and management processes are a crucial element of ensuring safety of survivors while working with perpetrators (Hester & Lilley, 2016; WWP EN, 2023). Only five of the 14 perpetrator programmes in penitentiaries use risk assessment instruments, while five do not assess risk at all. The respondents listed a number of tools they use to undertake risk assessment, including interviews, guides, worksheets, psychological testing, observation, personality questionnaires, observing behaviour in the penitentiary environment after finishing the programme, etc. While these could be helpful ways to better understand the perpetrators participating in a programme, it is notable that these are not risk assessment tools, which highlights the need for capacity building in this aspect.

There is no systematic contact with victims as part of the risk assessment, although 90% of the respondents considered that it would be useful or very useful.

According to the Execution Code of the Republic of Moldova, Article 281, the prison needs to inform the police seven days before the perpetrator is released from prison, so that the police can ensure the protection of the victim (Republic of Moldova, 2004).

Programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence in the prison system in Moldova are conducted without the cooperation of organizations, units or professionals who work with victims. Although the risks of repeated violence while the perpetrators are in prison are lower, they still exist and need to be assessed and managed. However, no procedures currently exist in the aspect of risk assessment and management.

3.2.5. Cooperation with victim services and other agencies

The essential component of programmes not being set up in isolation but instead in close cooperation with women's support services, law enforcement agencies, the judiciary, probation services and child protection or child welfare offices is described in both the Istanbul Convention (CoE, 2011a) and the European Standards on Perpetrator Programmes (WWP EN, 2023). Clear guidance on the roles, responsibilities, and requirements of the perpetrator programme and connected partner service is needed to ensure that partner contact is prioritised and provided in a way that ensures survivors are informed about all relevant aspects of the work; that risks are assessed, mitigated and managed; and that survivors are offered appropriate support. Furthermore, it contributes to ongoing and productive information exchange and cooperation between the perpetrator programme and partner service. This cooperation should contribute to better outcomes for victims and perpetrators.

Only one of the penitentiary institutions cooperates or exchanges information with victim services within the framework of their perpetrator programmes, despite all respondents noting they would find information exchange useful or even very useful. The benefits they identified are first and foremost related to having more information about the violence and potential risks and being more able to include the perspective of the victim in the programme for perpetrators of domestic violence. Another benefit is ensuring that the victim is informed when the perpetrator is being released from prison and that any potential ongoing violence is identified and addressed.

The small number of victim services, especially outside Chisinau, was cited as one of the major obstacles for cooperation between penitentiaries and victim services. Some other challenges

mentioned were the difficulties for non government organisations to access penitentiaries and the unwillingness of victims to share information with penitentiary staff.

Collaboration with other agencies mainly takes place with the probation offices, although this is not the case for all probation offices. The different roles for penitentiaries and probation offices is described as such: the penitentiary institution prepares the inmate for reintegration, while the probation services monitors and supports the actual reintegration. Collaboration between penitentiaries and probation services mainly takes place during the inmate's detention period through various joint resocialization programmes, training sessions, etc. Only one prison psychologist mentioned that they have a joint programme with probation services that prepares inmates for release, despite the fact that there is, or should be, a continuum between the perpetrator programme in penitentiary and on probation, as pointed out by the manager of National Administration of Penitentiary.

A few penitentiary institutions cooperate with non government organisation, public institutions that conduct perpetrator programmes for released convicts. A few more would welcome such collaboration but mention that there are no organizations conducting community-based perpetrator programmes in their regions.

<p>There is a need for improving cooperation with the probation system, particularly in the aspect of post-penal support and ensuring that perpetrators that are released from prison engage in programmes in the community.</p>
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3.3. Programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence in the probation system

There are a total of 38 probation offices in Moldova, of which 30 are located in urban areas, five in small towns and three in rural areas. All probation offices have programmes to change violent behaviour, although they are not specifically for domestic violence perpetrators. Two probation offices implement their own specialized programme for domestic violence perpetrators, while 36 offices refer these perpetrators to the community-based programme run by the Centre for Assistance and Counselling for Domestic Violence Perpetrators from Drochia.

Approximately 80 perpetrators convicted of domestic violence participated in the perpetrator programme in the probation system or were referred by probation services to community-based programmes in 2022 and 2023 respectively. This represents a very small number, only 4% of all the

perpetrators in probation services convicted of domestic violence. There are various reasons for the low referral rates. In many cases, there is not an obligation imposed on perpetrators to participate in the programme. Furthermore, in some cases the duration of the sentence is shorter than the period needed to complete the programme. And importantly, internal capacities of the probation services to provide this specialized programme are low.

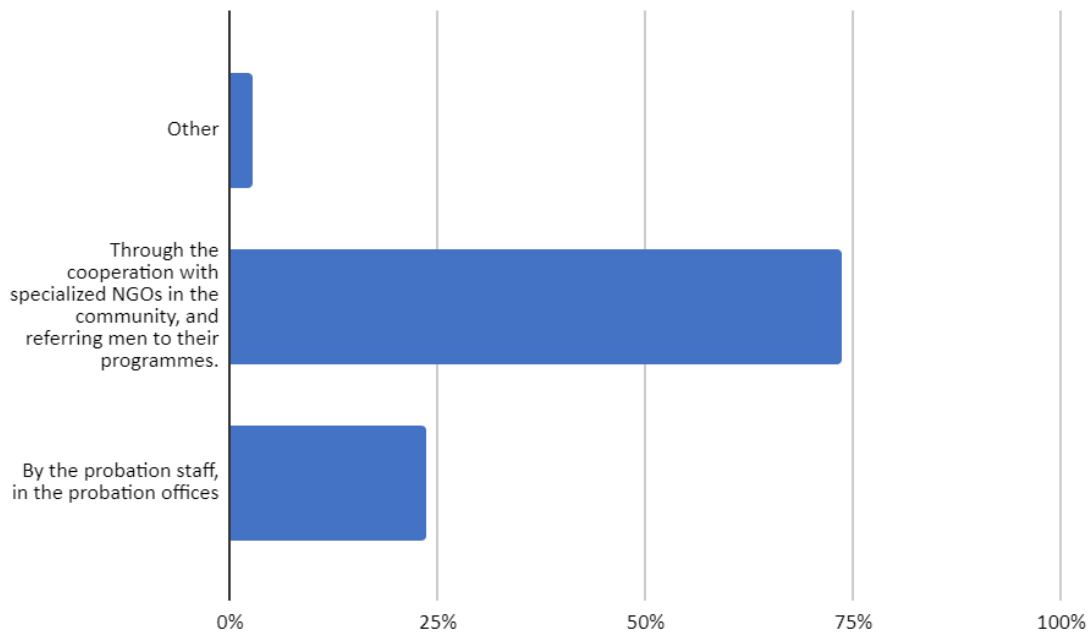
Figure 5: Perpetrators in the probation system referred to internal or external specialized programmes

Perpetrators programmes in probation services	2022	2023
Number of perpetrators in probation services convicted of domestic violence	2232	2144
Number of perpetrators going through perpetrator programme within probation services	2	8
Number of perpetrators referred by probation services to NGOs	80	72
Percentage of perpetrators convicted for DV referred to perpetrator programmes in the probation system or Centre for Assistance and Counselling for Domestic Violence Perpetrators	4%	4%

One of the reasons probation offices currently refer perpetrators to perpetrator programmes run by non-government organisations is the fact that the probation offices lack adequately trained staff to conduct the perpetrator programmes on domestic violence. In 2015, the National Probation Inspectorate trained 17 counsellors to conduct perpetrator programmes in the probation system. Currently, only two remain employed with the probation system, and no new training has been conducted. This was recognized as a reason for referring perpetrators to the Centre for Assistance and Counselling for Domestic Violence Perpetrators by 44% of probation counsellors. However, for counsellors, the primary reason for this decision is that the Centre for Assistance and Counselling for Domestic Violence Perpetrators are highly specialized in providing this kind of intervention (for 61% of probation counsellors), and that the Centre has more possibilities to work with victims while the perpetrator is in the programme (for 44% of probation counsellors).

The trend of highly valuing the specific expertise of NGOs working in this field is also visible in probation counsellors' opinions on who should provide programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence – probation services or non-government organisations.

Figure 6: The best way to implement perpetrator programmes in Moldova according to probation counsellors (n=38)



The dominant perception among probation counsellors is that programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence should be implemented by specialized non-government organisations. Only one in five counsellors believe that probation offices should implement their own programmes. In their explanations, most probation counsellors emphasize that specific expertise is needed for running these programmes, expertise they do not possess and are unlikely to gain through training, given the highly diversified activities that are part of their role.

I believe that the best way to implement programmes for aggressors is by referring them to NGOs or specialized services in this field, because not all offices have staff qualified to run the programmes, and those present are not focused only on this dimension, a fact that I believe decreases the quality of the intervention.

Probation counsellor

In the focus groups, probation counsellors also shared several challenges with the current model of referring perpetrators to the Centre for Assistance and Counselling for Domestic Violence Perpetrators. They described that there are not enough programmes for perpetrators in the community, so all perpetrators need to be referred to only programme in the community run by the

Centre for Assistance and Counselling for Domestic Violence Perpetrators. As many perpetrators cannot attend the programme in-person (e.g., too far from their place of residence), they are admitted to an online programme, and the probation counsellors question the outcomes of online work with perpetrators.

Another challenge is the minimal information probation counsellors receive after perpetrators complete the programme, which makes it harder to get a comprehensive view of the progress and further needs of the perpetrator. The probation counsellors only receive a certificate of completion for perpetrators, while it could be beneficial for them and their continued work to have a more detailed record of the process and perpetrators' progress, as well as areas needing specific attention. Challenges persist around the evaluation of programme outcomes, as the probation system and the Centre for Assistance and Counselling for Domestic Violence Perpetrators have not yet found a way to conduct an evaluation that would fit the needs and procedures of both actors. Finally, the Centre for Assistance and Counselling for Domestic Violence Perpetrators conducts the programme only in Romanian language, and therefore, Russian speakers might have difficulty benefiting from the programme.

