

STUDY

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PEACE PROCESSES: NEEDS AND PROSPECTS FOR ATU GAGAUZIA



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THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PEACE PROCESSES: NEEDS AND PROSPECTS FOR ATU GAGAUZIA

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

WPS Agenda	<i>Women, Peace and Security Agenda</i>
CPA	Central Public Authorities
LPA	Local public authorities
PAG	People's Assembly of Gagauzia
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CMI	CMI – Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation
HDI	Human Development Index
ODA	Organisation for the Development of Entrepreneurship
UN	United Nations
CSOs	Civil society organisations
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PISA	Platform for Security and Defence Initiatives
UNSCR 1325	UN Security Council Resolution 1325
UN WOMEN	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
ATU Gagauzia	Autonomous Territorial Unit Gagauzia
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund



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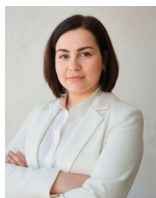
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INTRODUCTION

Context and relevance of the study

The *Women, Peace and Security* agenda is becoming increasingly relevant at the international, national and local levels, against a backdrop of protracted conflicts, complex crises, social polarisation, disinformation and vulnerabilities that directly affect community security. Its relevance is particularly significant for the Republic of Moldova, especially against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine, energy crises and the need to strengthen human security, community resilience and inclusive participation in peace and security processes.

The Republic of Moldova has made significant progress in adopting and implementing the *Women, Peace and Security* Agenda, including through the adoption of national action plans and the integration of objectives regarding the initiative to localise the WPS Agenda into the second National Programme for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 for the period 2023–2027¹. This development marks a shift from a predominantly centralised approach to one oriented towards communities or peripheral areas, where insecurity may be perceived differently than at the central level, and solutions must be adapted to local social, economic, cultural and informational realities.

The localisation of the WPS Agenda involves engaging local public authorities, civil society, community leaders, educational institutions, the local media and active women in the community in identifying problems, formulating solutions and monitoring progress. In this way, the WPS Agenda can become a practical tool for strengthening peace, human security and resilience at the local level. However, women's participation in formal peace processes remains limited, although their contribution is particularly evident in informal initiatives for reconciliation and support in crisis situations. This discrepancy shows that

1 The National Programme for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security for the years 2023–2027 and the Action Plan for its implementation. Government Decision No. 152 of 22 March 2023. In: Official Gazette No. 147–150, Art. 325 of 28 April 2023

the effective implementation of the WPS Agenda depends not only on the existence of the regulatory framework, but also on the genuine, meaningful and consistent inclusion of women in decision-making, peacebuilding and security processes.

Thus, this study was developed as part of a project aimed at raising awareness and recognition of women's role in promoting sustainable peace, community dialogue, mediation, conflict prevention and crisis management at the local level. The project concept stems from the need to identify the needs and opportunities for localising the WPS Agenda, to provide thematic and practical training for local actors, and to strengthen partnerships between local actors relevant to the implementation of the WPS Agenda.

The study is based on the observation that, although women are often informally involved in maintaining social cohesion, supporting families, education, social care, civic initiatives and resolving community issues, this contribution is not sufficiently acknowledged, valued or translated into real influence in decision-making processes. In ATU Gagauzia in particular, women's participation in peace and security processes must be analysed in relation to local peculiarities.

ATU Gagauzia, as a case study, is shaped by the complex nature of the region, which presents both vulnerabilities and opportunities for implementing the WPS Agenda. On the one hand, the region is characterised by identity-related sensitivities, an intricate relationship with central authorities, a distinct information environment, and barriers affecting civic participation. On the other hand, the region has significant local potential: women active in administration, education, civil society, the media and community initiatives; local organisations capable of facilitating dialogue; community leaders who enjoy credibility; as well as an expressed need for training, cooperation and safe spaces for discussion.

Aims and objectives

The study **aims** to contribute to increasing the level of understanding and recognition of the essential role of women in peace processes in the ATU Gagauzia, by identifying local needs, implementation challenges and existing opportunities, as well as by formulating practical recommendations for the localisation and effective implementation of the Women's Peace Agenda in the autonomous region.

Within this framework, the study sets out the following **objectives**:

- to establish the context for the implementation of the WPS Agenda relevant to the ATU Gagauzia;
- to identify the rationale and local framework for implementing the WPS Agenda;
- to analyse the main barriers limiting women's involvement in peace and security processes;
- to identify opportunities for developing local initiatives on peace processes;
- to formulate practical conclusions and recommendations for localising the WPS Agenda in the ATU Gagauzia, aimed at strengthening women's participation, improving institutional cooperation, developing local mechanisms for dialogue, debunking the stereotypes and increasing community resilience.

Study methodology and areas of analysis

The research was carried out in several stages: (-) Initiating dialogue and cooperation by organising field visits to identify needs and local actions regarding the role of women in peacebuilding and human security; (-) Organising a local roundtable to raise awareness of the need to establish a platform for communication and cooperation between local public authorities, civil society organisations, experts and other relevant partners, with a view to aligning efforts in implementing the WPS Agenda; (-) Capacity building for local actors through training sessions and practical activities focused on integrating the principles of the WPS Agenda, as well as identifying aspects relevant to the study; (-) Final consultations on the study's findings. These steps enabled the establishment of a dialogue initiative on the implementation of the WPS Agenda in ATU Gagauzia.

General and specific methods:

- **The quantitative method** involved the use of official statistical data, indicators relevant to the subject matter of the study, and the results of available surveys. This enabled the identification of general trends

regarding women's participation in decision-making and community processes, the population's level of awareness, the degree of trust in institutions, perceptions of security, and the main training needs of local stakeholders. Quantitative data were used to substantiate the findings and to link the perceptions expressed during project activities with broader developments and issues at regional and national levels.

- **The qualitative method** was employed through facilitated discussions, group exercises, observation, brainstorming and collective reflection. This method enabled a deeper understanding of the perceptions, experiences, fears, motivations and obstacles affecting women's involvement in local peace and security processes.
- **The systemic method** was used to analyse the interdependencies between economic, institutional, informational, cultural and gender-based vulnerabilities. This approach is necessary because the barriers to women's participation do not act in isolation, but reinforce one another: gender stereotypes reduce women's confidence in their own leadership; misinformation affects perceptions of equality and institutions; language barriers limit access to information; and a lack of cooperation between stakeholders weakens the community's capacity to respond.
- **The synthesis method** was used to integrate findings from documents, discussions, questionnaires, training sessions and observations into a coherent analytical framework. This enabled the formulation of conclusions and recommendations geared towards public policy, local interventions and capacity-building initiatives.
- **Contextual analysis** was used to understand the specific characteristics of ATU Gagauzia, including its social, informational, linguistic, institutional and cultural contexts. This method enabled the adaptation of the WPS Agenda to local realities and avoided a one-size-fits-all approach, which would risk remaining formal or insufficiently accepted by the community.

The methods used underpinned **the following lines of analysis** in the study, which enable the development of initiatives independent of each targeted actor:

- **Building the study's conceptual framework** around **inclusive security** and **human security**, which allows for moving beyond a narrow understand-

ing of security - centred exclusively on institutions, public order or military threats - and directs the analysis towards human needs within the community.

- **Establishing the quality of women's participation in peace, security and decision-making processes at local level** - analysing the framework within which women are present, heard and influential in community, consultative or decision-making processes relevant to social dialogue and crisis management.
- **Identifying the balance between barriers and opportunities in strengthening women's participation in peace processes** - analysing traditional and specific factors that limit the implementation of the WPS Agenda and identifying existing local initiatives and mechanisms that can support women's involvement.
- **Highlighting the need for cooperation between central public authorities, local public authorities, civil society and other local actors** through communication, coordination, trust and partnership among the relevant actors to promote the WPS Agenda and transform it into a framework applicable at the community level.

The target stakeholders are: women active at community level, representatives of local civil society, local public authorities, as well as central public authorities, educational institutions, local media, community leaders, independent experts and development partners involved in promoting human security and social cohesion.

Scope of the study

The study is exploratory and applicative in nature, having been developed on the basis of data collected during project activities, available documentary materials and contributions from participants, experts and local stakeholders. Consequently, **the findings reflect the perceptions, experiences and observations of those involved in the project process**, without claiming statistical representativeness for the entire population of ATU Gagauzia.

- **Changes in the security environment and their implications for the Women, Peace and Security Agenda** – the dynamic nature of global and local risks requires the WPS Agenda to be linked to new conceptual and practical trends in the field of peace and security (e.g. the *Triple NEXUS* approach). The study's findings are dependent on the security context prevailing during the research period.
- **The sensitivity of the topics analysed** – issues such as domestic violence, discrimination, gender stereotypes, trust in institutions, information preferences, reporting to central authorities or political participation may lead to reluctance to speak out. In a context marked by caution regarding public expression, some opinions may be expressed indirectly.
- **The dynamic nature of the regional context** – ATU Gagauzia is influenced by political, social, informational and geopolitical developments that can change rapidly. Consequently, some findings must be understood in relation to the period during which the project activities took place and may require updating through further research.
- **The availability of disaggregated local data** – the lack of studies, mapping and data on human security needs, and perceptions of women's role in peace processes constitutes one of the problems identified within the study itself. This limitation confirms the need to develop local mechanisms for data collection and analysis.
- **The predominantly qualitative nature of some findings.** Although the questionnaires provided useful quantitative data, many conclusions are based on discussions, exercises, observations and interpretations by participants and experts during the project implementation process.

Despite these limitations, the study makes an important contribution to understanding the preconditions, barriers and opportunities for implementing the WPS Agenda in ATU Gagauzia. Its main value lies in the fact that it brings together an analysis of the framework for implementing the WPS Agenda, the human security perspective, the experiences of local actors and the results of the participatory activities carried out within the project. Thus, the study can serve as a basis for future initiatives in training, consultation, institutional co-operation, gender-sensitive local policies and community mechanisms to promote women's participation in peace and security processes.

CONTEXT AND RATIONALE FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF **THE WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA IN THE ATU GAGAUZIA**

1.1 The importance of implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda – from international commitments to local realities

The Women, Peace and Security Agenda supports efforts to promote the rights of women and girls and to sustain peace and inclusive security



The *Women, Peace and Security* Agenda is a global framework established by Resolution 1325, adopted on 31 October 2000 by the UN Security Council, and through a series of subsequent resolutions and normative acts². It acknowledges that gender equality, women's rights and the meaningful participation of women are essential for conflict prevention, peacebuilding and the creation of security in any context.

The WPS agenda is aligned with and reinforces a wide range of global and regional commitments on gender equality, human rights and sustainable peace. These include, for example, *the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW)³ and *the Sustainable Development Goals*⁴. Together, these commitments support efforts to promote the rights of women and girls and to uphold inclusive, gender-sensitive peace and security. Besides, it is a tool for civil society to raise awareness of forms of discrimination against women, which are often overlooked. For example, in 2020 the Promo-Lex Association presented a report that remains relevant today on "Hate speech and incitement to discrimination against women in the Republic of Moldova"⁵. This report is closely linked to the WPS Agenda, as it highlights one of the structural barriers affecting women's participation, protection and safety in the public sphere: hate speech and incitement to discrimination.

2 Natalia Albu. Women, Peace and Security Agenda. Summary note. PISA, 2024. Available at: https://pisa.md/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Nota-informativa_AGENDA-FEMEILE-PACEA-SI-SECURITATE.pdf

3 Note: The Republic of Moldova ratified CEDAW on 1 July 1994

4 *What are the Sustainable Development Goals?* Available at: https://statistica.gov.md/ro/obiectivele-de-dezvoltare-durabila-183_4498.html

5 Hate speech and incitement to discrimination against women in the Republic of Moldova. Report, Promo-LEX, 2020. Available at: https://promolex.md/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/final_versiunea_scurta_hate_speech_cedaw_2019_ro-2.pdf

The report shows that women were among the groups most affected by hate speech in the Republic of Moldova, and the number of cases based on sex/gender criteria increased significantly during the monitoring period, particularly in political, religious and media contexts.

CEDAW, as a reference document for the WPS Agenda, requires states not only to formally adopt the principles of gender equality, but also to ensure their effective application in all regions. From the perspective of the Republic of Moldova, this principle highlights a gap between commitments made at national level and the realities of implementation at local level. The data from this study show that, in practice, in ATU Gagauzia, local public policies are frequently *gender-blind*, failing to take into account the differences in needs and experiences between women and men. This gap is exacerbated by limited institutional capacity and the absence of systematic mechanisms for integrating a gender perspective into the process of planning and implementing public policies. In this context, CEDAW can serve as a framework for the critical evaluation of existing policies, facilitating the identification of gaps and indirect forms of discrimination. At the same time, it provides a normative basis for integrating gender analysis at the level of local public authorities in Gagauzia, and for the development of practical guidelines and tools for civil servants, a need explicitly highlighted in this study.

In this regard, the effective implementation of the WPS Agenda contributes to building *inclusive security*, as it enables the identification and integration of the different security needs of women and men, reduces structural vulnerabilities (such as gender-based violence, exclusion or unequal access to resources) and ensures that the public policies respond to community realities in an equitable manner, thereby strengthening resilience and social cohesion at the local level [Annex 1].

More recently, on 14 October 2021, the Republic of Moldova became the 35th state to ratify *the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence* (the Istanbul Convention). Law No. 144/2021 initiated the procedures to align the national regulatory framework with its provisions. The National Programme on Preventing and

Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence for the years 2023–2027⁶ has been approved, which is based on the four pillars set out in the Istanbul Convention: (1) prevention; (2) protection and support for victims; (3) prosecution and holding perpetrators to account; and (4) multisectoral cooperation through integrated policies and data collection.

Based on a victim-centred approach, *the Istanbul Convention* provides concrete tools designed to ensure the protection, safety and empowerment of women and girls. In this regard, it sets out clear obligations for states to strengthen prevention mechanisms, including through the training of specialists who interact directly with victims, the development of cooperation with non-governmental organisations, and the active involvement of the media and the private sector in combating gender stereotypes. For example, at a practical level, these provisions have been implemented through concrete initiatives at local level, where authorities and NGOs have participated in training programmes dedicated to understanding and applying the Convention, including seminars for police officers, such as the one organised in Ceadir-Lunga in November 2022⁷.