These challenges are also recognized by the management of the National Probation Inspectorate, which considers that a combination of programmes run by probation counsellors and referrals to specialized Centre for Assistance and Counseling for Domestic Violence Perpetrators would be the preferred option. Having in mind the possibility that the regulatory framework will be revised as foreseen in the Action Plan, the demand for these programmes is likely to significantly increase. Although the national curriculum is designed for male perpetrators, one third of the probation offices work with female perpetrators. There is a strong consensus among the probation counsellors that it is easier to work with women perpetrators than men, that women are easier to integrate into the programme and that they communicate more openly. As explained by probation counsellors, many women perpetrators are victims of domestic violence themselves, and some have acted in self-defence. Some say that women perpetrators tend to be more vulnerable and in more need of support. Participants shared views that women more quickly develop awareness of what they have done, while men blame their violent actions on the victim or on alcohol or drugs. The need to develop specialized programmes for female perpetrators of domestic violence in Moldova was also recognized in research conducted in 2022 (UN Women, UNFPA).

The probation system in Moldova has encountered decreased capacities to implement programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence within their offices, leading to increased referrals to the a specialized institution from the social sector, public or private (NGO). The high turnover of staff has resulted in the loss of human resources vital for running in-house probation programmes. Additionally, a very low percentage of perpetrators of domestic violence are referred to programmes.

The model in which perpetrators are referred to NGOs has both advantages and disadvantages. Most probation counsellors prefer this model, as they believe these are highly specialized programmes that should be delivered by professionals with specific expertise. However, challenges such as the lack of available programmes, online programme delivery, and insufficient information about the perpetrator's progress and the impact of the programme persist.

3.3.1. Curriculum

In both the probation system and community-based programmes for perpetrators, facilitators follow the national curriculum, which was developed by a team of experts in 2017 (Bodrug-Lungu, et al.). The curriculum is based on the DULUTH methodology and has been adapted to the Moldovan context.

As concluded in the Regional Guidance, the content of perpetrator programmes covers all the key elements of the work; is gender-informed; and has a clear focus on violence, motivation of perpetrators and changing gender stereotypes, while the duration of the programme is adequate (UN Women/UNFPA, 2022).

The curriculum of the perpetrator programme is further described in chapter 6.2.

3.3.2. Staff

There are currently 215 counsellors working in the 38 probation offices in Moldova, of which 156 (73%) are women. With the current level of demand for perpetrator programmes, both counsellors and the manager of the National Probation Inspectorate believe they have sufficient human resources to implement the perpetrator programme on their own. However, if the proposed legal revisions go through, all perpetrators of domestic violence on suspended sentences would be obliged to undertake the perpetrator programme, in which case the probation services would need significantly more counsellors to implement the programme in probation offices. If they were to set up gender-balanced teams for the group sessions, then more male counsellors would need to be hired.

Rather than the number of staff, the probation counsellors point to the lack of specialized training as a main obstacle for implementing their own programme. As previously mentioned, the National Probation Inspectorate trained 17 counsellors to conduct perpetrator programmes in probation offices; however, only two of them remain employed in the probation system. This also highlights how staff turnover, combined with the lack of ongoing training, hinders the availability of programmes in nearly all probation offices.

To establish in-house programmes, the probation system staff must undergo comprehensive training in facilitating programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence. Additionally, strategies need to be developed to prevent high staff turnover or the loss of knowledge and competencies resulting from turnover. Although the current capacities of the probation service appear to be able to meet the demands for these programmes, this could change if more perpetrators are referred to them.

3.3.3. Safety of Victims

The Istanbul Convention, articulated in Article 16, explicitly emphasizes the imperative for programmes aimed at perpetrators of domestic violence to prioritize the safety and human rights of victims (CoE, 2011a). It underscores the necessity for these programmes to be implemented in close collaboration with specialist support services for victims, where appropriate. Recognizing that a perpetrator's enrolment in such a program can significantly impact a victim's decision to remain in or leave the relationship, potentially exposing them to greater risks, and that perpetrators may exploit the programme as a means for further abuse, it is paramount that these programmes are meticulously designed to address these risks (WWP EN, 2023). International standards state that programmes for perpetrators need to be set up in a way which will enable close cooperation with organizations, units, or professionals working directly with victims (WWP EN, 2023; Home Office, 2023; Respect, 2023; Relive, n.d.). Furthermore, this is a practice within many probation systems in Europe (e.g., Scotland, Austria, Italy, Malta).

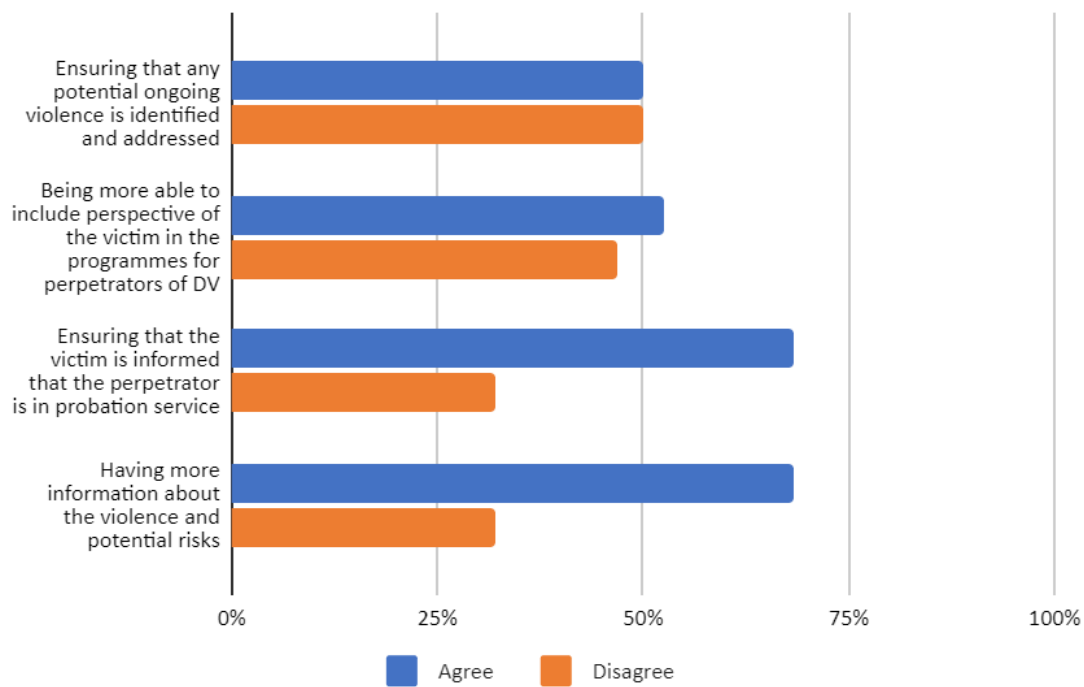
As outlined in the European Standards on Perpetrator Programmes, partner contact is established to ensure that women survivors are informed about the perpetrator programme, risks are adequately assessed and managed, and survivors are offered support (WWP EN, 2023). Every woman partner is offered partner contact service, and her enrolment is voluntary. Partner contact must include referral to appropriate services if the organization does not directly deliver this.

The national curriculum of Moldova highlights the need for perpetrator programmes to continuously cooperate with victim services in all stages of the programme: assessment, group sessions, evaluation

(Bodrug-Lungu et al., 2017). However, the curriculum does not offer a structure on what this cooperation should look like and what the procedures around it should be (UN Women/UNFPA, 2022).

Probation counsellors recognize the benefits of having contact with victims while working with perpetrators.

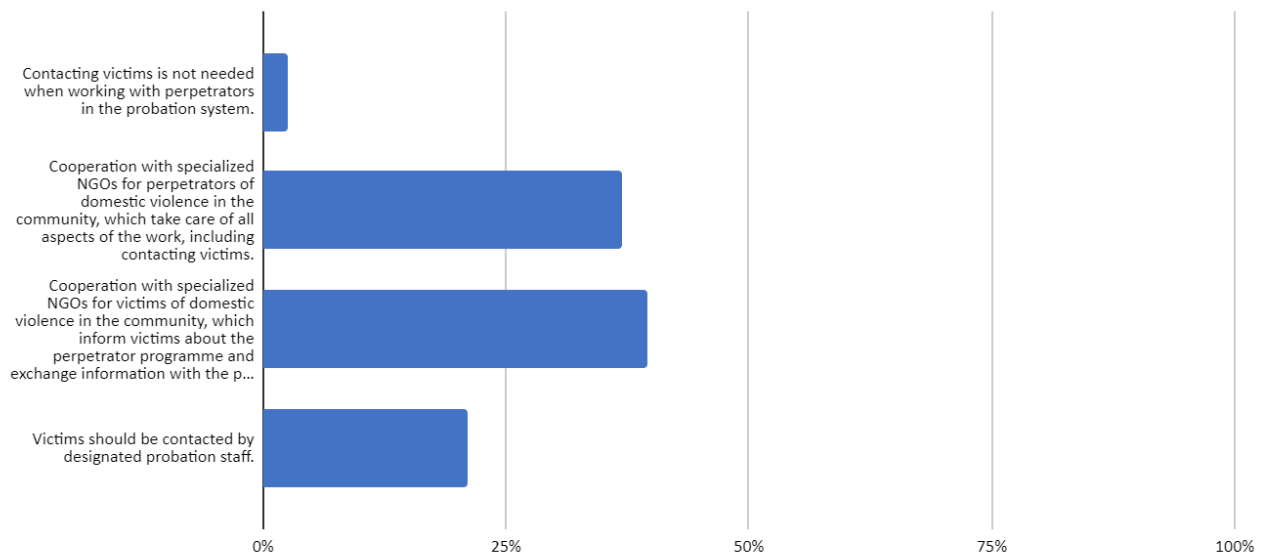
Figure 7: Probation counsellors' perception of benefits of having information from victims (n=38)



All listed reasons are valid points why it is important to work with women partners of the perpetrators who engage in programmes. However, probation offices in Moldova do not have partner contact integrated in their practice when working with perpetrators of domestic violence. This gap was also emphasized in the Regional Guidance, flagging it as a priority for improving the safety and quality of programmes in Moldova (Un Women/UNFPA, 2022). Deciding on ways to integrate partner contact in the probation service work is still an ongoing conversation.

The vast majority of the probation counsellors consider that the best way to establish partner contact is through cooperation with non-government organisations that are specialized in either perpetrator programmes or victim services.

Figure 8: Probation counsellors' perception of the best ways to organize contact with victims (n=38)



It is positive that the vast majority of probation counsellors recognize the importance of contacting victims when working with perpetrators of domestic violence. The provision of partner contact by independent women's support services in the a specialized institution from the social sector, public or private (NGOs) has many advantages. These are usually organizations with a wealth of expertise in supporting victims who provide a wide range of services. This increases the possibility that victims will receive adequate support and simplifies the process of finding such support. Furthermore, the independence of partner contact is ensured, which is one of the requirements – that partner contact cannot be provided by the professional who is working with the perpetrator, or at the same location as the perpetrator programme. However, when partner contact is provided by women's support services, it is vital that they have enough information about the programme for perpetrators and that there are clear and effective procedures for exchanging information with the perpetrator programme. All these aspects should be taken into account when designing the model for integrating partner contact in the probation programme for perpetrators of domestic violence.