Thus, sustainable peace cannot be built in the absence of inclusion, trust and solidarity. From this perspective, the WPS Agenda promotes a paradigm shift: from traditional, state-centred security to inclusive, people-centred security, in which women's experiences and contributions are recognised as being essential for stability and resilience. Recent data confirms this relationship. According to the Human Development Reports 2022–2024 produced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the perception of security is closely linked to the level of human development. In countries with a low or medium Human Development Index, the proportion of people who feel insecure is significantly higher compared to states with a high or very high level of development [Annexes 2 and 3]. This correlation reflects the fact that the WPS Agenda is not merely a normative initiative, but a practical tool for reducing insecurity and building sustainable peace by harnessing the full potential of society.

6 National Programme on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence for the Years 2023–2027. Available at: https://social.gov.md/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Programul-VFF-si-VF_-15.03.2023_final.pdf

7 The Gagauzia Police have learnt more about the Istanbul Convention. Available at: <https://civic.md/stiri/ong/67442-politia-din-gagauzia-a-aflat-mai-multe-despre-conventia-de-la-istanbul.html>

Women's participation in peacebuilding helps to identify different security needs

According to UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, women experience conflict, insecurity and post-conflict reconstruction differently from men, and these distinct experiences generate specific perspectives, priorities and contributions, which must be integrated into the processes of conflict prevention, negotiation, mediation and peacebuilding⁸.

However, globally, despite the recognised importance of women's participation, progress remains slow⁹. Furthermore, one way to assess the success of the WPS Agenda is through the lens of peace agreements, as the mechanisms for their implementation profoundly influence women's lives. From this perspective, women have the right to express their views, needs and capabilities and to see these reflected both in peace agreements and in the political and institutional processes following conflict or in the context of Security Sector Reform. Acknowledgement of this right, as well as of women's positive role in preventing violence and in social reconstruction, is a central element of the WPS Agenda and of the international commitments made to promote women's leadership in peace processes¹⁰.

In this context, the *Participation* Pillar of UNSCR 1325¹¹ establishes that the full and meaningful involvement of women in decision-making processes is essential for conflict prevention and the consolidation of sustainable peace. At the same time, CEDAW provides the legal basis for this participation, obliging states to ensure equal access to governance processes at both global and local levels.

In the Republic of Moldova, these commitments are reflected in the National Programme for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 for the years 2023–2027, but their implementation at the local level is limited. Thus, the data from this study, concerning the situation in ATU Gagauzia, indicate the existence of a

8 Women and peace and security. Report of the Secretary-General, September 2023. Available: <https://docs.un.org/en/s/2023/725?utm>

9 Women, Peace and Security at 25: Assessing Implementation through Gender Perspectives in Peace Agreements, July 2024. Available at: <https://peacerep.org/2025/07/24/women-peace-and-security-at-25/>

10 Women, Peace & Security and Humanitarian Compact Framework (2021). Available at: https://wpsha-compact.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/WPS-HA-Compact_Framework-EN-Web.pdf

11 Note: The four pillars of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, see Annex 4.

structural gap between women's actual role in the community and their participation in formal decision-making processes. Although women are recognised as key actors in maintaining social cohesion and managing crisis situations at the community level, their contribution is not fully utilised in the field of security policies¹².

This unequal distribution of perceptions reflects a structural pattern explained by the provisions of the WPS Agenda: women are accepted and valued in roles considered 'soft', associated with empathy, communication and social support, but remain largely excluded from the sphere of strategic leadership and high-stakes decision-making. In this regard, the problem is not a total lack of recognition, but its limitation to a symbolic and non-decision-making sphere.

In this context, women's participation cannot be reduced to their formal presence in consultations or public activities. Meaningful participation requires early access to information, an understanding of decision-making processes, the existence of safe platforms for expression, and a real opportunity to influence the agenda. Inclusive communication thus becomes a prerequisite for effective participation: it enables women to articulate their security needs, contribute to identifying solutions, and be recognised as agents of change, not merely as beneficiaries of public policies.

Women's participation must be understood as an essential mechanism for strengthening local governance and promoting a sustainable, inclusive peace that is tailored to the community's real security needs. Integrating women's experiences and perspectives enables a more comprehensive identification of risks and contributes to the development of better-calibrated institutional responses. This is particularly relevant in the context of ATU Gagauzia, where security is predominantly perceived through the prism of socio-economic vulnerabilities and everyday insecurity, and where women are already informally involved in managing community issues, yet their contribution is not always recognised and valued in decision-making processes. The exclusion of women from peace and security processes leads to incomplete solutions that do not reflect the diversity of society or the differentiated needs of the population [Annexes 5 and 6].

12 NOTE: The results of the questionnaires completed as part of the project show that the majority of participants - **87.5%** - recognise women's contribution to community life, particularly in mediation, social relations and community cohesion. However, recognition drops significantly when it comes to roles associated with security and decision-making: **31.3%** believe that women contribute to peacebuilding, **18.8%** see them as involved in conflict prevention, and only **6.3%** perceive them as initiators of solutions.

The development of an Action Plan to implement the *Women, Peace and Security* Agenda contributes to ensuring human security within the specific context of each country and locality

The call to develop a National Action Plan on the implementation of the *Women, Peace and Security* Agenda is not coincidental, but reflects a structural limitation of the international regulatory framework: the existence of a persistent gap between commitments made at the global level and their implementation at the national and local levels. In this regard, the UN Secretary-General's 2002 call, reiterated in 2004, for member states to develop national plans was intended to transform the WPS Agenda from a set of normative principles into an operational public policy instrument.

National Action Plans are dedicated instruments through which states operationalise the *Women, Peace and Security* Agenda, setting out objectives, actions, institutional responsibilities and coordination mechanisms between authorities with domestic and external remit. As a rule, they aim to ensure the coherent integration of all pillars of the agenda, as well as to define procedures for monitoring, evaluation, funding and consultation with civil society. At the same time, the adoption of such plans does not preclude the obligation of governments, multilateral agencies and international or non-governmental organisations to integrate a gender perspective into related policies and programmes on human rights, conflict prevention, crisis management, conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Consequently, many states resort to separate National Action Plans to ensure a clearer, more coordinated and measurable implementation of the WPS Agenda.

International experience shows that the effectiveness of these plans depends directly on their ability to be adapted to the local context. The concept of **localising the WPS Agenda** reflects precisely this need: translating national objectives into actions relevant to communities. This requires the involvement of local public authorities, civil society organisations and communities in identifying specific security risks and needs.

In the case of the Republic of Moldova, this dimension is particularly relevant. The first National Programme for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 (2018–

2021) was intended to introduce the WPS Agenda into the state's institutional architecture and to create the first coordination and awareness-raising mechanisms. However, its predominantly centralised nature and limited involvement of the local level highlighted a significant shortcoming: **the absence of a genuine link between national policies and the realities of communities.**

The second National Programme (2023–2027) is being developed in a fundamentally different context. The war in Ukraine, the refugee crisis, the intensification of hybrid threats and internal economic vulnerabilities have redefined the Republic of Moldova's security agenda. Within this framework, the 1325 Programme aims not only to promote gender equality, but also to strengthen societal resilience and human security¹³.

A new and essential element of this Programme is the explicit integration of local public authorities and the promotion of the localisation of the WPS Agenda. However, an analysis of its implementation shows that this process remains limited due to the lack of effective coordination, insufficient financial resources and reduced institutional capacities at the local level¹⁴.

The localisation of the WPS Agenda depends directly on the quality of communication between central public authorities, local public authorities, civil society and communities. In the Republic of Moldova, the communication between central public authorities and local public authorities often remains fragmented and insufficiently coordinated, and cooperation with civil society organisations is inconsistent¹⁵. This situation reduces the capacity to 'translate' national policies into local actions and limits women's genuine participation, particularly in ATU Gagauzia, where the social, linguistic and informational context requires tailored approaches. Without inclusive communication, the WPS Agenda cannot be localised, women's participation remains formal, and inclusive security cannot be co-created with the community.

13 What is human security? Available: <https://www.un.org/humansecurity/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Brochure1rus.pdf>

14 Monitoring report (2023–2024) on the UNSCR 1325 Implementation Programme for 2023–2027. Available at: <https://pisa.md/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/raport-de-monitorizare-pentru-anii-2023-2024-al-programului-national-de-implementare-a-rezolutiei-1325-un-security-council-resolution-on-women-peace-and-security-for-the-years-2023-1-1.pdf>

15 Strategic communication plan on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. PISA, 2024. Available: https://pisa.md/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/PLAN-de-comunicare-strategica__1-merged.pdf

This gap becomes critical, especially when security is perceived differently at the local level compared to the central level. Empirical data indicate that insecurity is mainly associated with economic, social and institutional factors - inflation, poverty, lack of trust in institutions and limited access to services - and less so with direct military threats¹⁶. At the same time, gender-related structural barriers persist: social stereotypes, limited participation of women in decision-making processes, and a diminished perception of their role in the security sphere. These realities confirm that, in the absence of a localised approach, national policies risk failing to meet the real needs of the population. As the structure of differing security needs shows, women, men, girls and boys are exposed to distinct risks - ranging from domestic violence and economic insecurity to social exclusion [Annex 5]. These differences cannot be addressed through uniform policies.

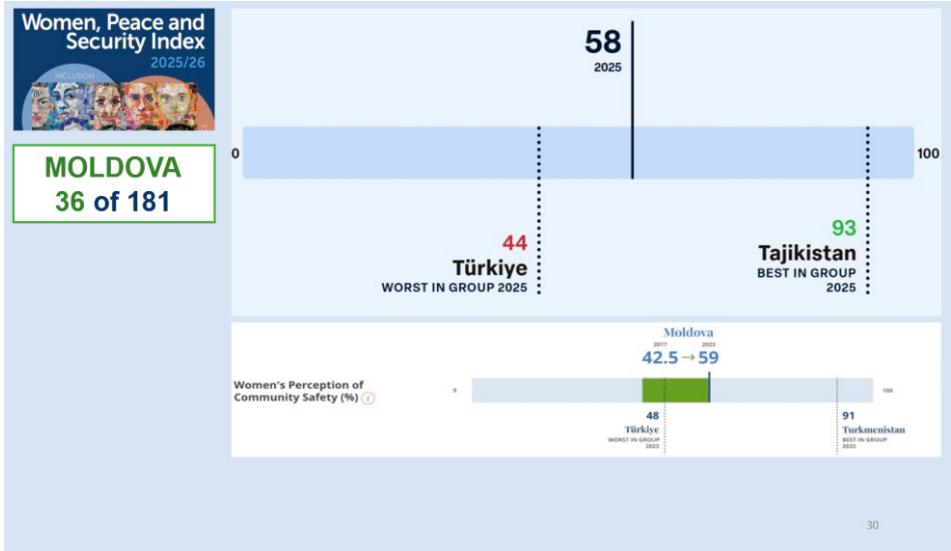


Figure 1. Women’s perception of safety in the community (%)

Source: <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/the-index/country/moldova/>

In this context, the indicators presented in the *Women, Peace and Security Index (2025/2026)*¹⁷ are relevant, as they offer a meaningful perspective on the

16 Study on the knowledge, attitudes and practices of the population in the districts of Comrat, Ceadăr-Lunga, Vulcănești and Taraclia regarding sources of information and attitudes towards gender equality and the role of women in public life. Institutum Virtutis Civilis, 2026, p. 62. Available at: https://ivcmoldova.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/studiu_RO_20.03.pdf

17 Women, Peace and Security Index. Available at: <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/the-index/>

perceived dimension of human security, particularly from women's perspective. In the case of the Republic of Moldova, ranking 36th out of 181 countries is a high score. However, to understand the real situation, it is worth analysing each indicator separately. Thus, 36th place indicates an average level of performance in terms of inclusion, justice and security, but also highlights the existence of persistent vulnerabilities.

Data on *women's perceptions of community safety*¹⁸ show that, in the Republic of Moldova, the level stands at approximately 58% in 2025 (Figure 1), reflecting an improvement compared with previous years (approximately 42.5% in 2017). This positive trend suggests progress in certain areas of everyday safety, but the level remains moderate, indicating that almost half of women do not feel fully safe in their communities. Compared to other countries, the discrepancies are significant: whilst in countries such as Tajikistan the level of perceived safety reaches 93%, in other contexts, such as Turkey, it drops to 44%. This variation confirms that the perception of security is strongly influenced by structural factors such as institutional stability, social cohesion, levels of violence, trust in authorities and social norms regarding the role of women.

For the Republic of Moldova, the figure of 58% must be interpreted in the context of a complex security environment, characterised by: proximity to the conflict in Ukraine, economic and energy pressures, low levels of trust in institutions, the persistence of gender-based violence and social stereotypes, exposure to disinformation and hybrid risks.

This indicator is particularly relevant as it reflects **perceived security**, not just formal security. Unlike traditional security indicators (military or institutional), women's perception of safety captures essential dimensions of human security: freedom of movement, protection against violence, trust in the community, and the ability to participate in social and economic life. In this sense, the localisation of the WPS Agenda becomes an essential mechanism for: (-) adapting policies to community realities; (-) building trust between citizens and institutions; (-) preventing social tensions and conflicts; (-) strengthening community cohesion and resilience.

18 Note: Community safety directly influences women's mobility and their opportunities for participation outside the home. Perceptions of safety can be affected by fear of violence, unsafe public spaces or a lack of adequate infrastructure, including street lighting, with effects on women's immediate and long-term well-being

Thus, the National Action Plans are not merely technical tools for implementing an international agenda, but become genuine strategic mechanisms for the governance of human security. They create a functional bridge between the global and local levels, facilitating the translation of international commitments into public policies adapted to the realities of communities. In this way, security is transformed from an abstract, state-centred concept into a concrete dimension, experienced daily by citizens, which includes personal safety, economic stability, social cohesion and trust in institutions. In this context, the analysis of global indicators on peace, gender equality, state fragility and human security becomes essential to understanding the link between good governance, inclusion and societal resilience. Annex 6 makes it clear that sustainable security cannot be achieved exclusively through military or coercive means. It is the result of a combination of effective governance, social inclusion and gender equality. In this regard, the WPS Agenda and National Action Plans become essential tools for reducing state fragility and for strengthening human security, particularly by localising policies and adapting them to the real needs of communities.

1.2 Prerequisites for implementing the *Women, Peace and Security Agenda* in ATU Gagauzia.

Description of the situation

Regional characteristics and implications for security and social cohesion



ATU Gagauzia is a regional area characterised by political, identity-related and socio-economic features that directly influence the dynamics of security, social cohesion and the implementation of the *Women, Peace and Security Agenda*. The region's distinctiveness stems from its autonomous status, distinct ethno-linguistic profile and geographical location on the border with Ukraine's Odessa region – factors that amplify the region's strategic relevance in the current regional security context. At the same time, the existence of a mixed governance model, in which security responsibilities are shared between the central and regional levels, creates a

need for permanent institutional coordination. This framework is further complicated by the vulnerability of the regional information space to polarisation and disinformation, factors which influence public perceptions and the level of trust in institutions.