Some interaction between victims of domestic violence and probation counsellors who work with perpetrators takes place and is part of the probation system's standard procedures. This entails conducting home visits, during which they talk to the perpetrator's family and potentially their neighbours as well. This process could be explored as one of the potential options for integrating partner contact in the probation service; however, it would need to fulfil all the safety requirements defined by international standards. The risks of utilizing this procedure are that the same person who is working with the perpetrator also contacts victims, that the home might not be a safe space to speak with victims, and that the existing procedure would require severe revisions.

One of the main reasons for which partner contact is important is to have enough information to assess the risk of violence and define joint strategies to manage identified risks. According to the European Standards for Perpetrator Programmes, an ongoing risk assessment, using multiple information sources and employing a structured professional judgement approach, should be applied (WWP EN, 2023). Furthermore, the perpetrator programme should assess potential risks associated with contacting survivors and implement measures to minimize and mitigate those risks.

Probation offices that conduct their own programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence state that they implement risk assessment procedures, highlighting different tools which are not internationally recognized instruments. This indicates the need for further capacity building in this regard.

The aspect of contacting partners and exchanging information with professionals or organizations supporting victims is not currently practiced in programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence in Moldova. It is encouraging that most probation officers recognize the value of obtaining information from victims, although many believe that this aspect of the work should be entrusted to women's support services.

3.3.4. Cooperation with victim services and other agencies

Currently, there is no cooperation or information exchange between the two probation offices conducting perpetrator programmes and victim services in cases of domestic violence. Among the probation offices that refer perpetrators to community-based programmes, only five offices (14%) cooperate with victim services or exchange information with them in cases of domestic violence.

From the probation officers' perspective, the most common reason by far for this lack of cooperation or information exchange is the lack of such NGOs in the country, especially outside of Chisinau. Other reasons are that probation services do not work with victims, reluctance from the side of the victim to engage with the probation office, lack of time and no perceived need.

Probation officers perceive very little cooperation between probation offices and penitentiaries, despite similarities in their roles, namely to prepare the inmate for reintegration into society. Some probation counsellors suggested that perpetrator programmes in penitentiaries could be carried out jointly with penitentiary and probation staff.

Cooperation with other agencies is rare, but some probation offices cooperate with legal authorities, police inspectorates, the social assistance department, city hall, psycho-pedagogical assistance services and youth clinics.

3.4. Community based perpetrator programmes

Research in 2022 identified 4 NGOs that were providing programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence in Moldova: the Center for Assistance and Counseling for Domestic Violence Perpetrators; CNFACEM; Raza Încrederii; and Stimul (UN Women/UNFPA, 2022).

Currently, only the Centre for Assistance and Counselling for Domestic Violence Perpetrators within the Public Institution "Assistance Services for Victims of Domestic Violence" in Drochia offers a specialised program for perpetrators. As other NGOs have suspended their activities due to lack of funding, the Centre in Drochia accepts participants from all over the country, most of whom are referred by the Probation Services. The Centre for Assistance and Counselling for Domestic Violence Perpetrators is based in Drochia, in the north of Moldova, but also implements the perpetrator program online for beneficiaries from other regions of the country.

The Centre is funded by the local government and international donors, but resources are allocated on a project basis and are not stable.

Programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence in the non-government sector have experienced significant shutdowns, despite the fact that the number of these services was never sufficient to address the country's needs. The one active programme implemented by a non-government institution, the Centre for Assistance and Counselling for Domestic Violence Perpetrators within the Public Institution "Assistance Services for Victims of Domestic Violence" in Drochia also lacks stable funding streams.

3.4.1. Characteristics of the programme

The programme was accredited by the National Accreditation Council of Social Service Providers in 2019. The programme provides services for both male and female perpetrators of intimate partner violence.

The Centre for Assistance and Counselling for Domestic Violence Perpetrators has seen rapid growth in the number of perpetrators in their programmes, increasing from 55 in 2021 to 96 in 2023. That increase can be partially explained by the fact that they are now the only non-government organisation in Moldova providing perpetrator programmes. Currently, the Centre for Assistance and Counselling for Domestic Violence Perpetrators manages to enrol all the perpetrators referred to them. There is no waiting time and they therefore do not use waiting lists.

The Centre for Assistance and Counselling for Domestic Violence Perpetrators applies a number of admission requirements, including signing of an agreement/contract as the basis for participation in the programme, meeting the facilitator requirements for group work, absence of alcohol and drug addiction as well as mental disorders. The intake stage includes individual counselling before group work starts.

Exclusionary criteria are applied in cases where the perpetrator continues to be abusive towards the victim/survivor, is violent against group members or facilitators, breaches the agreement/contract or demonstrates lack of participation/cooperation more than twice.

3.4.2. Curriculum

The work is carried out as the intake phase (3 sessions) and group work (30 sessions). The intake phase takes the form of individual work and is conducted twice per week for 1-2 weeks (2-4 sessions in total).

Group sessions are conducted twice per week for 14-26 weeks. Each group session lasts 1.5-2 hours, totalling 60-70 hours. The average number of participants attending group sessions is 6-10.

The content of the programme consists of the following themes: **gender roles and stereotypes (masculinity and femininity), gender-specific power and control, attitudes and beliefs that support violence, liability/responsibility for violent behaviour, effects of domestic violence on the victim/empathy towards the victim, fatherhood and the effects of domestic violence on children, alcohol/drugs and violence, high-risk situations (e.g., separation), definition of violence/types of abuse (e.g., wheel of violence), re-enactment of violent acts, confronting justification and minimization strategies, time out, anger management, personal history of violence (biographical work), egalitarian relationship, social skills (communication/conflict resolution), self-awareness, self-reflection and emotional expression, social relationships (friendship, social networks).** As noted in the Regional Guidance, the content of the national programme which is also applied by Centre for Assistance and Counselling for Domestic Violence Perpetrators has an appropriate duration and choice of topics, as well as good theoretical grounding (UN Women/UNFPA, 2022).

Regarding the online programme provided by the Centre for Assistance and Counselling for Domestic Violence Perpetrators, interviewed professionals listed many benefits. The beneficiary can go through the programme without physically having to go to the Centre in Drochia, which might be a considerable distance for many. That also means that the perpetrator can take part in the programme sessions from his comfort zone. One of the interviewed perpetrators currently going through the Centre for Assistance and Counselling for Domestic Violence Perpetrators' programme believe that the online format is an advantage. *"It takes great courage for a Moldovan man to open up emotionally*

to other men,” he reasoned, and opening up in front of others might be easier to do from the safety of the screen compared to being face-to-face.

Interviewed professionals also highlighted that the main difference between in-person and online programmes lies with the moderation techniques applied by the facilitator of the programme. When online, the facilitator has limited moderation techniques to use compared to when the programme is implemented in person. Among the obstacles is also the access to reliable Internet connection, which many perpetrators do not have. However, the number of participants in online groups is significantly higher than in in-person groups. Interviewed professionals mentioned that they take in up to 20 people in an online group, while one of the interviewed perpetrators noted that there are 36 participants in the group that he is attending. When compared to in-person groups, in which the number of participants is up to 8-10, it is clear that the possibilities for engagement and interaction in the online group are significantly reduced. Furthermore, the online groups are facilitated on Viber, which makes it hard to organize exchange in small groups between participants and limits interaction between participants, which is also important for personal reflections.

The content of the programme for perpetrators of domestic violence covers all key aspects of working with this target group and has an adequate duration. However, the online programme is delivered with several modifications that might impact the programme’s quality, such as the increased number of participants in online groups, which limits engagement and individual interaction, and the application of a less engaging approach overall. The online programme was introduced to address a higher demand for perpetrator programmes from one NGO across the entire territory of the country.

3.4.3. Staff

The programme is staffed by two full-time male, two full-time female and two part-time female facilitators who work directly with perpetrators. They have all undergone specialized training for working with perpetrators of domestic violence. The Centre for Assistance and Counselling for Domestic Violence Perpetrators highlights challenges with high staff turnover and meeting the additional training needs of staff.

3.4.4. Safety of Victims

As highlighted in the Regional Guidance, the Centre for Assistance and Counselling for Domestic Violence Perpetrators applies a standardized procedure for carrying out risk assessment, always using the same tool and assessing the risk at the same time intervals (UN Women/UNFPA, 2022). A roadmap of actions is applied in medium- or high-risk cases. The organization cooperates with victim service/victim support workers to assess the risk in each case. Information is also collected from the (former) partner/victim/survivor to assess the risk.

However, none of the interviewed perpetrators or survivors was aware of any cooperation happening between the perpetrator programme and women's support service. As explained by the interviewed professionals, the possibility of contacting victims when working with perpetrators is reduced in cases of online interventions (as victims live in cities far from the programme) and when clients are referred by the probation service (as they do not always receive victims' contact details). This situation demonstrates that the quality of the intervention is decreased as a result of referring perpetrators from the whole country to one programme.

Furthermore, one of the interviewed victims shared that the violence continued after a man was admitted to the programme, as he was blaming her for being mandated to the programme. She was not aware whether any measures had been taken by the perpetrator programme or women's support service to stop the violence. This once more highlights the urgent need to ensure that all partners and ex-partners of perpetrators in the programme get appropriate support and that the risks are jointly monitored and managed.

Although the national curriculum emphasizes the importance of ensuring contact with victims and close cooperation between services working with perpetrators and those working with victims, it does not outline clear procedures for its implementation in practice. The one active NGO in the country has good practices in this regard. However, these practices have been modified to adapt to current demands from across the country in a manner that does not necessarily reflect the best interests of the victims.

3.4.5. Cooperation with other agencies

As mentioned earlier, the vast majority of probation offices (36 of 38 probation offices) refer their perpetrators to the Centre for Assistance and Counselling for Domestic Violence Perpetrators' programme, and almost all of the participants in the programme (98 percent in 2023) are referred to them by the probation service.

Cooperation between the Centre for Assistance and Counselling for Domestic Violence Perpetrators and the probation service is described as working smoothly. There is a collaboration agreement in place with all 38 probation offices in Moldova. However, the probation counsellors have highlighted the need for more cooperation so they have more information about the client's progress and outcomes of the programme. Furthermore, it is also clear that the procedures around ensuring that partner contact is in place when referring perpetrators from the probation service to the NGO need to be improved.