The region's political and administrative structure is regulated by Law No. 344/1994 on the special legal status of Gagauzia¹⁹, which establishes the existence of its own regional institutions, including the People's Assembly and the Executive Committee. However, the fundamental components of security and public order remain integrated into the national system, making cooperation between central and regional authorities an essential element for the effective functioning of security and crisis management mechanisms.

From a demographic perspective, the region comprises 32 localities and, as of 1 January 2025, had a population of 112,983 inhabitants, of whom 60,367 were women and 52,616 were men²⁰. At the same time, the high proportion of the rural population, at 58.6%, influences access to public services, infrastructure and economic opportunities, contributing to the exacerbation of social and territorial vulnerabilities.

The region's ethno-linguistic profile also impacts the effectiveness of institutional communication and the reception of public messages. According to the 2024 census, 81.2% of residents identified as Gagauz, and 77.2% indicated Gagauzian language as their mother tongue²¹. Given its proximity to Ukraine and exposure to the effects of the war, the region is becoming more vulnerable to hybrid risks, polarisation and regional instability. In this context, the OSCE has for several years regarded the functioning of autonomy and the strengthening of social cohesion as relevant components of preventive security.

19 Law No. 344 of 23 December 1994 on the special legal status of Gagauzia (Gagauz-Yeri) Published: 14 January 1995 in the Official Gazette No. 3-4, Article 51

20 Regional statistics. https://statistica.gov.md/ro/statistic_indicator_details/29.

21 Ethnocultural characteristics. Final results, public event, 20 October 2025. Available at: https://statistica.gov.md/files/files/evenimente/2025/20.10.25_Eveniment_rezultate_RPL_etnii/Prezentare_RPL%202024_20_10_1025.pdf

Socio-economic and environmental vulnerabilities and their impact on community resilience

The region's socio-economic and environmental context reflects the existence of persistent structural vulnerabilities, which directly influence community resilience and human security. The regional economy is heavily dependent on agriculture, a sector accounting for approximately 27% of regional GDP, whilst per capita GDP remains among the lowest in the Republic of Moldova²². In this context, the decline in regional

agricultural production by approximately 8% in 2023, in contrast to national trends, highlights the regional economy's marked dependence on climatic factors and economic volatility. Persistent poverty, underdeveloped infrastructure and dependence on climatic conditions directly affect economic security and contribute to deepening social inequalities. Infrastructural vulnerabilities are also reflected in the fact that approximately 70% of localities lack adequate sewerage systems²³, and over 84.4% of wells do not meet drinking water standards²⁴. These issues affect both the quality of life of the population and the ability of communities to respond effectively to crisis situations.

The environmental dimension exacerbates regional fragility and intensifies pressures on community security. Frequent droughts, the lack of efficient irrigation systems and limited capacity to adapt to climate change contribute to increased economic and food insecurity. At the same time, environmental degradation and poor waste management place additional pressure on local ecosystems and public health.

Consequently, economic, social and environmental vulnerabilities do not operate in isolation, but are interconnected and generate a pattern of systemic fragility. This pattern simultaneously affects community resilience, institutional response capacity and the level of human security at the regional level.

22 OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Christophe Kamp concludes first official visit to Moldova. Available at: <https://hcnm.osce.org/hcnm/588691>

23 Modernisation of local public services in the Republic of Moldova. Available at: https://www.adrgagauzia.md/public/files/5.07.2018_FINAL_PRS_WSS_ENG.pdf

24 Note: In Moldova, 90% of settlements have no sewerage system. Available at: <https://logos-pres.md/en/news/in-moldova-90-of-settlements-have-no-sewerage-system/>

Structural barriers and limited participation of women in decision-making and security processes

The situation of women in the region is influenced by gender stereotypes, patriarchal norms and information polarisation, factors which affect women's participation in decision-making processes and in security-related sectors. Although there are examples of female leadership and training initiatives, women's institutional representation remains low. In this context, recent studies show that stereotypes and structural barriers continue to limit women's integration into the security sector and decision-making processes²⁵. Socio-political research conducted in southern Moldova highlights the fact that media content originating from the Russian Federation significantly influences local political and geopolitical perceptions, including representations of women's roles in society and security. In these circumstances, reducing stereotypes requires both changes in institutional culture and the development of coherent mechanisms for strategic communication and civic education.

Women's limited participation in security and administration sectors is influenced, among other things, by the unequal distribution of family responsibilities and the lack of gender-sensitive policies. During the activities carried out in the region, participants highlighted barriers such as self-exclusion, lack of self-confidence and the reduced visibility of women in the public sphere, factors which contribute to their diminished involvement in community and institutional processes. Data on political participation reflect these structural trends. In the 2023 local elections, the proportion of women standing as mayoral candidates in ATU Gagauzia was 24.1%, below the national average of 30.3%, and compared to the 2019 election, there was a decrease of 2 percentage points²⁶. These figures highlight the need for measures aimed at building trust, developing women's leadership and increasing women's participation in local decision-making processes.

25 Elena Mârzac. Perceptions and attitudes regarding the role of women in peace and security processes in the Republic of Moldova. Available at: https://pisa.md/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Studiu_Perceptiile-si-atitudinile-privind-rolul-femeilor-in-procese-de-pace-si-securitate-in-Republica-Moldova.pdf

26 "Mayors in the shadows" Study on the representation of women and men in elected positions at local council level. Available at: https://progen.md/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Raport-alegeri-pri-mari_2023-1.pdf, p. 8

Gender-based violence, disinformation and the challenges of localising the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

One of the key challenges for implementing the WPS Agenda in ATU Gagauzia is the context in which gender-based violence and social tolerance of certain forms of abuse remain high. OSCE data on violence against women show that nearly three-quarters of women who have had a partner have experienced violence from him, with psychological violence being the most widespread form of abuse. In this context, strengthening protection infrastructure and developing a coordinated community response become essential components of human security at the regional level.

At the same time, the regional information space remains highly exposed to propaganda and disinformation, and the regional media continues to be vulnerable to political influence and pressure. The high level of trust in the media in the Russian Federation contributes to the deepening of polarisation and the intensification of suspicion towards central institutions, affecting social cohesion and the ability of institutions to build trusting relationships with the population.

In these circumstances, ATU Gagauzia highlights the need for an approach to the WPS Agenda rooted in local specificities and regional realities. In a context characterised by identity and territorial sensitivities, women's participation in community dialogue, conflict prevention and the strengthening of social cohesion can help reduce polarisation and build community resilience. Initiatives carried out between 2025 and 2026²⁷ have demonstrated a local demand for training, cooperation between authorities and civil society, and the expansion of women's participation in decision-making processes. *However, the effective implementation of the WPS Agenda continues to be influenced by regional political volatility, tensions between Chişinău and the autonomous regions, limited access to disaggregated public data, and the existence of cultural and informational sensitivities. In this context, the WPS Agenda risks being perceived more as an external initiative than as a tool aimed at strengthening human security and local resilience.*

27 Events organised by MCI, PISA, Institutum Virtulis, Women of Moldova, etc.

In conclusion, the implementation of the WPS Agenda in ATU Gagauzia requires measures tailored to regional specificities and existing vulnerabilities. Integrating the WPS Agenda as a tool for strengthening human security, community resilience and social cohesion can help enhance the capacity of local institutions to respond to social, economic and geopolitical pressures.

1.3 Perceptions and stereotypes regarding women's participation in decision-making processes in ATU Gagauzia*

The issue of women's participation in politics and decision-making processes is an important indicator of a society's democratic development. In ATU Gagauzia, this issue has a particular specificity: despite women's visible involvement in local public administration, their representation at the regional level has long remained limited. The main paradox lies in the fact that society has proved ready to support women in the highest political office, but has failed to ensure a comparable systemic presence of women in the representative institutions of power - at local and regional level.

Since the establishment of autonomy in 1994, women's participation in the political life of Gagauzia has developed unevenly. At the local level, women have gradually consolidated their positions through active involvement in social and community life, whilst institutional and cultural barriers have persisted in regional government bodies. In this context, the election of two women to the office of Bashkan set a significant political precedent, which influenced public perceptions of acceptable models of female leadership in the region.

Gender stereotypes in public perception

The political culture of ATU Gagauzia (ATUG) has historically been shaped by traditional patriarchal values. Women were primarily perceived as: the keepers of the family, educators of children, and representatives of the social sphere - school and hospital directors and, very rarely, organisers of the local community. For this reason, women's participation in politics was long perceived as secondary to the role of men. This was particularly true of regional politics

* Authoress: Jecova Ecaterina

– elections for the office of Bashkan and for the People’s Assembly of Gagauzia. In society, this situation, in which women were not promoted to elected political office, was long justified by the patriarchal nature of Gagauz society. It was widely accepted that persistent stereotypes existed, according to which: politics is a ‘male domain’, women are less capable of making firm political decisions, men are better suited to managing conflicts and political competition, and women are effective in the social and humanitarian spheres.



Local training session "Women in peace processes: needs and prospects for Gagauzia",
19–20 February 2026, Avdarma village, ATU Gagauzia

Source: CMI – Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation

At the same time, at the level of local public administration, attitudes towards women were considerably more positive. Women were often perceived as responsible administrators, more attuned to the needs of the population and less prone to conflict in the exercise of leadership roles. For this reason, women achieved significantly better results in elections for village and town councils, as well as for mayoral positions. However, women’s participation in electoral processes remained at around 5–10% until the early 1990s.

Women in the local public administration system and public institutions.

The mid-1990s became the most propitious period for women in Gagauzia to participate in electoral processes. By then, the Republic of Moldova was already organising its affairs as an independent state, and Gagauzia had obtained autonomous status in 1994. It was during this period that local councils within the autonomous region became more active. From the mid-1990s onwards, women were actively elected as councillors in village and town councils, representing the fields of education, health and culture. This can be explained by several factors: the high level of trust within local communities, women's authority in the social sphere, the less politicised nature of local elections, and women's close ties with a large number of people through their professional activities.

The appointment of women to leadership positions in public institutions also provides food for thought on the themes of gender equality and female leadership. During the period 2024–2026, women hold a significant proportion of leadership positions in public institutions in Gagauzia, yet their representation in local public administration bodies remains considerably lower. The highest level of female representation is observed in the pre-school education system. All 59 kindergartens (early years education institutions) in the autonomous region are headed by women, accounting for 100% of leadership roles in this sector. Women also hold a dominant position in general education institutions (secondary schools and lower secondary schools): of 45 institutions, 41 are led by women, which corresponds to a share of 91%. In the specialist secondary vocational education system, women lead 3 of the 4 existing institutions (75%).

In the field of extracurricular education, which includes creative and sports institutions, the level of female representation is lower: out of 14 institutions, 6 are led by women, which constitutes 43%. In local public administration bodies, women's participation is considerably lower. Of the 26 mayors of localities in Gagauzia, only 5 are women, representing 19.2%. This demonstrates the continued existence of a gender imbalance in elected leadership positions. In the local councils of municipalities, towns and villages, women are represented to a greater extent. Of the 407 local councillors, according to our calculations, approximately 142 are women, representing around 35% of the total number of councillor seats.

The analysis thus shows that women play a leading role in the management of educational institutions in Gagauzia, particularly in pre-school and gener-

al education. At the same time, their participation in political leadership and decision-making processes at the local government level remains significantly lower, indicating the need to further promote gender balance in elected and executive bodies. Gradually, since the establishment of autonomy, the number of female mayors has also increased. This trend has been particularly evident in rural areas, where voters prioritised the practical results of a candidate's work over their gender.

However, even at the local level, women faced difficulties such as limited access to the financial resources needed to run election campaigns, and the need to balance professional work with family responsibilities and household duties. In rural areas, running a household is time-consuming, and women are inevitably involved in these activities. Over time, however, technological developments have made it easier to manage household tasks, and women have begun to play a more active role in the public life of their communities.

In the current local government bodies of the autonomous region, elected in 2021, across the 26 localities, 5 mayoralties are led by women - 19.2%, and, according to our calculations, approximately 142 women were elected as councillors out of a total of 407 councillors. Given that mayors and councillors are usually nominated with the support of various political parties active in the Republic of Moldova, there is a tendency for political parties to rely more often on male candidates in local elections, whilst women are most frequently promoted as independent candidates. It should be noted that the events of 1990, during the so-called 'volunteers' march' to Gagauzia, provided a significant impetus for women's activism. At that time, women took part alongside men in the protests and became participants in those historic events. According to our observations, it was then that strong support formed within society for the women who later became symbols of female leadership. Their names are part of Gagauzia's history, and they have led various fields of activity.

We can mention the names of some of them:

- Maria Marunevici – researcher, politician, director of the Gagauzia Scientific and Research Centre;
- Alexandra Molla – public activist, head of the Gagauzia Department of Culture;

- Evghenia Ciorba – public activist, head of the Gagauzia Education Department;
- Vera Balova – public activist, Vice-President of the People’s Assembly of Gagauzia in the 2nd legislative term, Head of the Education Department of Gagauzia from 2006 to 2015;
- Evghenia Risilian – public activist, who, from the 1990s to the present day, having been elected on several occasions, has served on the Cismichioi Village Council.

These are just the names of a few women whose leadership was driven by socio-political events, and whose example has represented a remarkable presence of women in the management of processes within the autonomous region.

The People’s Assembly of Gagauzia: ‘male-dominated’ politics.

The institution least accessible to women has remained the People’s Assembly of Gagauzia. It should be noted that elections to the autonomous region’s legislative body take place in 35 electoral constituencies, but each locality is represented in the PAG by at least one deputy. The Law “On the Special Legal Status of Gagauzia” was adopted in 1994, and in 1995 the first elections were held for the People’s Assembly – the legislative body of Gagauzia, “vested with the right to adopt normative acts within the limits of its competence”. Of the 35 deputies in the first term of the PAG, only one woman was elected – Maria Baltatu, a deputy from the village of Dudulesti, Comrat district. According to the 2004 census, published on the website statistica.gov.md, 45 people lived in the village (43 Moldovans and 2 Gagauz), whilst the 2024 census indicates that only one person lives in the locality.