3.5. Police work with perpetrators

According to Law 45/2007, the police can suggest to the court to oblige a perpetrator of domestic violence to undergo a perpetrator programme, if it is considered necessary for the reduction or elimination of violence. This is an important tool the police can apply in civil proceedings, as evidence shows that very few perpetrators enrol voluntarily in perpetrator programmes. The decision as to whether this measure is imposed is on the judge. However, the police do not have the opportunity to suggest referral to perpetrator programmes in criminal cases.

Despite the existing possibility of referral in civil cases, police staff very rarely recommend referral to perpetrator programmes. As seen in the table below, police-recommended referrals to perpetrator programmes were as little as 3% of domestic violence cases in 2022, with the 2023 figure even lower, accounting for only 2% of cases. Almost all the police-recommended referrals were accepted by the judge, which demonstrates the potential of the police to influence perpetrators' referrals to programmes.

Figure 9. Statistics on domestic violence 2022 and 2023¹²

	2022			2023		
	Total	Men perpetrator	Women perpetrator	Total	Men perpetrator	Women perpetrator
Domestic violence cases (all)	2471	2312	159	2679	2516	163
Domestic violence cases (criminal)	852	754	98	960	866	94
No. of cases in which police recommended referral to perpetrator programme	49	47	2	32	32	0
No. of cases in which this recommendation was accepted by the judge/prosecutor	48	46	2	31	31	0

The main challenges in recommending referrals to perpetrator programmes include men’s refusal to take part in programmes (52%), lack of perpetrator programmes in the community (48%), victims not wanting perpetrators to be referred to these programmes (38%), and lack of procedures on how to make this recommendation (29%). Some other challenges include police staff not having enough knowledge about these programmes and their benefits (15%) and prosecutors and judges lacking knowledge about these programmes and their benefits (10 %).

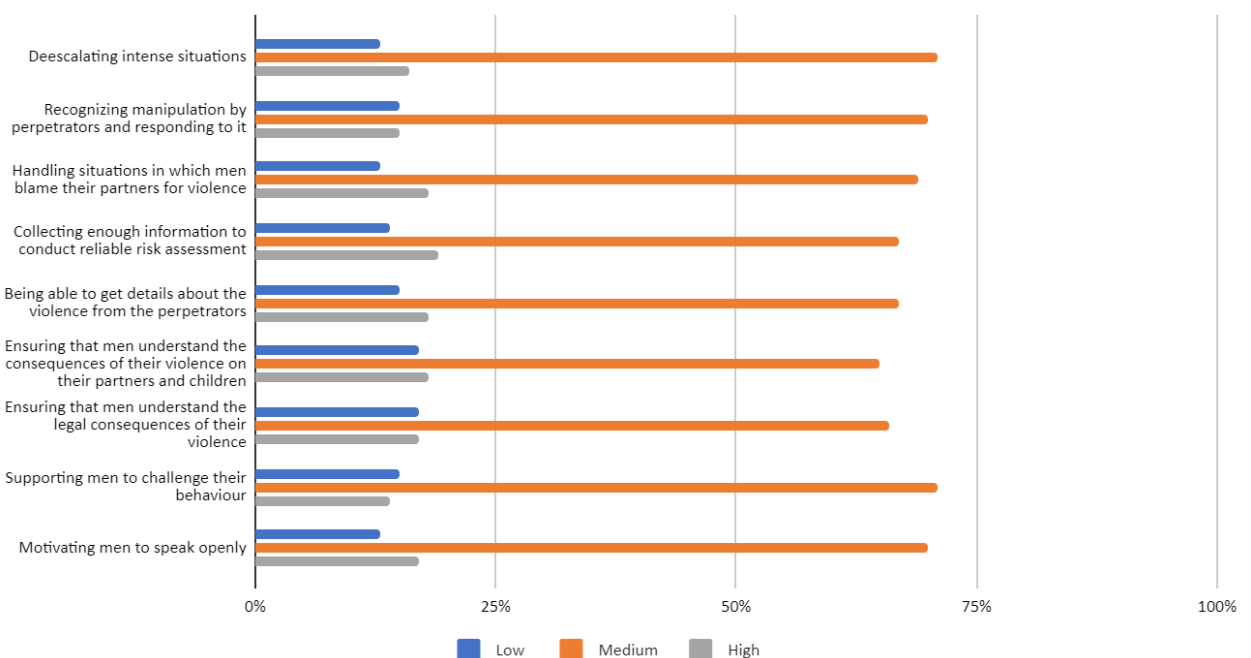
The police can have a significant impact on the referrals of perpetrators to programmes in civil cases, as their recommendations are usually accepted by judges. However, police staff rarely exercise this option. The reasons for this seem to be complex, with the main obstacles being the lack of programmes in the country and perpetrators' refusal to participate in these programmes. This highlights the need for more programmes, as well as for increasing the competencies of police staff in motivating men to enrol in programs or take action despite their initial resistance.

¹² Data received from the Ministry of Internal Affairs

3.5.1. Knowledge and training

Only 37% of the responding police professionals have had specific training on domestic violence. Despite that, 89% of the respondents consider that they have the training and knowledge needed to work effectively in the field of domestic violence and to address both victims and perpetrators of domestic violence. When it comes to the specific areas of working with perpetrators of domestic violence, approximately 70% rated their competence as medium in all areas, while 15% rated it as low and another 15% as high.

Figure 10. The perception of police employees on their competencies in addressing men who use domestic violence (n=338)



When it comes to knowledge about perpetrator programmes, around 60% of police respondents consider that they have some knowledge, while 20% feel they have high knowledge.

Police employees identified different training needs related to domestic violence: understanding violence, documenting domestic violence cases, communicating with perpetrators and victims, issuing restraining orders and monitoring protection orders, assisting family aggressors to change their behaviour, emergency placement of victim or aggressor, practical training on real cases and collaboration with other agencies.

The majority of police employees show confidence in their competencies to intervene with perpetrators of domestic violence and motivate them to engage. However, more than half of the police employees have not received specialized training on domestic violence.

3.5.2. Work situation and challenges

Half of the responding police professionals stated that they are not affected psychologically by working in the field of domestic violence. One-fourth are somehow affected, and another one-fourth are largely affected.

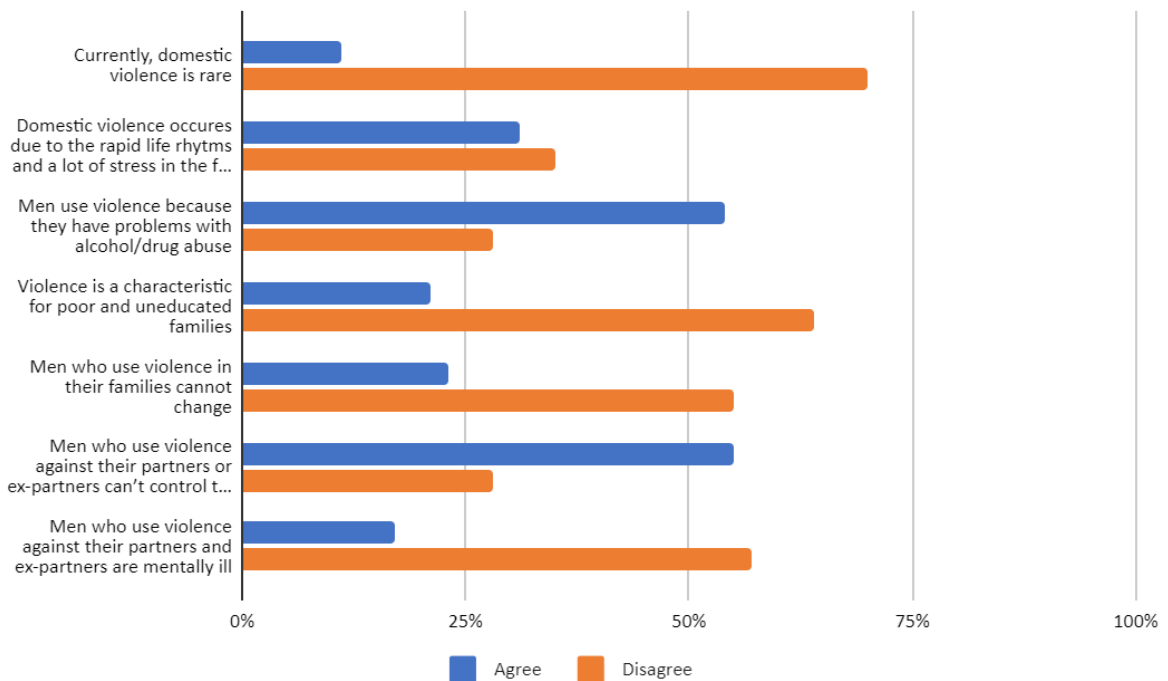
Access to space (in terms of time and/or ability) for self-care to deal with the psychological impact of working in the field of domestic violence seems to vary across the country. While 30% stated that they do have space for self-care, another 30% claimed that they do not, and 40% have space to some extent.

The main challenges police employees face when dealing with cases of domestic violence are related to gaps and weaknesses in current legislation, including lenient punishments, lack of placement or temporary residence for the perpetrator during emergency protection orders, lack of support services for victims, unwillingness of the victim to cooperate with the police, and lack of proof. Other challenges are alcohol consumption, aggressive perpetrators, conflict management and monitoring of the victim and aggressor.

3.5.3. Attitudes to domestic violence

The majority (70%) of the police personnel respondents recognize that domestic violence is common. Police personnel *do not* believe that men who use violence against their partners or ex-partners are mentally ill, nor that domestic violence is a characteristic of poor and uneducated families. Rather, police professionals believe that domestic violence is an effect of problems with alcohol and/or drug abuse or that men are unable to control their anger. Approximately one-third believe that domestic violence occurs due to the rapid pace of life and stress in the family, while one-third do not believe this is the case. Positively, police personnel believe that men who use violence in their families can change.

Figure 11. The attitudes of police employees on why men use domestic violence (n=338)



Police personnel do not believe that men who are violent to their (ex) partners are also aggressive towards others, or that men who assault their wives also assault their children. They believe that if they do not hurt their children, men who use violence against their partners or ex-partners are still good fathers. One-third of responding police personnel agreed with the claim that police employees do not use violence against their partners or ex-partners, while one-third disagreed.

Furthermore, respondents believed that women are as violent as men and that women do not tell the truth about situations of violence and consider them normal. Forty percent of the respondents stated their belief that some women provoke violence and deserve to be punished, while the same amount did not believe this to be true.

Further work on developing the competencies of police employees needs to focus on their understanding of the causes of violence, specifically on the understanding that stress in the family, difficulties in handling the anger or addictions are not causal factors of violence. Furthermore, it's important to work on their understanding of the impact of violence on children and the parenting competencies of fathers who use violence in the family, as well on victim blaming, as 40% believe that women provoke the violence and deserve to be punished.

4. Recommendations

This section presents recommendations for the further development of programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence in the Republic of Moldova. Furthermore, it outlines specific recommendations for the development of programs across different sectors (penitentiary, probation, social, public and private (NGOs))

The report also presents roadmaps for the development of programmes over the next 5 years (2024-2028), outlining the order in which certain aspects of the programmes should be developed. These steps for programmes' development are based on the identified strengths and challenges that programmes have, but also on the identified priorities in the country and in each sector. The focus is on ensuring that the key elements of safe and effective programmes are in place before the more widespread implementation of the programme across the country.

It is important to highlight that the further development of services for victims of violence against women and domestic violence is paramount for ensuring the safety and well-being of the victims. This should be a continuous process conducted in parallel with the development of programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence.

4.1. Recommendation on development of programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence in the Republic of Moldova

The Republic of Moldova has already made significant steps toward establishing safe and quality programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence. The current legislation ensures that perpetrators can be referred to programmes through criminal and civil proceedings as well as through self-referral. The development of programmes has taken place in different sectors (prisons, probation services and non-government specialised services), which will ensure that perpetrators who are identified by different parts of the system are engaged in programmes. Furthermore, the Republic of Moldova is one of the few countries in Europe that has adopted quality standards for programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence, demonstrating the intention to monitor and regulate the quality of the service in the country.

However, programmes for perpetrators in Moldova face multiple challenges in their operations. Programmes are not accessible in different parts of the country, and the number of active programmes has significantly decreased in the non-government sector and probation sector, resulting in very low percentages of perpetrators being referred to programmes. The main obstacles to

programme accessibility and suitability are lack of available and stable funds and staff turnover, which lead to a loss of institutional expertise and capabilities to deliver programmes. Staff turnover is also connected with insufficient funding in the whole sector, beyond specific funding for programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence. Moreover, the element of ensuring victim safety while working with perpetrators is an aspect that requires the urgent attention of the government. Although both national standards and the national curriculum emphasize the need to prioritize the safety of victims in all actions and closely cooperate with services for victims, the implementation of these principles is insufficient in practice, while the level of the implementation has decreased over the years.

The recommendations in this section are designed for decision- and policy-makers in the country. Aligning with the National Programme for preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence for 2023-2027 and its National Action Plan, the recommendations outline the following key aspects of further development of programmes in the country: a) establishing accessible and sustainable programmes; b) improving the safety and quality of programmes; c) enabling effective collaboration.

a) *Establishing accessible and sustainable programmes;*

Programmes that operate countrywide and that are accessible to perpetrators coming from different referral routes are crucial for ensuring the impact of programmes for perpetrators on improving the safety of victims in the country. The development of programmes achieved thus far in the prison sector, probation sector and social sector, public, and private (NGOs) should be continued, as each of these sectors can reach different types of perpetrators. Furthermore, the existence of programmes in various sectors ensures the continuity of service provision (e.g., that perpetrators released from prisons can access programmes in the community) as well as cost-effective programme delivery (e.g., that probation offices that do not have enough perpetrators or trained staff can refer perpetrators to specialised programmes, implemented by institutions in the social sector, public or private (NGO)).

- ***Ensure stable funding;*** the social sector, public or private (NGOs) has an urgent need for stable and adequate funding. The government needs to ensure adequate resources for perpetrator programmes. One of the possibilities is to allocate financial resources to Territorial Agencies for Social Assistance (ATAS) at the regional levels, that can be used to support perpetrator programmes. Furthermore, it is crucial that funding is stable rather than project-based, as this is the only way to ensure that programmes are sustainable and that staff turnover is minimized (due to increased stability in their working arrangements).

It is vital that funding is also ensured for women's support services, organizations, and professionals that work with victims, as their work is an integral part of perpetrator programme operations. Moreover, the funding of perpetrator programmes should not take away resources from services for victims.

At the moment, the prison and probation sector can ensure programme delivery with their current human resources. However, the improvement of working conditions and salaries of employees in this sector would contribute to shifting the trend of staff turn-over, which would preserve valuable expertise for programme delivery and reduce the need for additional investments in the training and on boarding of new staff. Furthermore, the government needs to be mindful that future legislative changes, such as the suggestion to ensure mandatory referrals to programmes as one of the protection measures, will increase the demand for programmes and should allocate adequate resources for the implementation of these positive initiatives.

- Increase the number of available programmes; the need to increase the number of programmes available is recognized in both the National Programme and its Action Plan. It is important to support the further development of programmes in prisons and probation services and focus specifically on increasing the number of programmes in the social sector, public or private (NGO). It is recommended to firstly support communities which already have experienced and trained non government institutions before expanding programmes to other parts of the country.

b) Improving the safety and quality of programmes;

- Encourage women's support services and perpetrator programmes in all sectors to work together; programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence need to have close cooperation with organizations or professionals that provide support to victims. This is important for programmes in all sectors: probation, prison, social sector, public or private (NGO).

The government should encourage existing women's support services to take on this role in a joint effort to ensure the safety of victims and to bring their expertise to this process. The possibility of creating synergies between ensuring partner contact in the context of programmes for perpetrators

of domestic violence and the Law No. 137/2016 on the Rehabilitation of Victims of Crime should be considered.

- Upgrade standards for programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence; the existing quality standards should be upgraded to better fit with the provisions of the Istanbul Convention, European Standards for Perpetrator Programmes and identified pitfalls the organizations face in programme implementation. It is crucial that the standards incorporate clear guidance and procedures on contacting victims when perpetrators are referred to programmes, as well as clear procedures in continuous risk assessment and management.
- Monitoring and evaluation; set up procedures for the continuous monitoring and evaluation of programmes for perpetrators. It is highly recommended that data on programmes' outcomes is shared and compared at the country level. Relevant agencies (possibly, for example, the National Agency on Ending Violence against Women) should support and coordinate this data collection. This is the only way to ensure a broad understanding of programmes and their impact, which enables future policy- and decision-making based on reliable and comprehensive data. To do that, it is important that programmes in all sectors use the same or comparable evaluation tools and gather the same type of data. The recommendation is to use the IMPACT Outcome Monitoring Toolkit,¹³ a specialized instrument for the evaluation of the outcomes of programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence, used in more than 12 countries in Europe. This standardized tool allows for collecting comparable data across programmes and also with the men in the programme and the victims, in order to enhance robustness of the results.
- Ensure continuous training of perpetrator programme professionals; It is recommended to build the existing expertise in the country to ensure strong in-country capacities to provide training for the future delivery of perpetrator programmes. Currently, the Centre for Assistance and Counselling for Domestic Violence Perpetrators within the Public Institution "Assistance Services for Victims of Domestic Violence" holds the most experience conducting programmes and training others, which should be expanded in a way that integrates elements of partner contact and risk assessment and management in their training package. Following that, the existing capacities in the prison system to provide in-house trainings

¹³ For more information, please see: <https://www.work-with-perpetrators.eu/impact>

should be supported, while the probation system should be strengthened to establish in-house training capacities after they set up and pilot programmes.

- Encourage development of specialized programmes for different types of perpetrators; it is recommended to firstly focus all efforts on setting up safe and efficient programmes for male perpetrators of intimate partner violence in all systems. Following that, the government should encourage and support the development of programmes for other target groups (e.g., female perpetrators, young perpetrators). The prison system and the Centre for Assistance and Counselling for Domestic Violence Perpetrators within the Public Institution "Assistance Services for Victims of Domestic Violence." already have some experience in working with female perpetrators, which could be utilized to develop and disseminate specialized training programme for all sectors.

To make informed decisions about the needs for specialized programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence, it is crucial to ensure that the data on different types of perpetrators in all sectors is continuously collected and disaggregated.

c) ***Enabling effective collaboration;***

Programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence should not operate in isolation, and each country should ensure that these programmes are part of the coordinated community response to domestic violence. Cooperation between different actors in Moldova and perpetrator programmes exists, but it is mainly focused on mutual referrals (and not joint case-based work, information sharing and decision making).

One of the key obstacles to ensuring better multi-agency work is the lack of available programmes for perpetrators, which is why there should be a primary focus on the programmes development and coordination between different sectors before initiating systematic efforts to establish broader multi-agency work around programmes for perpetrators.

- Set up and coordinate a working group on prison-probation-social sector, public and private (NGOs) cooperation within the implementation of programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence; The working group should aim to outline clear procedures for cooperation, roles and responsibilities of each of the sectors. The protocol should focus on:

-enabling mutual referrals of perpetrators and defining processes for ensuring effective cooperation, including related to exchanging information on perpetrators' progress, the outcomes of the programme and the impact it had on the perpetrator and the victim.

-enabling referrals for perpetrators released from the prison to programmes within the probation service or social sector, public or private (NGOs) and defining the process for increasing the motivation of the perpetrators to engage in the programme in the community.

-ensure that when making referrals, there is a clear process in place to allow the programme to share relevant contact information about the victim with the women's support service with which they are collaborating.

- ensure consistency of programmes across sectors (content, approach, procedures, evaluation methods, etc.)

- Improving broader multi-agency cooperation and increasing referrals to programmes;

Broader multi-agency cooperation should take the following directions:

- Train police professionals to improve their competencies in working with perpetrators of domestic violence and motivating them to engage in perpetrator programmes. Training should also focus on providing more information to police professionals about perpetrator programmes and their benefits in order to increase the number of recommendations to refer perpetrators to programmes. Likewise, the training should address the attitudes of police professionals toward domestic violence, specifically the misconceptions that men commit domestic violence because they cannot control their anger or because they are addicted to alcohol and drugs, in addition to victim-blaming beliefs. Furthermore, the police staff should expand their understanding of the effects of the domestic violence on children and the fathering competencies of the perpetrator.
- Initiate legislative and other changes which would enable perpetrators to be referred to programmes in probation setting and social, public and private (NGOs) setting at a minimum duration that requires them to complete the full programme (30 sessions). It is crucial to ensure there is enough time to implement the intervention, which will increase the likelihood that the violence is not repeated.