In the article by journalist Alina Mihalchina published on the website nokta.md, we find the following information:

- between 1995 and 2021, women accounted for only around 8% of the members of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova;
- in some election campaigns, female candidates accounted for just 5–15%;

- in the legislature elected in 2021, women secured only around 3% of the seats.

It is interesting to note that in the 1999 elections for the People's Assembly of Gagauzia, 201 candidates were registered, of whom 11 were women. It is noteworthy that in two constituencies, two female candidates each ran for the seat of deputy, and in both constituencies – Ceadir-Lunga and Comrat – female deputies were elected. This remains a unique case in the history of elections to the PAG. Neither before nor after 1999, including in the most recent elections in 2021, were two female candidates registered simultaneously in a single constituency.

Throughout the entire existence of the PAG, the proportion of women among deputies has remained extremely low. In some legislatures, women accounted for only a few per cent of the body of deputies. Throughout the entire existence of the autonomy, not a single female deputy has ever been elected to the PAG from any of Gagauzia's 17 localities. In contrast, female deputies were elected once each from the localities of Joltai, Cazaclia, Copceac, Cismichioi, Ceadir-Lunga, Avdarma, Besalma and Chiriet-Lunga. There were women who were elected as deputies to the PAG twice or even four times – from the villages of Cazaclia and Joltai, respectively. Furthermore, two female MPs were elected from the village of Chioselia Rusa and the municipality of Comrat in different terms of the PAG.

In the current 7th term of the PAG, 123 people stood as candidates, 18 of whom were women, representing 14.6% of the total number of candidates. These figures are available on alegeri.md. Following the first round of voting, only one woman was elected to the PAG, and the second round saw another female MP elected. Today, there are only two female MPs in the PAG: one represents the constituency of Ceadir-Lunga municipality, and the other – the village of Congaz. Neither of them chairs any specialist committees, and no women were nominated for election to the position of vice-president or chairperson of the PAG. Thus, the women in the 7th legislature of the PAG are MPs who continue their professional work in management and education, but are not actively involved in legislative and political work.

Statistics on women's participation in PAG election campaigns show that female candidates account for up to 15% in each election campaign, whilst the propor-

tion of those elected does not exceed, on average, 3–5%. This suggests that the higher the number of female candidates, the greater the likelihood that more women will be elected. This means that it is necessary to strengthen women's participation in electoral processes. This situation can be explained by a number of factors: the dominance of male political networks, high competition, the personalised nature of regional politics, and stereotypes that 'tough' and 'dirty' politics is a sphere reserved for men. Furthermore, female candidates have often faced insufficient campaign funding, limited support from parties, excessive scrutiny of their personal lives, as well as criticism of their physical appearance and emotionality, rather than debate on their political programme.

An analysis of male and female participation in the Gagauzia elections, presented on www.alegeri.md, highlights significant gender inequality among candidates over the years. The proportion of men has consistently remained much higher than that of women:

- in 1995, men accounted for 96.2% of all candidates, and women for just 3.8%
- In 1999, men accounted for 93.5% and women for 6.5%.
- In 2003, men accounted for 90.3% of candidates, whilst women accounted for 9.7%.

In the following years, a gradual increase in the representation of women was observed:

- In 2008, their share reached 18.1%, whilst that of men fell to 81.9%.
- In 2012, women already accounted for 20.3% of candidates, and men for 79.7%.
- In 2016, the proportion of women was 15.1%, and that of men – 84.9%.
- In the 2021 elections, women accounted for 14.6% of all candidates, whilst men accounted for 85.4%.

Overall, the data show a positive trend in the increase in women's participation compared to the 1990s, but their representation in the electoral process in Gagauzia remains significantly lower than that of men and is far from achieving gender balance.

It is interesting to note that women constitute the majority of the population of the Gagauz autonomy. Thus, despite women's activity at the local level, their advancement in regional politics has long remained limited. Consequently, it can be concluded that projects dedicated to women's leadership still have significant scope for intervention in Gagauzia.

The paradox of Gagauz politics:

a female Bashkan amidst low representation of women in positions of power.

The first instance of this kind in the Gagauzia elections occurred in 2015. Twelve candidates stood for the post of Bashkan, including just one woman – Irina Vlah. It should be noted that among the male candidates there were figures with significant political experience, such as Dmitri Croitor – former Bashkan of Gagauzia (1999–2002), Alexandr Stoianoglo – Prosecutor of Gagauzia (1995–2001) and Deputy Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova (2009–2010), whilst Irina Vlah had 10 years of parliamentary experience in the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova as a member of the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova.

The 2015 elections for the position of Bashkan became the first election campaign in which voters demonstrated that the stereotype regarding the 'patriarchal nature of society' had been overcome in Gagauzia. In the election for the highest office in the autonomous region, despite the presence of a considerable number of male candidates, the people chose a woman for this highly responsible position. Here, the main issue must be analysed: were the votes cast for a female Bashkan a conscious choice, whereby voters felt it was time for the men in power to be replaced and for the administration of the autonomous region to be entrusted to female hands, considered by nature to be more caring and trustworthy, or was another factor at play?

We are inclined towards the conclusion that can be supported by numerous examples found in the lives of Gagauz families, where the primary role in setting the course of family life falls to the woman, and upon her rests the responsibility for the children's upbringing, managing finances, organising household work and other aspects of daily life. For this reason, patriarchy represents, in our view, an element inherited from the history of Gagauz families, which did not manifest itself clearly even during the Soviet period, and with the democ-

ratification of modern society and a better understanding of human rights, can no longer be considered relevant.

However, there is also the argument of ‘another factor’ in the election of a female Bashkan in 2015. As mentioned, patriarchy does not characterise Gagauz society, and the female candidate was perceived on an equal footing with the male candidates. It is possible that the following arguments were more convincing to voters:

- We have seen how men have performed in the role of Bashkan; let us try entrusting this role to a woman.
- The only female candidate was backed by the Socialist Party, the most popular party in the autonomous region.
- The only candidate who enjoyed the support of the Russian Federation’s leadership.

The 2023 Bashkan elections confirmed the willingness of the region’s residents not only to vote for a woman again, but also to vote even when very little was known about the female candidate. For the first time in the history of all electoral campaigns in Gagauzia, a person with no public experience, let alone political experience, stood for an elected office. Evghenia Guțul was elected Bashkan.

However, her election provides an opportunity to discuss the quality of the choice made by citizens for the position of head of the autonomous region – the guarantor of legality and of the Statute of Gagauzia. At the same time, the history of women politicians in Gagauzia will record, for the first time, the involvement of a female Bashkan in a case of electoral corruption. With no political background, Evghenia Guțul managed to become Bashkan, but she also became the first head of the autonomous region to end up behind bars following a conviction. The ‘distinctive feature’ of the phenomenon of the female Bashkan, illustrated by the example of the last two elected Bashkans, lies in the fact that it was precisely during their terms of office, over the last five years, that unprecedented tension was observed in relations between the official Comrat and Chișinău.

Conclusions. Analysing the data presented in this paper, we conclude that, since 1994, a certain pattern of women’s participation in the socio-political life of the autonomy and the country has emerged in Gagauzia: (-) the lower the level of

power, the greater the representation of women; (-) the more politicised and politically competitive the institution, the lower the number of women; (-) at the same time, voters have shown themselves willing to support a woman for the highest office – that of Bashkan.

Thus, Gagauzia combines a traditional semi-patriarchal political culture with a high willingness to vote for a woman in direct elections. This results in a peculiar paradox: women are very rarely elected to the People's Assembly of Gagauzia, yet in recent years they have been regularly elected to the position of head of the autonomous region.

The history of elections for the post of Bashkan of Gagauzia demonstrates a significant shift in public perception of women in politics. Whilst there were no women among the candidates at all between 1995 and 2010, since 2010 women have not only begun to stand in the elections for the post of Bashkan, but have also won three times in a row. At the same time, it is particularly relevant that women remain under-represented in the People's Assembly of Gagauzia, yet society is prepared to entrust a woman with the highest executive power of the autonomy. This fact makes the elections for the position of Bashkan one of the most telling examples of changing gender attitudes in Gagauzia's political culture and means that the issue of women's leadership must, more than ever, be the subject of debate and promotion within society.

1.4 The role of communication and cooperation in promoting women's participation in peace and security processes

Effective public communication, women's participation and cooperation between central and local authorities, civil society and the media play an important role in localising the *Women, Peace and Security* Agenda. For the ATU Gagauzia, these elements are essential in adapting the WPS Agenda to local realities and in strengthening an inclusive security framework based on dialogue, trust and community involvement. In this context, strategic communication acts as a bridge between the commitments of the WPS Agenda and community realities, helping to translate it into accessible language centred on human security, social cohesion and local resilience.

Strategic communication – a bridge between the commitments of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and community realities

This need is supported not only by the logic of the WPS Agenda, but also by the perceptions of the region's population. Based on data from the study by the *Institutum Virtutes Civilis* Public Association, the population associate the security primarily with the socio-economic dimension: 63% of respondents mentioned high prices, 48% poverty, and 43% infrastructure as the main community concerns. At the same time, 56% feel that their interests are insufficiently represented

at national level, 50% express the same view regarding the local level, and 69% consider that citizens' influence over public processes is limited.²⁸ This profile shows that, at the local level, security is predominantly understood through the prism of everyday issues: access to services, social protection, economic stability and the community's capacity to respond to crises. Consequently, the formulation and communication of the WPS Agenda in ATU Gagauzia must be grounded in the logic of human security and community participation. *Within this framework, the role of women gains public relevance when linked to specific areas such as child protection, violence prevention, community mediation, access to services, local crisis management and the strengthening of social cohesion.*

In terms of communication, studies show that the information landscape in ATU Gagauzia is dominated by local, regional and informal sources, and in crisis situations the population turns primarily to community-based channels.²⁹ At the same time, disinformation is perceived as a significant problem, the ability to verify information remains uneven, and trust is concentrated mainly around local actors and the regional media. *This profile confirms the need for strategic local communication that is multilingual, concise and built around trusted community messengers.* It follows that, *for the WPS Agenda, communication must be at once explanatory, preventative and geared towards building community resilience.*

28 Study on the knowledge, attitudes and practices of the population in the districts of Comrat, Ceadâr-Lunga, Vulcănești and Taraclia regarding sources of information and attitudes towards gender equality and the role of women in public life. Available at: https://ivcmoldova.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/studiu_RO_20.03.pdf

29 Public perception of security in the Republic of Moldova: challenges and strategic directions. Available at: <https://pisa.md/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Perceptia-publica-asupra-securitatii-in-Republi-ca-Moldova.pdf>

In this context, strategic communication fulfils the functions of informing, legitimising and mobilising at the same time. This facilitates greater public understanding of the WPS Agenda, supports the involvement of women in mediation, leadership and community response roles, and helps to mitigate the effects of stereotypes and information manipulation. The working materials mentioned in the study methodology highlight the relevance of multilingual messages, short and accessible formats, community meetings and the involvement of credible messengers, such as teachers, healthcare workers, social workers, local leaders and volunteers. *In a context where trust is built primarily through social proximity and local legitimacy, this approach provides the conditions for linking the WPS Agenda to the community's everyday experiences.*

Women's participation in peace and security processes is underpinned by a strong social foundation, yet this foundation coexists with persistent cultural and institutional barriers. The results of the questionnaires in this study indicate that women are particularly recognised for their role in mediation, community cohesion and the resolution of local issues, whilst their participation in formal peace processes, conflict prevention and decision-making is perceived as limited. At the same time, the main barriers are associated with patriarchal norms, limited institutional support and reduced access to information and training. *These findings support the need to strengthen the visibility of women's leadership and to expand women's participation from informal roles to institutional and strategic ones.*

Institutional cooperation and local legitimacy of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda



From an institutional perspective, the local implementation of the WPS Agenda depends on the quality of cooperation between the central government, local authorities, civil society and the media. Studies also highlight a number of structural limitations regarding public participation and trust in institutions.³⁰ A significant proportion of respondents stated that their interests are

not sufficiently represented, that they cannot influence decisions at local level, and that elections and public processes are not sufficiently accessible and inclusive. At the same time, trust in local and regional authorities is higher than

30 Ibid



Roundtable: *Women in peacebuilding processes: the role of local dialogue*, 5 December 2025, Avdarma village, ATU Gagauzia

Source: CMI – Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation

in central authorities, and people tend to perceive the local level as being closer and more relevant to their daily lives. This finding confirms that *promoting the role of women in peace and security processes in ATU Gagauzia must start from the local infrastructure of legitimacy: local councils, community leaders, civic networks, women's groups, local professionals and regional media institutions*. In the absence of such an anchorage, messages and initiatives risk being perceived as coming from outside, unclear or politicised, thus becoming more vulnerable to rejection, misinterpretation or political instrumentalisation.

Another important finding concerns the fragility of communication, coordination and mutual trust between local and central actors: not all residents are aware of the services offered by local councils, information is not sufficiently visible, there is a lack of communicators, and changes and policies are not explained in simple, accessible language. At the same time, the lack of trust between central authorities and local authorities, as well as competition among civil society organisations at the local level, reduce the willingness to cooperate and weaken the capacity for a joint response to community issues. *In*

this context, clearer coordination mechanisms are needed, along with mapping of relevant actors for collaboration, joint initiatives between NGOs and public institutions, and the development of structured partnerships with educational institutions, local media and, where possible, the private sector.

Community capital, communication and cooperation for the localisation of the WPS Agenda



From a community perspective, the results indicate a capital of solidarity that can be harnessed in localising the WPS Agenda. Although the general level of trust remains relatively low and is manifested mainly within close-knit circles, communities demonstrate a capacity for mobilisation in situations of crisis or need, particularly in small towns. This combination of widespread mis-

trust and solidarity activated in specific situations suggests that *local peace and security processes must be built through practical, visible actions that are connected to the community's needs. Within this framework, women, civil society and trusted local actors can facilitate dialogue, community mobilisation and the transformation of the discourse on peace and security into one that is relevant to the lived experience of the community.*

The materials analysed in the study indicate *the need for more active coordination, better-targeted information, clear explanations of policies and stable cooperation mechanisms.* In this context, the civil society has a strategic value and can: (-) initiate documents in the field of WPS, (-) contribute to monitoring and evaluation, (-) collect data through local surveys, and facilitate dialogue between the community and institutions. At the same time, the potential of cross-sectoral partnerships with educational institutions and the local media, and of using the digital space as a resource for mobilisation, information and civic solidarity, is highlighted.