- Train other stakeholders (social services, child protection services, health services) on how to identify domestic violence and how to motivate men to self-refer to programmes.
- Establish cooperation with addiction and mental health services, in the aspect of mutual referrals and coordinated working.
- Involve programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence into multi-agency meetings (e.g., MARAC).

However, intensive focus on multi-agency cooperation should take place when the number of programmes in the country increases (particularly in the probation and social sector, public or private (NGOs)) and when these programmes are operating in close cooperation with organizations/professionals who support victims.

Roadmap 1: Improving programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence in the Republic of Moldova

Domains:

- ✓ Creating accessible and sustainable programs
- ✓ Improving the safety and quality of programs
- ✓ Creating the necessary conditions for effective collaboration



4.2. Recommendations for the development of programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence in penitentiaries

Programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence in penitentiary institutions have been developing since 2020, and the National Administration of Penitentiaries has managed to deliver programmes across their institutions and train all staff in a relatively short period of time. Furthermore, the penitentiary system continues to increase the percentage of inmates who undertake the programme, although most penitentiaries focus on domestic violence, even if this wasn't the crime for which the individual was convicted. This demonstrates strong internal capacities of the National Administration of Penitentiaries to further develop and improve the programme and its quality.

Further development of the programme should focus on three main aspects: a) improving programme design and quality; b) ensuring victims' safety; and c) effective collaboration.

a) Improving programme design and quality

- *Train key staff:* key staff from the National Administration of Penitentiaries and selected practitioners should receive training for working with male perpetrators of intimate partner violence.¹⁴

This training should include the aspects that are currently missing, such as: partner contact, risk assessment and management, accountability of perpetrators, topics specific for working with this target group (masculinity, sexualized violence, fathering, intimacy, power and control in intimate relationships). Furthermore, it is highly recommended that the training includes motivational interviewing, as this approach has shown positive results in working with clients with low motivation to engage in services and change their behaviour. Given the current challenges that penitentiary psychologists face in motivating perpetrators and the specifics of the population of perpetrators of domestic violence in the prison setting, building competencies in this regard would bring tangible benefits for professionals and their clients.

The penitentiary system has good internal capacities to design their own programme based on the training received. The key staff to be included in the training should be professionals

¹⁴ As explained in the analysis, the penitentiary system currently delivers the same programme for all male perpetrators of domestic violence (which includes intimate partner violence, but also violence against other family members such as children, parents, siblings, etc.).

who have a role in developing new programmes within the penitentiary system and training other colleagues. This training of key staff would be a 'training of trainers' action that would allow these staff to then build the capacities of other colleagues across the country.

- Revise the programme; based on the training received, it is recommended that the penitentiary team revise the current programme, bearing in mind the following aspects:
 - The programme needs to be specifically designed for and provided to male perpetrators of violence against their partners.
 - The programme content needs to be upgraded to include all relevant topics for working with this target group (listed above). It is also important to bear in mind that most of the topics need to be covered in more than one session to ensure that the participants can absorb and integrate the concepts.
 - The programme duration should be increased, as the existing 13 sessions will hardly ensure longer-term change. The suggestion is to gradually increase the number of sessions in the programme to ensure that it can be implemented in the current prison context, in which the majority of professionals are hesitant about this modification of the programme and most perpetrators may show resistance to engaging in longer programmes.
 - The programme content should also provide opportunities to perpetrators for experiential learning and reflections instead of focusing mainly on the psycho-educational aspect. The programme's interactivity should be increased through the use of different types of materials (illustrations, videos, vignettes, interactive exercises, etc.).
 - The procedure for programme implementation should ensure that all inmates who have used violence against their partners are referred to this programme, regardless of the type of crime for which they are convicted. Many prisons apply this practice, and it is recommended to ensure that this good practice is applied throughout the penitentiary system.

It is recommended to evaluate and upgrade the curriculum every 3-4 years to ensure that the experience from its implementation is utilized to improve the programme and that newly developed approaches with proven efficacy can be integrated into the curriculum.

- *Ongoing training of the psychologists running programmes;* based on the revised and upgraded programme, organize internal trainings for prison psychologists. It is vital that sufficient training hours are provided for the staff who will be implementing specialized programme for male perpetrators of intimate partner violence. As guidance, the European Standards for Perpetrator Programmes (WWP EN, 2023) suggest that professionals working with perpetrators need to undergo 84 hours of specialized training.

- *Establish an evaluation system and conduct yearly evaluations of programme outcomes;* the current evaluation system should be upgraded, taking into account the following principles:
 - Data is collected on a wide range of outcomes: attitudes toward women and gender-based violence, level of accountability for the committed violence, recurrence of violence (including different types of violence).

 - The same data should be collected before the programme, halfway through the programme, after programme completion, and at least 3 months after programme completion (if possible) to enable pre-post comparison.

 - It is critical to include victims' perspectives on their safety and the effects of the programme throughout the programme duration.

The National Administration of Penitentiaries should conduct yearly evaluations of the programme and utilize findings to inform future programme revisions. Furthermore, it is recommended to conduct an external evaluation of the programme at least once every five years. The recommendation is to use the IMPACT Outcome Monitoring Toolkit.¹⁵ As mentioned above, this tool allows for the collection of a wide range of outcomes at different points in time during the programme and produces comparable data from the men in the programme and the victims.

¹⁵ For more information, please see: <https://www.work-with-perpetrators.eu/impact>

- Develop specialized programme for a new target group of perpetrators: The penitentiary system needs to provide programmes for a wide range of perpetrators of domestic violence. It is noted with satisfaction that the penitentiary system has already started to work on the development of specialized programmes for perpetrators, and that they are already implementing a programme for perpetrators of sexual violence and a programme for victims of gender-based violence who have been sentenced to prison for acts of violence against their abuser.

The process of developing specialized programmes should be continued. As mentioned above, it is recommended to prioritize the development of a specialized programme for male perpetrators of intimate partner violence, as this is the most prevalent form of violence.

Recommended next steps in the process of specialization of programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence are:

- Revise the procedures for collecting data about domestic violence in a way that enables disaggregated data per type of domestic violence committed.¹⁶ Furthermore, begin collecting data on inmates who have not been convicted for domestic violence but have been perpetrating it. This data exists in the case files of every inmate, but it is not collected or analysed at the central level of the National Penitentiary Administration. Systematic collection and analysis of this type of data will have multiple benefits, one of them being the ability to draw conclusions on which type of the specialized programme to develop in the future.
- Design specialized programmes for populations of perpetrators that are not yet covered by existing treatment programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence. The recommendation is to initiate this process only when the programme for male perpetrators of intimate partner violence is well established and implemented.

b) Ensuring victim safety

Prioritizing the safety and well-being of victims while working with perpetrators is a primary task of programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence. While the risks of repeated violence when the perpetrator is in prison are limited, they still exist and should be assessed and closely monitored. The openness and positive attitudes of the majority of prison psychologists toward

¹⁶ Currently, data is collected based on the law and the article of the inmate's conviction, and not on the type of violence that he/she has committed.

cooperation with women's support services and better risk assessment present a valuable opportunity to integrate this aspect of the perpetrator programme into the prison system.

The recommended steps for integrating the prioritization of victims' safety into prison programmes are:

- Train key staff on risk assessment and partner contact; key staff of the penitentiary system should be trained on making contact with victims while working with perpetrators as well as on risk assessment and management. Trained staff will utilize newly gained competencies to decide whether they can be implemented in the revised programme for male perpetrators of intimate partner violence and in what way.

Furthermore, the key staff will use the gained knowledge to draft procedures and possible ways in which they could establish partnerships with organizations who work with victims, ideally women's support services.

- Sign protocols of cooperation with organizations supporting victims; The National Administration of Penitentiaries should explore the possibilities of establishing cooperation with organizations supporting victims, ideally women's support services in local communities in which prisons are placed. The goal of this cooperation would be to better ensure the safety of survivors and to find ways in which victim support organizations could work with victims, monitor whether any new violence is occurring, take action in case violence is present, and exchange information with the penitentiary system that could be relevant for assessing risks.

It is suggested to initiate these partnerships in two local communities and then gradually increase the number of partnerships throughout the country.

This process should be started in the final stages of the revision/upgrade of the programme for male perpetrators of intimate partner violence. Furthermore, it may rely on the partnerships established by the probation system (see Section 8.3. and Roadmap 3).

c) Effective collaboration

The prison system in Moldova already has a wide partnership network with different institutions and organizations, which should be expanded and strengthened for more effective results in cases of domestic violence, especially in aspects of post-penal protection. The recommended steps are:

- Take part in the working group on prison-probation-social sector, public and private (NGO) collaboration;

The task of the working group would be to define procedures for cooperation between programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence in Moldova which are operated in the prison, probation and social sectors (see Section 8.1).

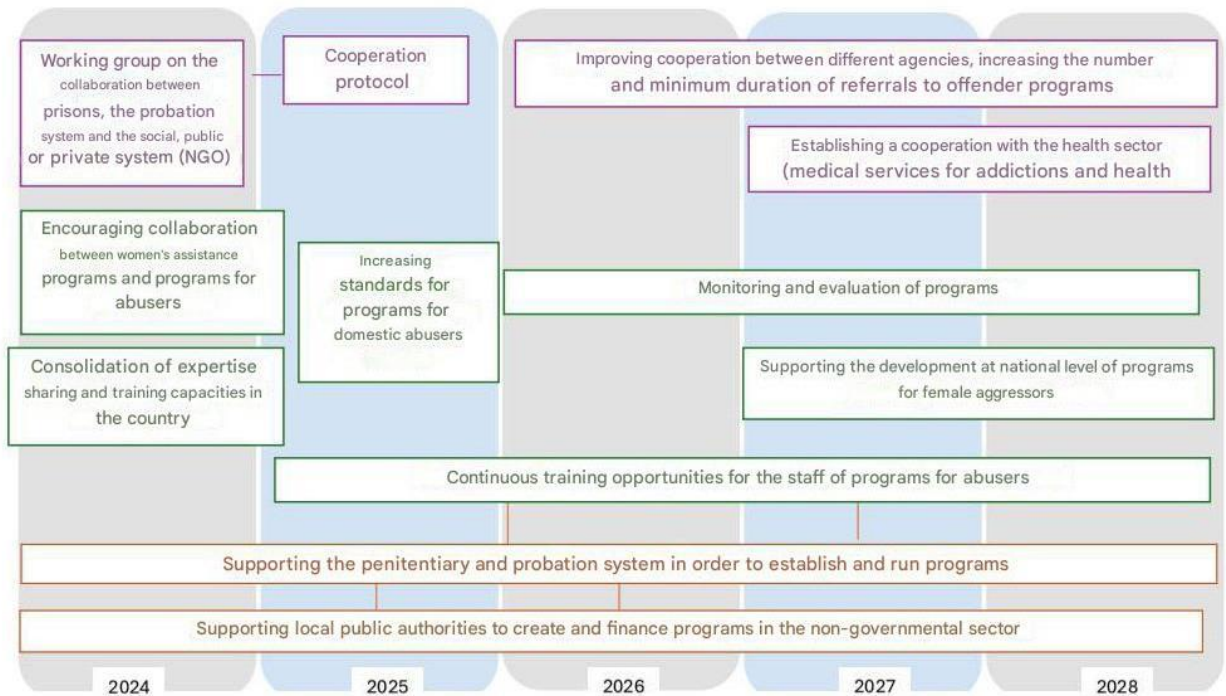
- Cooperation protocol:

The working group should develop a protocol which defines processes and procedures for the cooperation of programmes in prisons, probation services and institutions from the social sector, public or private (NGO). More details can be found in Section 8.1. and Roadmap 1. For penitentiaries, the core element of the protocol should be effective post-penal treatment of perpetrators of domestic violence. Ideally, the transition from prison to the community should be facilitated so that perpetrators get to know the programme professional from the probation office or a specialised institution from the social sector, public or private (NGO), and that the motivational aspect of engaging in a programme for perpetrators of domestic violence in the community is tackled jointly, before the inmate is released. The focus should be on establishing pathways for perpetrators of domestic violence to undertake programmes in the community.