The media is a key pillar of the implementation of the WPS Agenda, having a direct influence on perceptions of women, authority, security and institutions. In the local context, characterised by high consumption of regional and digital sources and a marked presence of competing geopolitical narratives, effective communication requires multilingual messages, partnerships between local public authorities, CSOs and the local media, as well as the promotion of con-

crete examples of women engaged in dialogue, leadership and the resolution of community issues. Moreover, the previous experiences in the Republic of Moldova show that civil society and the independent media can act as multipliers of resilience, especially when they explain the impact of manipulation in advance and in an accessible language, as well as provide communities with credible interpretative frameworks.

From a practical perspective, the second part of the study will analyse the main barriers limiting the implementation of the WPS Agenda in ATU Gagauzia, structured around six interconnected dimensions. *The interaction of these factors shows that the localisation of the WPS Agenda requires an integrated approach, in which strategic communication, cooperation infrastructure and local participation mechanisms are developed simultaneously.*

In this context, the strategic communication objectives related to the implementation of the WPS Agenda in ATU Gagauzia should aim at: (1) Increasing social acceptance of women's participation in public life, leadership and peace and security processes, by promoting credible local examples and combating gender stereotypes; (2) Strengthening trust and cooperation between central and local authorities, civil society and the media through clear, accessible and participatory communication; (3) Increasing access to credible information and reducing vulnerability to disinformation through multilingual messages, local channels and media literacy; (4) Promoting the WPS Agenda as a local human security agenda, not as an external issue, by linking it to concrete problems: violence prevention, child protection, access to services, crisis response and community cohesion; (5) Developing safe spaces for dialogue and participation, where women, young people and local stakeholders can effectively contribute to defining community priorities and solutions.

Overall, these objectives can transform the WPS Agenda into a practical framework for local action, capable of linking public policies to the real needs of the community and strengthening inclusive participation in peace and security processes.

1.5 The evolution of initiatives dedicated to women in ATU Gagauzia: from social support to leadership and strengthening community resilience*

Over the past four years, a distinct strand of projects dedicated to women has gradually emerged in ATU Gagauzia, aimed at strengthening economic resilience, increasing participation in public life and protecting women's rights. Most of these initiatives are implemented with the support of international development partners, including UNDP Moldova, UN Women Moldova, the European Union, Sweden, Romania and other external donors.

These projects address structural challenges specific to the region, such as limited employment opportunities, high economic dependence rates among women, insufficient participation in decision-making processes, domestic violence and the modest development of women's entrepreneurship, particularly in rural areas. The interventions aim to support women's entrepreneurship, strengthen economic opportunities for women in rural areas, prevent and combat gender-based violence, provide psychological, legal and social services, develop leadership and civic participation skills, engage women and girls in educational and community activities, and support vulnerable groups.

A defining feature of these initiatives is their practical and social focus. Most projects combine training, mentoring, counselling and psychological support with grant schemes designed to develop economic initiatives or facilitate social reintegration. Particular attention is paid to rural communities, where women's access to economic and educational opportunities remains limited.

Another distinctive feature is that a significant proportion of the projects are implemented by community organisations and initiative groups active in the fields of local development, social protection, civic participation and youth policy, rather than exclusively by organisations specialising in the promotion of women's rights. At the same time, the region continues to face a lack of sustainable centres and platforms dedicated to women, long-term mentoring programmes, networks for women entrepreneurs and a robust local support infrastructure.

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Despite these limitations, there is a steady increase in interest in women's leadership, social entrepreneurship, the creative industries and women's involvement in community development. This trend creates favourable conditions for the emergence of new initiatives that combine economic development, the promotion of cultural identity, youth participation and the strengthening of women's role in local communities.

Main directions of projects for women in ATU Gagauzia (2023–2026)

1. Economic empowerment of women

One of the most important national initiatives dedicated to women is *the Women's Entrepreneurship Support Programme* implemented by ODA. It has become one of the main instruments for supporting women's entrepreneurship in Gagauzia, particularly for women in rural areas and small towns. Through the grants and training programmes, women are provided with opportunities to start their own businesses, modernise their family farms, develop local and organic production, and strengthen their economic independence.

Particular attention is paid to women-led start-ups, youth entrepreneurship, the development of digital skills and the promotion of sustainable development - issues of particular importance for Gagauzia given the limited employment opportunities and high levels of migration. ODA programmes support initiatives in agriculture, micro-production, services, green business and family entrepreneurship, including projects developed within business incubators and local grant schemes.

A relevant example is Evghenia Lazareva³¹, who launched a farm for growing green microgreens in the municipality of Ceadir-Lunga. The business was developed within the Business Incubator, with financial support provided by UNDP Moldova and ODA³².

The project '*Sustainable and Resilient Communities through Women Empowerment*' was one of the most extensive initiatives implemented by UNDP Moldova in ATU Gagauzia in the areas of women's empowerment, sustainable devel-

31 'This is a mega-useful product' — how a family from Chadyr-Lunga built a business on microgreens. Available at: <https://nokta.md/459326-2/>

32 Microgreens. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/micro_green_farm/

opment and the strengthening of local communities. Funded by Sweden, the project was implemented between 2020 and 2025, including localities in ATU Gagauzia. The main aim of the project was to strengthen the resilience of rural communities by expanding economic, social and educational opportunities for women, particularly for women in rural areas, women entrepreneurs and female-headed households. A relevant example is Stefania Ruseva from the municipality of Ceadir-Lunga, who participated in both phases of the project. During the first phase, she successfully launched her own business producing homemade canned fruit and vegetables. Subsequently, in 2025, during the second phase of the project, she expanded her business by opening a semi-finished products production unit and a catering service, demonstrating the long-term impact of investments in women's entrepreneurship and local economic development³³.

In ATU Gagauzia, the economic dimension represents the most developed area of intervention for women, with the majority of projects focused on entrepreneurship, self-employment and the development of family businesses, particularly in rural areas. Experience from ODA and UNDP programmes shows that small grants, combined with training, can generate sustainable businesses and strengthen women's economic independence. Projects are in particularly high demand in rural areas and small towns, and women are showing a growing interest in the green economy, food processing and the development of local brands. At the same time, many initiatives are evolving from home-based activities into functioning businesses. However, significant challenges remain, such as the time-limited nature of projects, the lack of mentoring mechanisms and post-grant support, insufficient cooperation networks for women entrepreneurs, and the concentration of activities in traditional sectors with low added value. Although a base of women entrepreneurs has already been established in the region, consolidating this progress requires the development of a women's business ecosystem based on mentoring, cooperation, digitalisation and long-term support.

33 How women in Gagauzia are developing eco-businesses with the support of Western partners. Available at: <https://nokta.md/foto-kak-zhenshhiny-v-gagauzii-razvivajut-eko-biznes-pri-podderzhke-zapadnyh-partnerov/>

2. Combating violence against women

Combating violence against women in Gagauzia is achieved through a combination of government programmes and civil society initiatives, which include the work of crisis centres, psychological and legal support services, as well as information and awareness-raising campaigns aimed at changing societal attitudes towards the phenomenon of domestic violence [Annex 7]. **The Centre for Victims of Domestic Violence**, established with the support of UNDP Moldova, operates in the region. It provides temporary shelter and integrated support and protection services for women affected by violence and their children.

This area represents one of the most developed institutional sectors in the region. In ATU Gagauzia, there is already a support infrastructure comprising crisis centres, psychological and legal support services, as well as protection programmes for women and children affected by violence. An important aspect is that interventions are gradually evolving from emergency response towards integrated rehabilitation and social reintegration services. In this context, the *Biaz Gul* Public Association has established itself as the region's leading specialist organisation in the field of preventing and combating gender-based violence. The large number of projects implemented and the constant support from international partners reflect both the trust of donors and the real need for these services.

3. Women's leadership and participation in decision-making processes

Women's leadership and the expansion of women's participation in decision-making processes in Gagauzia are gradually being strengthened through educational programmes, media initiatives and projects implemented by civil society organisations. These interventions aim to foster a new generation of women leaders, develop management and communication skills, and increase the visibility of successful female role models in the public sphere.

One successful project in this area, aimed at strengthening the role of women in Gagauz society and combating disinformation, was '*The Path to Success* (2025)',

implemented with financial support from *International Media Support* (IMS).³⁴ The project presents the stories of women who have succeeded in establishing themselves in the fields of business, education and community work, including with the support of European programmes. The initiative involved the production of five documentary films, each lasting approximately 20 minutes, produced in Russian and subtitled in Romanian and Gagauz. The video content was complemented by infographics, short videos and podcasts, distributed via the *LAF.md* media platform, social media and partner regional media organisations. The project helped to raise the profile of women leaders and promote positive role models, demonstrating the active role of women in the development of local communities. At the same time, the initiative aimed to combat gender stereotypes and strengthen public confidence in women's participation in economic and social life.

Between 2025 and 2026, the *Institutum Virtutes Civilis* Public Association, an organisation based in Chişinău, implemented two initiatives aimed at promoting women's participation and strengthening social cohesion. These are the 'Women for Leadership and Effective Governance' project³⁵, through which an Academy was established dedicated to developing leadership skills and women's participation in decision-making processes, and the 'Empowering People and Communities to Strengthen Social Cohesion' project, under which a sociological study was conducted on social perceptions, gender relations and community cohesion in ATU Gagauzia and in Taraclia district.

This area is still in a consolidation phase. Although leadership academies, media projects and educational programmes have emerged in recent years, women's systematic participation in politics and decision-making processes remains limited. Positive developments include growing interest in leadership programmes, increased visibility of women in the public sphere, the promotion of new role models, and more active involvement of women in community life. Furthermore, the region has few platforms dedicated to women, limited support networks for women leaders, and their participation in local politics re-

34 What lies behind the project 'Path to Success: Stories of Women in Gagauzia'. Available at: https://laf.md/2025/07/04/%D0%B2%D0%B8%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%BE-%D1%87%D1%82%D0%BE-%D1%81%D1%82%D0%BE%D0%B8%D1%82-%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B5%D0%BA%D1%82%D0%BE%D0%BC-%D0%BF%D1%83%D1%82%D1%8C-%D0%BA-%D1%83%D1%81/#google_vignette

35 Women for Good Governance: 40 female leaders from Gagauzia strengthen their political skills. Available at: <https://ivcmoldova.org/femei-pentru-buna-guvernare-40-de-lidere-din-gagauzia-isi-consolideaza-competentele-politice/>

mains modest. These realities show that, in addition to training, long-term interventions aimed at changing social perceptions and strengthening women's participation in public life are necessary.

4. Women and peace processes

The issue of women's participation in peace processes and community dialogue has begun to develop actively in Gagauzia in recent years, against a backdrop of regional challenges, growing polarisation and the need to strengthen social cohesion. The main focus of these initiatives is on developing women's leadership, involving women in decision-making processes, conflict prevention and building trust within communities. Women are considered key actors in peace processes, human security and local dialogue, particularly in a multicultural region sensitive to political change such as Gagauzia. A relevant example is the training programme **'Women in peace processes: needs and perspectives for the region'**, organised in Gagauzia as part of the 'Gagauzia Dialogue' project, implemented by CMI – Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation with support from Sweden³⁶.



Local training: Women in peace processes: needs and prospects for Gagauzia,
19–20 February 2026, Avdarma village, ATU Gagauzia

Source: CMI – Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation

³⁶ Women in peace processes: two days dedicated to women's leadership in Gagauzia. Available at: <https://gagauziadiologue.md/ru/femeile-in-procese-de-pace-doua-zile-dedicate-leadership-ului-feminin-in-gagauzia/>

Furthermore, as part of programmes implemented by *UN Women Moldova* and *CALM (Congress of Local Authorities in Moldova)*, women from Gagauzia are participating in initiatives dedicated to *gender-responsive governance* and the promotion of inclusive decision-making processes at the local level. These programmes involve representatives from local councils and public administrations, including those in rural areas, contributing to institutional capacity building and the integration of a gender perspective into governance and community development processes.³⁷

This is one of the newest and most strategic areas of intervention for the region. What makes this approach unique is that women are seen not merely as recipients of assistance, but also as facilitators of community dialogue, community leaders, participants in conflict prevention, and promoters of peace initiatives. Training programmes in the field of peace- s demonstrate that international organisations increasingly perceive Gagauzia as an important space for strengthening community resilience and conflict prevention.

The strengths of this area are: women's high potential to contribute to local dialogue, the region's multicultural experience, and the presence of active women in communities and local public administration. Looking ahead, women's participation in peace processes could become one of the most promising areas of development for Gagauzia. Projects aimed at strengthening social cohesion, dialogue between different population groups, media literacy, preventing radicalisation, and involving women in sustainable development and community security processes are particularly relevant.

In conclusion, an analysis of projects implemented in ATU Gagauzia between 2023 and 2026 highlights a gradual diversification of interventions targeting women and an expansion of these beyond the traditional scope of social assistance. Whilst the initial focus was on combating violence and protecting vulnerable groups, in recent years there has been an increasingly pronounced shift towards strengthening economic resilience, developing women's leadership, participation in decision-making processes, and the involvement of women in peace and social cohesion initiatives.

37 Women's Local Leadership Drives Gender-Responsive Governance in 22 Moldovan Communities. Available at: <https://www.calm.md/en/womens-local-leadership-drives-gender-responsive-governance-22-moldovan-communities/>

The results demonstrate the important role played by international partners and civil society organisations in promoting these changes, given that local support infrastructure remains limited. At the same time, the persistence of gender stereotypes, the low participation of women in decision-making bodies and the lack of sustainable mentoring and cooperation mechanisms indicate that the progress achieved has not yet been fully institutionalised.

Looking ahead, the development of an integrated support ecosystem for women, combining economic opportunities, civic participation, education, leadership and the strengthening of women's role in peace processes, can contribute significantly to increasing community resilience and the sustainable development of the region. The experiences gained in recent years demonstrate the existence of significant potential for mobilisation and participation, which can be harnessed through long-term interventions and by strengthening cooperation between authorities, civil society and development partners.



Local training: *Women in peace processes: needs and prospects for Gagauzia*, 19–20 February 2026, Avdarma village, ATU Gagauzia

Source: CMI – Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation

BARRIERS IDENTIFIED REGARDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA IN ATU GAGAUZIA

2.1. The persistence of gender stereotypes and patriarchal norms

Relevance of the issue

Successive crises in recent years have contributed to the reinforcement of gender stereotypes at both national and local levels. Whilst in 2021, 47.9% of citizens believed that ‘a woman’s destiny is the family and the home’, by 2025 this proportion had risen to 62.4%. A worrying trend is also observed among young people aged 18–29, where the level of stereotypes rose from 27.6% in 2021 to 37.6% in 2025. These trends are relevant to the WPS Agenda, as they show that gender stereotypes are not merely a cultural legacy, but a problem exacerbated by crises and insecurity. In this context, ATU Gagauzia offers a relevant example of how traditional gender norms influence women’s participation, social cohesion and the ability of communities to respond inclusively to change.

Social perceptions in the region remain marked by persistent gender and identity stereotypes, which limit civic participation, social cohesion and the community’s ability to adapt to ongoing transformations. These contribute to maintaining power imbalances and perpetuating a social model in which inclusion and equality are difficult to achieve.

Manifestations of the issue in the context of ATU Gagauzia

Empirical data show significant resistance to *gender equality* and the persistence of traditional perceptions regarding women’s roles in the family and society: 58% of respondents believe that gender equality is not appropriate for the Republic of Moldova, and 59% maintain that women should not work if men can provide for the family³⁸. These results highlight a normative structure deeply rooted in patriarchal models, in which social roles are rigidly defined according to gender criteria.

In discursive and symbolic terms, these perceptions are underpinned by traditionalist narratives that define women’s roles almost exclusively within the

38 Study on the knowledge, attitudes and practices of the population in the districts of Comrat, Ceadîr-Lunga, Vulcăneşti and Taraclia regarding sources of information and attitudes towards gender equality and the role of women in public life, p. 41. Available at: https://ivcmoldova.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/studiu_RO_20.03.pdf,

domestic sphere as mothers and carers. Such representations are frequently reiterated in the public sphere, including through statements such as “a woman’s place is in the kitchen, raising children and looking after the family”³⁹. In analytical terms, these stereotypes function as mechanisms for legitimising structural inequalities, influencing both social expectations and the actual distribution of power within the community.

In this context, the findings discussed during the project activities confirm the relevance of data presented by previous research, which indicates the persistence of traditional gender roles in ATU Gagauzia. These are evident, among other things, in the distribution of childcare responsibilities between parents. Thus, when a child is ill and needs to stay at home, in 73.7% of households it is the mother who stays at home with the child, either alone or primarily. In 20.3% of families, both parents stay with the child equally, and in only 5.3% of cases, it is the father who stays, either alone or primarily. This distribution persists regardless of educational attainment, employment status or income level. Among young parents (aged 20–34), the mother is more frequently (80.7%) the sole or primary person responsible for staying at home with the sick child. Among older parents (aged 35–59), the distribution is somewhat more even, although the mother often continues to bear the main responsibility (68.4%).⁴⁰

In practical terms, these norms are reflected in a traditional division of roles, in which women are associated with the family and caregiving, and men with authority and the role of provider. In this context, phenomena such as domestic violence are sometimes downplayed, which contributes to the under-reporting of cases and the perpetuation of discriminatory practices that limit women’s participation in public life.

ATU Gagauzia can be characterised as a relatively conservative region, where the modernisation of values coexists with the persistence of traditional norms. Gender discrimination manifests itself both through social attitudes and prejudices, and through the under-representation of women in decision-making positions. The perception that the man must be the ‘head of the family’, and that women’s leadership skills are inferior, continues to influence social and institutional relations.

39 Ziarul de Gardă, Together we are a force! Gagauzia hosted the Unity Forum, bringing together women from across Moldova. Available at: <https://www.zdg.md/stiri/impreuna-suntem-o-fora-gagauzia-a-gazduit-forumul-unitatii-unind-femeile-din-toata-moldova/>

40 Demographic profile of ATU Gagauzia. Chişinău, 2022, p. 36. Available at: https://www.expert-grup.org/media/k2/attachments/profilul_demografic_utag_ro_compressed.pdf

These realities intersect with an identity dimension marked by perceptions of cultural insecurity in the context of European integration. In certain segments of society, closer ties with the European Union are associated with the risk of losing Gagauz identity, a perception frequently exploited in political discourse. As a result, reluctance towards central authorities and international partners is growing, with narratives focused on autonomy and alternative geopolitical orientations being favoured.

Patriarchal norms remain deeply ingrained. Opinion polls show that approximately 58–59% of respondents believe that a man should be the head of the family, and that a woman is not obliged to work if she is financially supported. These perceptions limit women's access to equal opportunities and their full participation in public life.

On the issue of gender equality, the results paint a mixed picture, characterised by acceptance of women's participation in public life, alongside the persistence of certain cultural and family stereotypes. Although 78% of respondents believe that women are treated equally to men, 58% state that gender equality is an issue 'imported from other countries', 59% believe that traditions contribute to gender inequality, and 55% consider that women are too emotional for certain roles. At the same time, 72% believe that certain professions are specific to women, 60% believe that the final decision in the family rests with the man, and 59% view domestic violence as a personal matter. At the same time, 63% support women's involvement in leadership roles, and 62% in political roles. These figures indicate an openness towards women's participation, yet this coexists with cultural barriers and traditional norms that continue to influence the distribution of roles and authority in society⁴¹. *These findings suggest that the barriers to women's participation in peace and security are not only institutional but also normative, being linked to the social legitimacy of female authority and the way in which the community interprets the relationship between equality, tradition and social order.*

However, the studies and data collected through questionnaires also highlight favourable conditions for strengthening women's participation in public life

41 Study on the knowledge, attitudes and practices of the population in the districts of Comrat, Ceadăr-Lunga, Vulcănești and Taraclia regarding sources of information and attitudes towards gender equality and the role of women in public life. Available: https://ivcmoldova.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/studiu_RO_20.03.pdf

and in peace and security processes. Respondents acknowledge the significant presence of women in managerial positions, particularly in education, health and public services, and local examples are valued for their competence and efficiency.

Education is an ambivalent sphere. On the one hand, there remains a tendency to invest more in the development of boys, perpetuating gender inequalities. On the other hand, there is a growing need to promote equal opportunities and mutual respect, particularly among young people, where there is an increasingly pronounced shift towards relationships based on equality, to the detriment of patriarchal or matriarchal models.

Patriarchal norms continue to be reproduced within the family and the education system, including by women, contributing to the transmission of gender stereotypes across generations. The image of women as mothers and carers, and of men as protectors and figures of authority, remains dominant, and personal relationships are often valued more highly than professional merit and skills.

Nevertheless, there are signs of a gradual shift. Women's growing confidence in their own abilities and awareness of their role in society point to a potential for transformation that can be harnessed through education, public communication, local models of female leadership and inclusive mechanisms for participation. The idea that professionalism has no gender is becoming increasingly accepted, even though stereotypes and certain forms of competition among women continue to persist.

Areas for action and opportunities to rebuild trust

Main causes:

- the persistence of traditional cultural norms and patriarchal models of social organisation;
- traditionalist narratives that define women's role almost exclusively within the domestic sphere;
- the internalisation of gender stereotypes within the family, education and the public sphere;
- the under-representation of women in decision-making roles and limited access to leadership;

- the political exploitation of identity and geopolitical fears, which reinforces conservative narratives and resistance to change.

Stakeholders who can contribute to the solution: local and regional public authorities; educational institutions; civil society organisations; local and regional media; community leaders and women leaders in the region; central authorities and international partners.

Recommended measures:

- systemic interventions targeting both education and women's participation in public life, with a view to strengthening gender equality and social cohesion;
- the development of education focused on equal opportunities and mutual respect, particularly among younger generations;
- the creation of mechanisms to reduce persistent structural and cultural barriers to women's participation in decision-making processes;
- recognising and valuing the real roles assumed by women in the community;
- reducing the influence of narratives that legitimise structural inequalities and restrict women's access to equal opportunities.

Opportunities and lessons learnt:

- there is a noticeable shift in attitudes, particularly among young people, who reject both patriarchy and matriarchy in favour of relationships based on equality;
- there are signs of a gradual evolution in gender relations, particularly in everyday life;
- the growing confidence of women in their own abilities and their awareness of their role in society indicate an ongoing process of transformation;
- the idea that professionalism has no gender is becoming increasingly accepted, even though stereotypes and forms of competition among women persist, generated by a social environment characterised by limited opportunities.

Success stories from the Republic of Moldova show that gender stereotypes can be effectively combated by combining public awareness campaigns, promoting women leaders as positive role models, organising forums and networks of women's solidarity, and developing civic education and mentoring programmes. Recent experiences, including campaigns on the *Women, Peace and Security* Agenda, brochures on successful women in the security and defence sector, and local women's forums, demonstrate that changing perceptions is possible when interventions are tailored to communities and provide real, visible and credible examples.

Desired outcome: *To reduce the influence of gender stereotypes and patriarchal norms on community life and to strengthen women's equal participation in the public sphere and in decision-making processes.*

Strategic communication objective:

To increase the level of social acceptance of women's participation in public life, in peace and security processes and in decision-making structures, by promoting local messages and examples that challenge gender stereotypes and legitimise women's role as actors in community security.

2.2 The crisis of trust, lack of social cohesion and the culture of silence

Relevance of the issue

The level of interpersonal trust in ATU Gagauzia is characterised by profound structural fragility, reflected both in everyday social relations and in attitudes towards public institutions. Empirical data indicate that 'the level of trust between people is extremely low', suggesting not only a crisis of social capital but also a dysfunction in the mechanisms of community solidarity. In this context, changes in social norms and gender roles further contribute to social fragmentation: the traditional model of the man as head of the family is in decline, yet has not been replaced by a functional alternative model of engagement. Thus, a phenomenon of male social withdrawal is emerging, manifested through passivity or compensatory behaviours, including refuge in alcohol consumption or

abstract discourse, disconnected from the realities of the community. At the same time, women tend to prioritise family security and immediate stability, which reflects a pragmatic approach, but also a limitation on their involvement in the public sphere.

In the absence of a ‘collective project’ or a unifying idea that provides a shared sense of development, relations between communities and localities remain fragmented. This lack of a common direction contributes to the isolation of individuals and their disengagement from civic and political processes. Under these circumstances, social cohesion in ATU Gagauzia cannot be strengthened without systemic intervention. The only viable prospect appears to be the development of an integrated ‘community safety’ approach, which would rebuild trust through local engagement, dialogue and participation. The lack of a unifying vision capable of generating a sense of belonging and shared responsibility remains one of the region’s most significant vulnerabilities, with direct implications for social and democratic resilience.

Developments in the context of ATU Gagauzia

This social dynamic is amplified by a low level of trust in institutions and the information environment. According to the data, approximately half of the region’s inhabitants do not trust the national media in Romanian or the official statements of the central authorities. In crisis situations, the population turns predominantly to regional media (41%) or Russian-language sources (29%), whilst the official press is viewed with scepticism⁴². This preference for information is not neutral, but reflects deep identity and geopolitical divides, which influence perceptions of reality and limit the coherence of the information space.

The crisis of trust is closely linked to a high level of social fragmentation. Surveys highlight the main dividing lines: income (64%), language spoken (62%) and political preferences (58%), whilst 74% of respondents believe that these divisions are ‘artificially’ created by politicians⁴³. In this context, social cohe-

42 Study on the knowledge, attitudes and practices of the population in the districts of Comrat, Ceadăr-Lunga, Vulcănești and Taraclia regarding sources of information and attitudes towards gender equality and the role of women in public life, p. 27. https://ivcmoldova.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/studiu_RO_20.03.pdf,

43 Ibid.

sion is deeply affected, being described as a “generalised climate of insecurity and mistrust”, which hinders collective mobilisation and erodes the ability of communities to act in concert.

The level of social intolerance within the Gagauz community constitutes a significant dimension of societal fragmentation, reflecting both identity-based divisions and structural vulnerabilities in social cohesion. Empirical data highlight the existence of negative attitudes towards a wide range of social groups, including ethnic and religious minorities, which indicates a predisposition towards exclusion and a reduced capacity to accept diversity. In particular, it is significant that approximately 1 in 5 respondents express unfavourable attitudes towards speakers of Romanian⁴⁴, which suggests the persistence of identity-based tensions in relation to the national majority and contributes to the consolidation of a symbolic distance between the region and the central political sphere.

These manifestations of intolerance are closely linked to perceptions of social division. The majority believe that the segmentation of society along lines such as income, language spoken or political preferences is ‘artificially created’ by politicians, which reveals a deep mistrust of the political class and the mechanisms of representation. At the same time, this perception does not deny the real effects of these divisions, which continue to shape social relations and fuel tensions at the community level.

Nevertheless, the regional context also offers examples that demonstrate the potential to overcome these divisions. The case of the village of Congaz is illustrative in this regard. In the largest rural community in Gagauzia, characterised by marked ethnic diversity (Gagauz, Moldovans, Russians, Ukrainians and Bulgarians), a long-standing peaceful coexistence has been maintained, based on mutual respect and the preservation of each group’s traditions⁴⁵. This example highlights the fact that inter-community solidarity is not absent, but depends on the existence of functional mechanisms for dialogue and the cultivation of mutual respect.

44 Study on the knowledge, attitudes and practices of the population in the districts of Comrat, Ceadâr-Lunga, Vulcăneşti and Taraclia regarding sources of information and attitudes towards gender equality and the role of women in public life, p. 50. Available at: https://ivcmoldova.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/studiu_RO_20.03.pdf.

45 Ziarul de Gardă, Together we are a force! Gagauzia hosted the Unity Forum, bringing together women from across Moldova. Available at: <https://www.zdg.md/stiri/impreuna-suntem-o-forta-gagauzia-a-gazduit-forumul-unitatii-unind-femeile-din-toata-moldova/>

At present, however, economic and linguistic divisions remain the most visible and persistent sources of internal conflict. These are amplified by a crisis of trust in institutions and amongst community members, creating a vicious circle in which negative perceptions and social fragmentation reinforce one another. In this context, social intolerance should not be interpreted as an isolated phenomenon, but as the expression of a vulnerable social structure, in which differences are politicised and exploited, and mechanisms for inclusion and cooperation remain underdeveloped.

The public sphere in ATU Gagauzia is characterised by a pronounced culture of self-censorship, which significantly restricts freedom of expression and the quality of public debate. This dynamic is closely linked to the structure of the local media landscape, which is often perceived as monopolised or politicised, where pluralism of opinion is limited and sensitive topics are avoided. Under these circumstances, journalists exercise excessive caution, avoiding critical topics for fear of reprisals or political pressure⁴⁶.

The direct consequence of this media climate is the spread of self-censorship at a societal level. Citizens become reluctant to express their opinions, particularly on sensitive political or social issues, and the fear of social, professional or political consequences reduces engagement in public debates and the community's ability to promote change.