Roadmap 2: Improving programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence in the penitentiary system

Domains:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Creating accessible and sustainable programs
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Improving the safety and quality of programs
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Creating the necessary conditions for effective collaboration



4.3. Recommendations on the development of programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence in probation services

The National Probation Inspectorate has invested in ensuring that individuals who are convicted for acts of domestic violence undergo specialized programmes, either in probation offices or in non-government sector. However, due to staff turnover, the probation offices have lost capacities to provide in-house programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence, as most of the trained staff have left the organization. Although the probation system has been implementing the national curriculum, some key aspects were not integrated into their practice, such as working with victims and conducting continuous risk assessment. Likewise, perpetrators were frequently referred to shorter conflict management or anger management programmes, as they were reluctant to participate in more comprehensive programmes centred around domestic violence, or the duration of their sentence was shorter than the length of the specialized programme for perpetrators of domestic violence. The probation system has rightly focused on establishing partnerships with NGOs; however, the lack of active programmes in the non-government sector has created additional challenges in ensuring that perpetrators receive appropriate support in changing their behaviour.

The probation system in Moldova is well developed and covers most of the country's territory. The capacities of various probation offices are different (regarding the number of staff, their workload and expertise). Furthermore, the need for an in-house programme for this group of perpetrators varies across the country, as probation offices have varying numbers of cases that require programmes specific to domestic violence (e.g., some offices referred just one perpetrator in 2023, while others referred 17).

The existing capacities of the probation offices and the number of cities in which they operate, as well as their diversity and differing needs and resources across the country, suggest that the best model for the future development of programmes for perpetrators in Moldova needs to include **both the development of in-house programmes to be delivered by the probation staff and the establishment of partnerships with specialised services, provided by institutions from the social sector, public or private (NGO) for the referral of perpetrators to these programmes. Each probation office, in partnership with the National Probation Inspectorate, should decide which model to apply.**

Further development of the programmes in the probation system should advance in three main directions: a) building internal capacities for programme delivery; b) ensuring victims' safety; and c) effective collaboration.

a) Building internal capacities for programme delivery

Building internal capacities within the probation services is essential for ensuring that the perpetrators of domestic violence in this service receive appropriate interventions to help them change their behaviour. It is recommended to manage this process step by step and to prioritize the strategy that will lead to setting up a *fewer number of quality programmes* that can operate in a *sustainable way*. The following steps are recommended:

- *Selection of pilot probation offices*; The National Probation Inspectorate should select 2-3 probation offices as pilot offices for the roll-out of the programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence. In the selection process, the following criteria should be considered:
 - Choose the office that has a *higher number of staff*. this criterion is relevant due to the potential of staff turnover, which would result in a loss of expertise within the office. If more staff from the same probation office are trained, this increases the possibility that the expertise remains within the particular office even if some professionals leave the organisation. It is recommended that 4-5 professionals from each probation office are trained. Furthermore, it is recommended to select offices that have both male and female staff.¹⁷
 - Choose professionals who are *motivated* to deliver programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence and who might appreciate the opportunity to step into the role of future trainers. It is highly recommended to set up a motivational selection process which would highlight the benefits of taking on this role and prioritize the internal motivation of professionals in the selection process. Bearing in mind that the vast majority of the probation counsellors prefer the model of referring perpetrators of domestic violence to specialised services, provided by non government organisations and are cautious about the role of probation counsellor becoming more specialized, it is key that pilot efforts are conducted by professionals who are more confident in taking on this role.
 - Choose probation offices that usually have a *higher number of perpetrators of domestic violence*. This criterion ensures that trained professionals can conduct the work in a cost-effective way. The recommendation is to include offices who have 10 or more perpetrators of domestic violence per year.

¹⁷ Based on the data received from the National Probation Inspectorate, these could be offices in: Chisnau (36 staff), Balti (11 staff), Cahul (8 staff), Causeni (7 staff), Criuleni (6 staff), Drochia (8 staff), Hînesti (7 staff). Please note that other probation offices that have 5-6 probation counsellors could also be selected, if they better fit other listed criteria.

- Choose probation offices that are located far from specialized service. Currently, the programme is only active in Drochia, so, probation offices whose beneficiaries cannot attend the programme in-person should be prioritized.

- Choose probation offices which can *establish cooperation with women's support services* in their local communities. This criterion is crucial for ensuring that pilot programmes can be implemented in a safe and effective way. Establishing cooperation with women's support services (or having strong potential to achieve this cooperation) must be a *pre-condition for being selected* for a pilot probation office. Ideally, the probation office would sign a protocol of cooperation with the partnering women's support service.

- *Training of pilot probation offices (include partner women's support service)*; The training for probation counsellors needs to be a comprehensive training for the facilitation of perpetrator programmes that provides theoretical knowledge, experiential learning and skill-building, and clear materials for conducting the programme. Furthermore, probation counsellors from the pilot offices and their partner women's support organization need to receive joint training on partner contact, risk assessment and management, and continuous joint work and information exchange.

- *Piloting the programme and development of an evaluation procedure*; trained probation counsellors and their partner women's support service should pilot the programme delivery in a minimum period of one year. The National Probation Inspectorate should develop a comprehensive evaluation procedure, which would include:
 - measurement of the programme outcomes (all types of violence, victim's feeling of safety, victim's increased space for action, effects on children, level of responsibility of the perpetrator).
 - measurement before the programme, halfway through the programme, and after the programme.
 - the same data should be collected from the victim and the perpetrator.
 - measurement of the process of programme implementation (through questionnaires and focus groups with facilitators).

The developed evaluation process and tools will be implemented in the future programme roll-out, as part of the continuous internal evaluation of the programme. The recommended evaluation tool is the IMPACT Toolkit, applied Europe-wide.¹⁸

- *Development and roll-out of the final programme;* based on the piloting of the programme, the National Probation Inspectorate should decide on the final programme curriculum and procedures for its roll-out. The programmes should be continuously delivered in trained probation offices.
- *Development of the training programme and training 4-5 new probation offices;* The experiences from the piloting should be utilized to develop a training on facilitating programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence in the probation system, which will ideally be implemented in partnership with experts from NGOs delivering the programme. Experiences from pilot probation offices should be disseminated in 4-5 new probation offices, following the same criteria as for the pilots.
- *Internal and external programme evaluation;* Internal evaluation of the programme and its outcomes needs to be continuously conducted, with reports outlined yearly. The recommended tool for conducting evaluations is the IMPACT Outcome Monitoring Toolkit.¹⁹ The implementation of the toolkit will ensure independent external evaluation and comparison with other programmes in Europe and saves resources for conducting complex analysis by the probation service staff.

b) Ensuring victim safety

It is crucial that programmes in probation in Moldova are set up in partnership with organizations/units/professionals that support victims, ideally independent women's support services. This is why this aspect needs to be fully integrated from the outset, during the selection and training of the first pilot probation offices. The recommended steps are:

- *Partnering with women's support services in pilot communities;* Women's support services need to be included in piloting perpetrator programmes and training professionals. Trainings

¹⁸ <https://www.work-with-perpetrators.eu/impact>

¹⁹ <https://www.work-with-perpetrators.eu/impact>

on partner contact, risk assessment and management and integrated working should be participated in jointly by probation counsellors and professionals from women's support services. In these trainings, women's support services need to receive enough information about perpetrator programmes, their goal and ways of operating. Ideally, probation offices should sign a cooperation agreement with women's support services, outlining the joint work.

- *Ongoing cooperation with women support's services in programme delivery*; cooperation between probation officers and women's support services needs to be continuous in all cases: in the programme piloting, programme roll-out, and programme expansion to new probation offices.

c) Effective collaboration

- The probation system in the Republic of Moldova already has a wide network of partnerships with various institutions and organizations, which should be expanded and strengthened to achieve more effective outcomes in cases of domestic violence, particularly in terms of referring perpetrators to specialized service providers in the non-governmental sector offering perpetrator programs and post-penal protection. The recommended steps are:
- Take part in the working group on prison-probation-social sector, public and private (NGOs) collaboration; The task of the working group would be to define procedures for cooperation between programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence in Moldova that are operated in the prison, probation and social sector, public and private (NGOs)_(see Section 8.1.). Furthermore, the focus should be on ensuring that when perpetrators are referred to non government organisations, there is a clear process on how the contact details from the victim are passed to the organisation, while keeping the victim informed.
- Cooperation protocol;

The working group should develop a protocol which defines processes and procedures for the cooperation of programmes in prison, probation and social sector, public and private (NGOs) settings. More details can be found in Section 8.1. and Roadmap 1. From the probation system perspective, the core element of the protocol should be effective cooperation with non government sector that work with perpetrators referred to them by the probation system. It is critical that cooperation is not reduced to simply referrals, but that joint work is operationalized. It is highly recommended that non government

organisations working with perpetrators from the probation system inform the probation counsellors on the progress of the perpetrator (at least halfway through the programme and at programme completion), that they jointly manage high-risk cases, and that ways of evaluating programme outcomes for each specific perpetrator are defined. If both non government organisations and probation offices apply the same evaluation tool (for example, IMPACT Toolkit), this process becomes much more simplified.