This 'culture of silence' affects the functioning of local democracy, limiting critical debate, the accountability of authorities and the circulation of ideas. At the same time, the fragmentation of civil society and the lack of independent platforms for expression accentuate the isolation of local actors and weaken social cohesion.

The impact is also evident on women's participation in the public life. Self-censorship and fear of speaking out contribute to their reduced involvement in decision-making processes, discourage them from standing for elected or leadership roles, and amplify a lack of confidence in their own abilities, particularly in the absence of visible models of female leadership. Thus, their exclusion is not only the result of formal barriers, but also of a social climate that discourages expression and the assumption of public roles.

46 Vitali Gaidarji. Restrictions on Freedom of Speech in Gagauzia: Threats to Democracy and Safety. Available: https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/FH-Restrictions-on-freedom-of-speech-in-Gagauzia_Eng-06-24.pdf

Local experts consistently emphasise the need to strengthen the protection of independent journalists and to develop institutional frameworks that guarantee freedom of expression and media pluralism⁴⁷. Only through such measures can the ‘culture of silence’ be overcome and an open public sphere be rebuilt, in which citizens participate actively and diversity of opinion is valued as the foundation of a functioning democratic society.

Areas for action and opportunities for rebuilding trust

Overcoming the crisis of trust and the culture of silence requires a shift from acknowledging social fragmentation to building local mechanisms for dialogue, participation and cooperation. Positive experiences identified in the Republic of Moldova and in ATU Gagauzia show that trust can be rebuilt when initiatives start at the community level, involve local authorities, civil society, women, young people and local leaders, and are supported by safe spaces for expression, media pluralism and joint projects.

Main causes:

- the extremely low level of interpersonal and institutional trust;
- social fragmentation along economic, linguistic and political lines;
- the lack of a ‘collective project’ or a shared mobilising idea;
- identity-based and geopolitical divides that influence perceptions of reality;
- social intolerance and a limited capacity to accept diversity;
- the politicisation and control of the local media landscape;
- a culture of self-censorship and fear of public expression;
- the lack of safe spaces for dialogue and mechanisms for inclusive participation;
- the absence of visible female leadership role models and social pressure on women who engage in public life.

47 Ibid

Stakeholders who can contribute to a solution: local and regional public authorities; central authorities; civil society organisations and local civic platforms; local and regional media; independent journalists; community leaders and local mediators; educational institutions; women's groups and women's leadership networks; development partners and international organisations that support freedom of expression, social cohesion and community dialogue.

Recommended measures / how this can be addressed:

- developing an integrated 'community safety' approach that rebuilds trust through local engagement, dialogue and participation;
- creating and supporting safe spaces for dialogue and mechanisms for inclusive participation;
- developing functional platforms for cooperation between communities and localities;
- strengthening the protection of independent journalists and the institutional framework guaranteeing freedom of expression and media pluralism;
- reducing the effects of self-censorship by opening up the public sphere for expression, deliberation and participation;
- encouraging women's participation in public life and developing visible models of female leadership;
- promoting inter-community dialogue and mutual respect in localities characterised by ethnic and linguistic diversity.

Opportunities and lessons learnt:

- the case of Congaz demonstrates that inter-community solidarity is not absent, but depends on the existence of functional mechanisms for dialogue and the cultivation of mutual respect⁴⁸;

48 Ziarul de Garda, Together we are a force! Gagauzia hosted the Unity Forum, bringing together women from all over Moldova. Available at: <https://www.zdg.md/stiri/impreama-suntem-o-forta-gagauzia-a-gazduit-forumul-unitatii-unind-femeile-din-toata-moldova/>

- the experience of the 13 localities in the Republic of Moldova that have become models of social cohesion, including Comrat and Taraclia, shows that professionally facilitated dialogue, joint activities and local ownership of initiatives can contribute to rebuilding trust and integrating social cooperation into local policies⁴⁹;
- peace and social cohesion initiatives implemented on both banks of the Dniester demonstrate that even in sensitive and polarised contexts, it is possible to build trust through local, participatory and inclusive projects that bring together women, young people and diverse communities⁵⁰;
- the model of local associations in the Republic of Moldova confirms that community participation, diaspora engagement and cooperation between citizens and local authorities can contribute not only to local development, but also to rebuilding trust and strengthening social cohesion⁵¹;
- the perception that divisions are ‘artificially’ created by politicians suggests there is potential for rebuilding social cohesion if political instrumentalisation and polarisation are reduced;
- local experts consistently emphasise the need to protect independent journalists and guarantee media pluralism, which points to clear courses of action⁵²;
- the fact that the exclusion of women is linked to the social climate, not just to formal barriers, shows that interventions must combine changing social norms with concrete measures for participation and visibility.

49 13 localities in the Republic of Moldova become models of social cohesion. Available: <https://moldova.un.org/en/312466-13-localities-republic-moldova-become-models-social-cohesion>

50 UN Moldova project strengthens peace and social cohesion on both banks of the Nistru river. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/moldova/press-releases/un-moldova-project-strengthens-peace-and-social-cohesion-both-banks-nistru-river>

51 Hometown associations drive local development and social cohesion in Moldova. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/moldova/press-releases/hometown-associations-drive-local-development-and-social-cohesion-moldova>

52 Vitali Gaidarji. Restrictions on Freedom of Speech in Gagauzia: Threats to Democracy and Safety. Available at: https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/FH-Restrictions-on-freedom-of-speech-in-Gagauzia_Eng-06-24.pdf

Success stories from the Republic of Moldova show that the crisis of trust, the lack of social cohesion and the culture of silence can be addressed by creating local spaces for dialogue, through participatory community initiatives and through mechanisms that bring together the authorities, civil society and citizens. A relevant success story for Gagauzia is the launch, in 2025, of the first Intergenerational Community Centre for Dialogue and Social Cohesion in Comrat, created as a safe space for meeting, cooperation and strengthening solidarity between generations.⁵³ The model of the 13 localities supported by UNDP and UNFPA, local peace initiatives on both banks of the Dniester, and projects developed through local associations demonstrate that trust and social cohesion can be strengthened when interventions are local, inclusive and institutionally supported.

Desired outcome: *Strengthening social and institutional trust, reducing community fragmentation and overcoming the culture of silence by developing a more open, participatory and inclusive public space.*

Strategic communication objective: *To strengthen trust between citizens, institutions and local communities by promoting dialogue, inclusive participation and safe spaces for expression, so that community issues can be discussed openly, without fear, stigmatisation or self-censorship.*

2.3. Information vulnerability and the impact of disinformation

Relevance of the issue

Limited access to credible information and persistent information vulnerabilities represent one of the most significant barriers to strengthening civic participation, public trust and support for gender equality and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Gagauzia. In this context, disinformation affects not only the quality of information but also the community's ability to correctly interpret social and political processes, to participate actively in public life and to develop resilience to manipulation.

⁵³ First Intergenerational Dialogue and Social Cohesion Centre launched in Comrat. Available at: <https://moldova.un.org/en/298064-first-intergenerational-dialogue-and-social-cohesion-center-launched-comrat>;

The language barrier, in turn, represents one of the most persistent structural vulnerabilities in ATU Gagauzia, with direct implications for social cohesion, access to information and civic integration. In the absence of coherent and sustained interventions, these problems keep the community in a state of informational isolation and limit the process of integration into the national space.

Manifestations in the context of ATU Gagauzia

The information landscape is dominated by informal, regional and digital sources. The most popular sources of information are friends and family, social media and traditional television, and in crisis situations the population tends to turn primarily to regional media, personal networks and local or regional authorities, whilst the national media in Romanian and communications from central authorities have a lesser influence. There is significant mistrust of the national media in Romanian and of official statements from central authorities, which is explained both by language barriers and by the perception that the realities in the south are not adequately represented and that the central narrative is distant, partisan or insufficiently adapted to local communities.

Available data show that the information landscape in ATU Gagauzia is dominated by regional sources: 56% of respondents get their information from family and friends, 50% from social media, and 41% from television. The most widely used platforms are TikTok (44%) and Facebook (41%), and in the event of a crisis, the main source of information is the regional media (41%), followed by the national media in Russian (29%) and⁵⁴. These data suggest that messages concerning women, peace and security are more likely to have an impact if they are conveyed through local channels that are accessible and credible to the community.

At the same time, 83% consider disinformation to be a problem in the Republic of Moldova, but 46% say they find it difficult to distinguish fake news from genuine news, and 6 out of 10 do nothing when they encounter false information. Furthermore, 55% do not trust the national media in Romanian, 52% do not trust statements from central authorities, whilst 62% trust regional media

54 Study on the knowledge, attitudes and practices of the population in the districts of Comrat, Ceadăr-Lunga, Vulcănești and Taraclia regarding sources of information and attitudes towards gender equality and the role of women in public life. Available at: https://ivcmoldova.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/studiu_RO_20.03.pdf

and 67% trust friends, neighbours and colleagues⁵⁵. These figures confirm the need for strategic local communication that combines information provision with media literacy and increased resilience to manipulation.

The language barrier represents one of the most persistent structural vulnerabilities in ATU Gagauzia, with direct implications for social cohesion, access to information and civic integration. Although Romanian (the official language of the Republic of Moldova) has a clear legal status, it is not mastered by the majority of the region's population, which exacerbates social and informational fragmentation. The local linguistic landscape remains dominated by functional bilingualism, in which Russian is used as the primary tool for inter-ethnic communication, whilst Gagauzian is preserved as a mother tongue and language of identity⁵⁶.

Empirical data confirms this reality: in 2021, only around 24% of respondents stated that they spoke Romanian fluently, whilst between 53% and 78% considered knowledge of the state language to be a factor in integration⁵⁷. Nevertheless, there is significant reluctance to accept this language proficiency as a civic duty, with surveys indicating that it is perceived as the least accepted obligation. This dissonance reflects not only a problem of language proficiency, but also one of identity and political perception.

The consequences are evident in the limited access to information from national sources in Romanian. Approximately 50% of residents state that they do not trust the national media in Romanian⁵⁸, and media consumption is predominantly oriented towards Russian-language sources. Analyses show that this situation is primarily driven by the language barrier, which disproportionately affects older generations, for whom a lack of knowledge of Romanian directly limits access to information and reduces interest in national media content. However, the problem is not exclusively linguistic. Some residents, although they understand Romanian, avoid consuming national media due to perceptions of political bias, the pro-European stance attributed to it, and

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid

57 Ibid

58 Study on the knowledge, attitudes and practices of the population in the districts of Comrat, Ceadîr-Lunga, Vulcăneşti and Taraclia regarding sources of information and attitudes towards gender equality and the role of women in public life, p. 28. Available at: https://ivcmoldova.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/studiu_RO_20.03.pdf

previous experiences deemed biased. Added to these factors are cultural and identity-related dimensions, including the perception that the national media does not adequately reflect local realities and the interests of communities in the south of the country. Significantly, young people highlight the intergenerational nature of these attitudes, emphasising the significant influence of older people's opinions on media consumption patterns within the family.

In practical terms, this linguistic and informational configuration creates a 'closed information circuit', in which Russian becomes the dominant channel for the production and distribution of media content. Under these conditions, access to objective and pluralistic information about local and national political processes is limited, and the diversity of information sources remains low.

The local Gagauz media is highly politicised. Local politicians use their own television stations and websites to promote their agenda. A telling example is the public broadcaster GRT: in March 2022, GRT's management was replaced by individuals affiliated with the ruling politicians, and the new management broadcast pro-Russian narratives, denigrating European integration⁵⁹. As a result, only 15% of residents said their trust in Moldovan state television had increased, whilst 28% said their trust had decreased. News from the Russian Federation and social media dominates the media landscape: in the context of the war in Ukraine, only 6% of Gagauz people support Ukraine, whilst 52% side with Russia. Furthermore, 60% get their news from social media and 52% from Russian television, whilst only 38% receive information about the war from the Moldovan media⁶⁰.

At the same time, independent Gagauz media is virtually non-existent: Nokta.md and Laf.md are among the few outlets producing quality journalism, but they face cyberattacks and pressure from pro-Russian groups. The result is that the Gagauz public sphere suffers from a lack of pluralism and is plagued by disinformation. Politicians are exploiting this vacuum: for example, the pro-Russian website GagauzNews frequently disseminates fake news and conspiracy theories (including warnings about a 'Romanian invasion'), undermining public trust in official information.

59 Vitali Gaidarji. Restrictions on Freedom of Speech in Gagauzia: Threats to Democracy and Safety. Available: https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/FH-Restrictions-on-freedom-of-speech-in-Gagauzia_Eng-06-24.pdf

60 Ibid

The quality of the local media environment is further undermined by the political capture of communication channels. The local public media council (GRT) has been criticised for initially serving particular political interests: for instance, during the period when the council's chair was associated with a pro-Russian party, the public television station promoted narratives favourable to that party, "determining votes and influencing lives".

Disinformation is perceived in ATU Gagauzia as one of the most significant vulnerabilities in the information space, both in terms of the scale of the phenomenon and its impact on social and political perceptions. Empirical data indicate a high level of awareness: 83% of respondents recognise disinformation as a serious phenomenon, and approximately 7 in 10 consider it a serious problem. This perception is more pronounced among certain groups, such as men (71%), people with medium (73%) and high (74%) levels of education, as well as those with negative attitudes towards the European Union (79%) or who are dissatisfied with local government services (79%)⁶¹. Significantly, the same perception is shared by 73% of those who do not verify information at all, suggesting an awareness of the problem without a genuine internalisation of preventive behaviours.

Thematically, information manipulation focuses predominantly on political topics, considered the area where distortions, propaganda and intentionally false information occur most frequently. This focus reflects the deeply politicised nature of the information landscape and the relevance of disinformation as a tool of influence. At the same time, young people explicitly identify war-related topics as being vulnerable to disinformation, which indicates a heightened sensitivity to geopolitical and security narratives⁶².

However, the level of critical literacy remains uneven and insufficient to effectively counter the phenomenon. Approximately 46% of respondents find it difficult to distinguish between fake and genuine news, and only 42% say it is easy or relatively easy for them to identify disinformation⁶³. Furthermore, one in four respondents state that they encounter major difficulties in this process,

61 Study on the knowledge, attitudes and practices of the population in the districts of Comrat, Ceadîr-Lunga, Vulcăneşti, Taraclia regarding sources of information and attitudes towards gender equality and the role of women in public life, p. 23 https://ivcmoldova.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/studiu_RO_20.03.pdf

62 Ibid., p. 23

63 Ibid., p. 24

a group dominated by rural residents (30%), people over 55 (29%) and those with a low level of education (33%). These figures highlight the existence of significant gaps in media literacy and critical thinking skills.