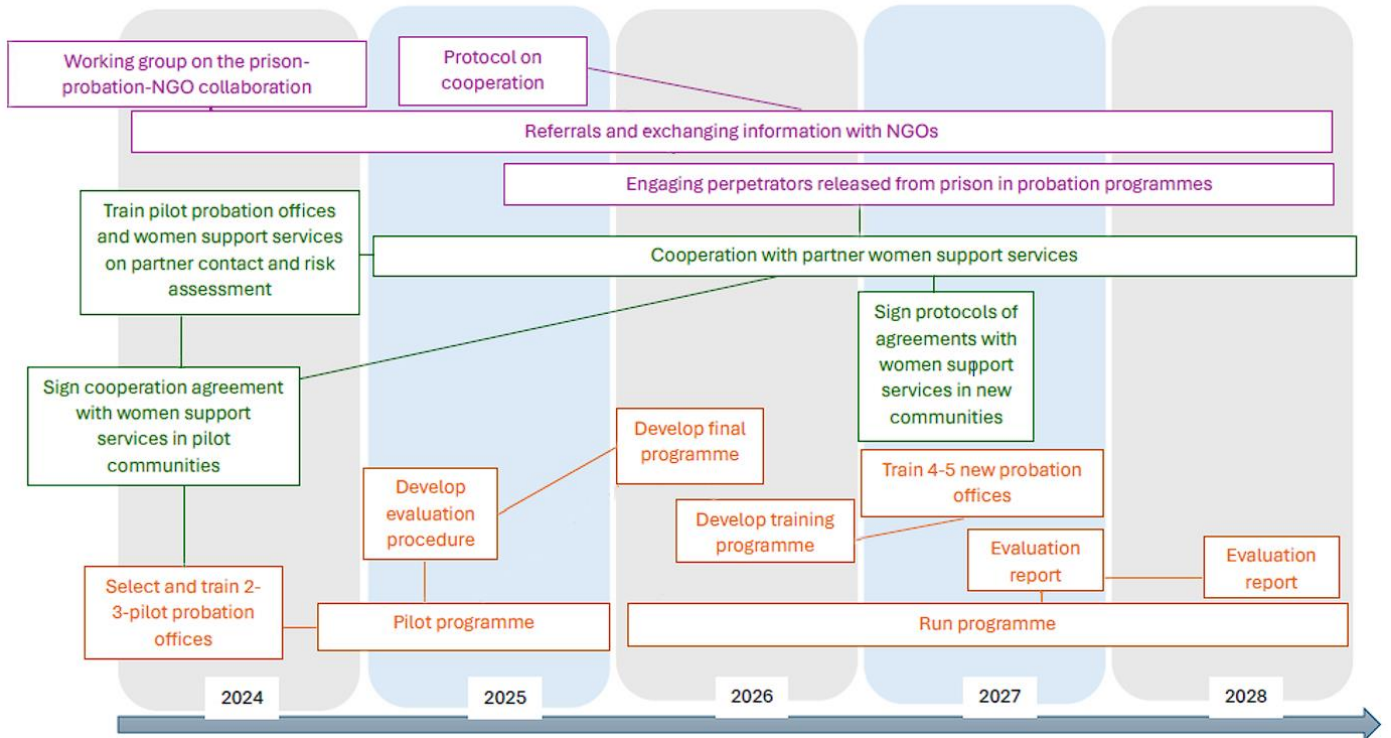
Furthermore, cooperation with prisons should be improved in the post-penal treatment of perpetrators of domestic violence. Ideally, the transition from the prison to the community should be facilitated in a way that perpetrators get to know the professional from the perpetrator programme from the probation office or non government organisations, and that the motivational aspect of engaging in a programme for perpetrators of domestic violence in the community is tackled jointly, before the inmate is released. The focus should be on establishing pathways for perpetrators of domestic violence to undertake programmes in the community.

- Advocating for a minimum duration of the sentence;
The probation office should advocate for ensuring that perpetrators of domestic violence are referred to probation services for a duration which, at minimum, would allow them to take part in the full programme.

Roadmap 3: Improving programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence in the probation system

Areas:

- ✓ Building internal capacities for programme delivery
- ✓ Ensuring victims' safety
- ✓ Effective collaborations



4.4. Recommendations on development of programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence in the social sector, public and private (NGO)

Further development of the programmes in the social sector, public and private (NGO) should advance in the following directions: a) establishing accessible and sustainable programmes; b) improving the safety and quality of programmes; c) effective collaboration.

a) *Establishing accessible and sustainable programmes;* this step relates to ensuring sufficient and stable funding for the sector. It is recommended to plan the establishment of one programme in the sector per year, prioritizing organizations that already have expertise in this specific field.

b) *Improving the safety and quality of programmes;*

- Build capacities to provide comprehensive training; programmes in the social sector, particularly the Centre for Assistance and Counselling for Domestic Violence Perpetrators, have the expertise to support building other professionals capacities in perpetrator work. It is important to use this national resource and to support the organization to develop a comprehensive training programme, which would include aspects of partner contact and risk assessment and management. In that way, the Republic of Moldova can rely on internal resources for the future training of professionals.
- Develop clear procedures for partner contact and risk assessment; it is vital to develop clear written procedures on how partner contact will be implemented and how the programme will conduct continuous risk assessment and management. The European Standards for Perpetrator Programmes could be a valuable resource for this activity. It is also important that these procedures are applied in every case, regardless of which is the referring entity of the perpetrator and regardless of the location of the perpetrator.
- Improve the quality of online work and explore alternatives to online work; conducting online work is currently a necessity, as only one programme is operating in the country. However, it is important to:

- take measures to ensure the higher quality of online work, in terms of applying adjusted materials for online work and specifically ensuring that the number of participants is the same as in in-person groups.

-develop partnerships with women's support services in other communities to ensure partner contact in all cases, even if the perpetrator is located far from the perpetrator programme.

-decrease the number of perpetrators going through online programmes when new programmes in the community or in probation offices start to operate.

c) Effective collaboration;

- Take part in the working group on prison-probation-social sector, public or private (NGO) collaboration; The task of the working group would be to define procedures for cooperation between programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence in Moldova that are operated in the three sectors (see Section 8.1.). Furthermore, the focus should be on ensuring that when perpetrators are referred to non government organisations, there is a clear process on how the contact details from the victim are passed to the organisation, while keeping the victim informed.

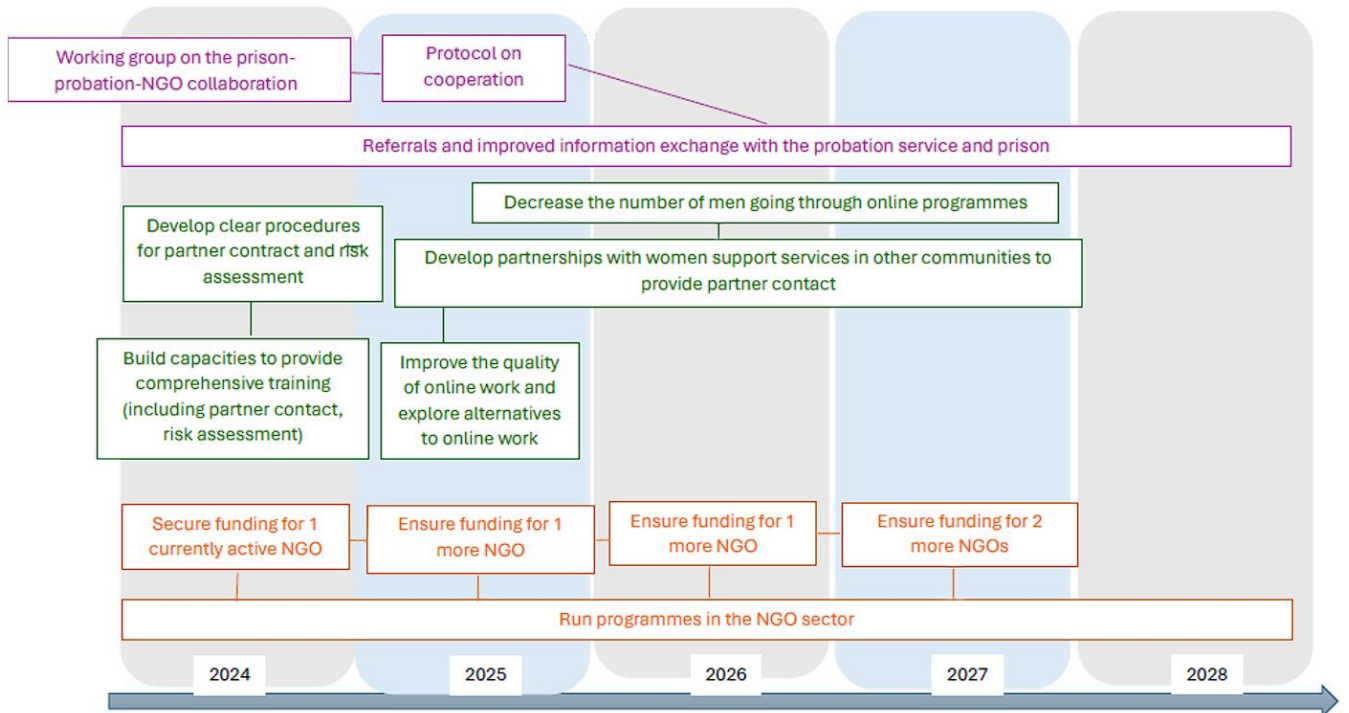
- Cooperation protocol;

The working group should develop a protocol which defines processes and procedures of the cooperation of programmes in prisons, probation services and social services, public and private(NGOs). More details can be found in Section 8.1. and Roadmap 1. From this perspective, the core element of the protocol should be effective cooperation with the probation system. It is essential that cooperation is not reduced to simply referrals, but that joint work is operationalized. It is highly recommended that non governmental organisations working with perpetrators from the probation system inform the probation counsellors on the progress of the perpetrator (at least halfway through the programme and at programme completion), that they jointly manage high-risk cases, and that ways of evaluating programme outcomes for each specific perpetrator are well-defined. If both NGOs and probation offices apply the same evaluation tool (for example, IMPACT toolkit), this process becomes much more simplified.

Roadmap 4: Improving programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence in the social sector, public and private (NGOs)

Areas:

- ✓ Establishing sustainable and accessible programmes
- ✓ Improving the safety and quality of programmes
- ✓ Effective collaborations



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