Another problematic issue is the population's passive behaviour in the face of disinformation. Approximately 60% of residents take no action when they encounter information they consider to be false⁶⁴, which indicates low civic engagement and a lack of accountability regarding the quality of the information landscape. Mechanisms for identifying and verifying information vary between groups: young people tend to use analytical and digital tools, whilst adults more frequently resort to social or intuitive mechanisms, based on trust in their close circle or on previous experiences. This differentiation reflects not only generational differences, but also the absence of standardised and systematic information evaluation skills.

Overall, a significant paradox emerges: although technical access to information is relatively widespread, citizens' involvement in combating disinformation remains limited. This discrepancy contributes to the perpetuation of a 'generalised climate of mistrust' and to the consolidation of systemic informational vulnerability. Disinformation acts as a factor distorting reality and as an amplifier of existing social tensions. It reinforces stereotypes, particularly those related to gender and identity, and heightens suspicion towards any official message, thereby eroding trust in the media and public institutions. *Consequently, disinformation in this context must be understood as a complex phenomenon that both reflects and, at the same time, deepens the structural fragilities of society: lack of trust, social fragmentation and low levels of media literacy.*

Areas for action and opportunities to rebuild trust

Main causes:

- the dominance of the information space by informal, regional and Russian-language sources;
- the language barrier and limited access to national sources in Romanian;

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 24

- the politicisation and capture of part of the local media landscape;
- a lack of pluralism and the weakness of the independent media;
- low media literacy and insufficient critical thinking skills;
- identity-based and geopolitical perceptions that fuel mistrust of official and central sources.

Actors who can contribute to a solution: local and regional public authorities; central authorities; local and regional media; independent newsrooms, including Nokta.md and Laf.md; educational institutions; civil society organisations; international partners supporting media and language literacy programmes; local communities and community leaders.

Recommended measures / how to address this:

- developing a local strategic communication strategy that combines information provision with media literacy and increased resilience to manipulation;
- aligning language policies with those on social inclusion and the development of media literacy;
- supporting government media campaigns tailored to the local language and context;
- expanding media and language literacy programmes;
- supporting independent media and informational pluralism;
- increasing access to objective and pluralistic information about local and national political processes.

Opportunities and lessons learnt:

- the data suggests that messages concerning women, peace and security are more likely to have an impact if they are conveyed through local channels that are accessible and credible to the community;
- there are some institutional and external initiatives aimed at mitigating this vulnerability. The authorities have begun to promote the Gagauz language through educational programmes and training courses for

teachers⁶⁵, whilst international partners support media and language literacy programmes;

- Young people tend to use analytical and digital tools to identify and verify information, which indicates significant potential for the development of interventions focused on media education and civic engagement.

Success stories from the Republic of Moldova show that the problem of limited access to credible information and vulnerability to disinformation can be effectively addressed through the development of independent local media, community media education, linguistically adapted content, and partnerships between NGOs, schools and journalists. Initiatives such as Stop Fals⁶⁶, local media, media literacy projects in minority languages, including *Media Literacy and Combating Disinformation among the Bulgarian Community in Moldova*⁶⁷, as well as media engagement programmes to promote gender equality developed by UN Women Moldova⁶⁸ and the Independent Press Association⁶⁹ demonstrate that information resilience increases when interventions are community-based, accessible and credible.

Desired outcome: *Increased access to credible information, reduced vulnerability to disinformation and a reduction in the impact of the language barrier on civic participation, public trust and social cohesion.*

Strategic communication objective: *To increase the community's access to credible information and strengthen resilience to disinformation by developing clear and accessible local communication that combines public information with media literacy and the promotion of credible sources of information.*

65 Government of the Republic of Moldova, Dorin Recean, 'Recean in discussion with young people from Gagauzia: Unity is our strength'. Available at: <https://stiri.md/article/social/recean-in-discutie-cu-tine-rii-din-gagauzia-si-taraclia-unitatea-e-puterea-noastra>

66 About us. Available at: <https://stopfals.md/ro/about-us>

67 Media Literacy and Combating Disinformation among the Bulgarian Community in Moldova. Available at: <https://icpmn.md/en/projects/alfabetizare-media-si-combaterea-dezinformatii-in-randul-comunitatii-bulgare-din-moldova>

68 Promoting Gender Equality with Media in Moldova. Available at: <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/06/promoting-gender-equality-with-media-in-moldova>

69 "Click for Gender Equality" Media Programme launched in Chisinau. Available: <https://moldova.un.org/en/14364-%E2%80%9CClick-gender-equality%E2%80%9D-media-programme-launched-chisinau>

2.4. Insufficient collaboration between the central government, local authorities and civil society in implementing the *Women, Peace and Security* Agenda

Relevance of the issue

The implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda at local level depends directly on the existence of effective cooperation between central government authorities, local authorities and civil society. In ATU Gagauzia, this collaboration remains fragile, uneven and often informal, which reduces the capacity of local actors to transform the WPS Agenda from a normative commitment into an applicable framework for community action.

The problem stems not only from a lack of resources, but also from a lack of mutual trust, insufficient communication, poor coordination and limited institutional capacity. Under these conditions, initiatives are fragmented, collaboration is often ad hoc, and policies and programmes are not sufficiently grounded in the community's real needs. For the WPS Agenda, this disconnect is particularly problematic, as women's participation, violence prevention, peacebuilding and community resilience require inter-institutional and cross-sectoral responses, not isolated interventions.

Findings in the context of ATU Gagauzia

The information gathered during the project shows that the main gaps in collaboration arise in terms of communication, coordination and trust. Respondents highlight issues with information, a lack of communication and communicators, the need to use simple language, as well as a lack of trust both between central and autonomous authorities and amongst civil society organisations. At the same time, civil society is perceived as underdeveloped in many localities, with limited capacity for action, and some protection and prevention mechanisms are considered ineffective.

At the same time, participants recognise civil society's potential to contribute to promoting the WPS Agenda through monitoring, evaluation, the development of policy proposals and community mobilisation. Examples such as the "Women's Initiative" Centre and the "Mirkiras" Public Association demonstrate

that local organisations can evolve from social assistance to civic participation, education and the promotion of women's leadership. The partnership between the "Mirkiras" Public Association and the local council, including through public consultations and digital dialogue tools, provides a relevant example of local cooperation.

The data from the questionnaires confirm these conclusions. Respondents identify NGOs, community organisations, local councils, women leaders, young leaders and respected community figures as key actors. Participants in the project's activities highlighted the need for clearer coordination mechanisms, mapping of relevant actors, the organisation of joint events, and the development of more structured partnerships between NGOs, public institutions, educational institutions, local media and, where possible, the private sector.

This issue is also evident at the broader level of relations between the centre and the autonomy. An analysis by the CMI – Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation on institutional relations between the central authorities and the Gagauz autonomy, carried out through a participatory process involving authorities, civil society and experts, shows that the coordination and cooperation mechanisms between Chişinău and Comrat need clarification and improvement⁷⁰. In the same vein, the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova adopted a legislative package in 2022 to facilitate more frequent consultations between Parliament and the People's Assembly of Gagauzia, as a step towards improving the relationship between the central government and the autonomy. More recently, cooperation between the central authorities and the Gagauz autonomy has continued through broader dialogue and consultation initiatives. In May 2025, as part of the 'Gagauzia Dialogue' project, a delegation comprising representatives of the national authorities, the Gagauz autonomy and civil society took part in a study visit to Finland to analyse models of autonomy and institutional cooperation⁷¹. At the same time, in 2026, the Government held consultations on local public administration reform in all districts of

70 Analysis of institutional arrangements and relations between central authorities and the Gagauz Autonomy. Available at: <https://gagauziadialogue.md/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/The-Guide-Romanian-version-WEB.pdf>

71 Moldovan Delegation Explores Autonomy and Governance in Finland Through the Åland Islands Model. Available at: <https://cmi.fi/2025/05/26/moldovan-delegation-explores-autonomy-and-governance-in-finland-through-the-aland-islands-model/>

the country and in ATU Gagauzia, with the participation of over 4,500 local elected representatives and citizens⁷².

Areas for action and opportunities to rebuild trust

Main causes:

- lack of trust between the central public administration, local public administration and civil society, including between central authorities and the autonomous region;
- insufficient and poorly adapted local communication, including a lack of communicators and clear explanations of policies;
- limited coordination and the absence of functional and regular cooperation mechanisms;
- low institutional capacity of some local public authorities and community organisations;
- competition and fragmentation among civil society organisations;
- low visibility of relevant local actors and a lack of clearly defined local networks;
- insufficient involvement of key sectors, such as education, local media and the private sector;
- lack of systematic participatory tools through which civil society can contribute to policy-making, monitoring and evaluation.

Stakeholders who can contribute to the solution: central public authorities relevant to the implementation of the WPS Agenda; local and regional public authorities in ATU Gagauzia; the People's Assembly and local councils; local civil society organisations; women's groups, women leaders and local councillors; Youth Councils and youth networks; educational institutions; local and regional media; the private sector, where it can support community initiatives; international partners and organisations that facilitate dialogue and social cohesion.

⁷² Consultations on local public administration reform held in all districts of the country and Gagauzia: Over 4,500 mayors and citizens participated. Available at: <https://gov.md/index.php/en/node/9785>

Recommended measures:

- establishing permanent local platforms for dialogue between the central government, local authorities, civil society, the media and communities;
- drawing up a list/mapping of relevant actors in the region and their areas of expertise;
- organising regular roundtables and public consultations on issues relating to the WPS, protection, disinformation, women's leadership and crisis management;
- creating mechanisms through which civil society can contribute to the drafting, monitoring and evaluation of documents and actions in the field of WPS;
- developing mentoring programmes to build trust between institutions and organisations;
- investing in training for local actors: leadership, advocacy, NGO operations, the Romanian language, disinformation and crisis management;
- using digital spaces and simple community communication tools, such as online groups and messaging apps, for information and mobilisation;
- supporting cross-sectoral partnerships that also include educational institutions, local media and, where possible, the private sector.

Opportunities and lessons learnt:

- local materials show that there are already working examples of collaboration. The “Mirkiras” Public Association has a collaboration agreement with the local council, which has facilitated public consultations and rapid communication with residents via a Viber chat;
- The “Women’s Initiative” Centre demonstrates that an organisation with roots in social work can evolve towards civic participation and the promotion of women in public life;
- The digital space is already being used as “an alternative channel for mobilisation”, which is particularly important in contexts where public space is limited;

- respondents repeatedly point out that the relevant actors already exist at local level, but are not sufficiently connected or utilised;
- at national level, there are already examples showing that civil society can be integrated into monitoring processes and institutional cooperation: for example, NGOs in Gagauzia have been involved in monitoring the implementation of the action plans under the National Integrity and Anti-Corruption Strategy;
- recent experiences of social cohesion in Moldova show that spaces for dialogue and joint community initiatives can enhance the capacity for cooperation between authorities, civil society and citizens. Such mechanisms have been developed in 13 communities in Moldova through UNDP and UNFPA projects;
- in Gagauzia, there are already initiatives dedicated specifically to local dialogue and women's participation, including the CMI initiative in December 2025, which brought together women leaders, civil society, authorities, the media, academia and the development sector to discuss how local dialogue can increase women's participation in peace and conflict prevention.

Desired outcome: *To strengthen functional and trustworthy cooperation between the central government, local authorities and civil society, so that the Women, Peace and Security Agenda is implemented through local mechanisms that are coordinated, participatory and adapted to the realities of the community.*

Strategic communication objective: *To strengthen trust and cooperation between central public authorities, local public authorities and civil society in ATU Gagauzia, by promoting clear, accessible and participatory communication that facilitates dialogue, inter-institutional coordination and the involvement of local actors in the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.*

2.5. Domestic violence and the weakness of protection mechanisms

Relevance of the issue

Domestic violence in ATU Gagauzia must be understood as a complex human security issue, situated at the intersection of patriarchal norms, institutional vulnerabilities and a persistent culture of silence. The traditional model of social organisation, which privileges male authority and subordinates the role of women, creates a framework conducive to the tolerance and normalisation of domestic violence. In this context, domestic violence appears as a latent, frequent, yet insufficiently visible phenomenon in the public sphere. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that violence against women affects not only individual safety but also social cohesion, trust in institutions and the community's ability to protect vulnerable people. From this perspective, the weakness of prevention and protection mechanisms reduces the effectiveness of the public response and perpetuates a pattern of daily insecurity for women and children.

Manifestations in the context of ATU Gagauzia

Available data indicate that domestic violence is widespread, yet remains largely 'invisible', being underreported and treated as a private matter. Victims, mainly women, avoid seeking help due to social stigma, shame and community pressure, which contributes to the perpetuation of the phenomenon. This dynamic is reinforced by the perception that such situations are a private matter and do not require public intervention, thereby reducing the ability of institutions to respond effectively.

The weakness of protection mechanisms is another dimension. Specialised social services, shelters for victims, psychological counselling and legal assistance are limited or underdeveloped in many localities across the region. Consequently, victims face real difficulties in accessing the necessary support, and institutional interventions remain piecemeal and reactive rather than preventive. This institutional shortfall exacerbates individual trauma and directly affects children, who in turn become indirect victims of violence.

According to the OSCE study on violence against women, women's well-being and safety, ATU Gagauzia is in particular need of support and capacity-building

to ensure a coordinated community response⁷³. At the same time, the document highlights that, at a practical level, there have already been local training initiatives in line with the standards of the Istanbul Convention, including seminars for police officers, such as the one organised in Ceadîr-Lunga in November 2022⁷⁴.

Areas for action and opportunities for rebuilding trust

Main causes:

- the persistence of patriarchal norms and social models that tolerate or minimise domestic violence;
- the treatment of domestic violence as a private matter rather than a matter of public interest and human security;
- social stigma, shame and community pressure that discourage reporting;
- limited access to specialist services, counselling, shelters and legal assistance;
- fragmented and reactive institutional interventions, rather than preventive and coordinated mechanisms;
- the internalisation of traditional norms by both women and men, which contributes to the tolerance of the phenomenon;
- limited capacity for cooperation between authorities, the police, social services, the healthcare system and community organisations.

Stakeholders who can contribute to the solution: local and regional public authorities; social services and social protection specialists; the police and law enforcement agencies; the healthcare system and mental health services; civil society organisations and specialist victim support centres; educational institutions; local and regional media; central authorities responsible for implementing the National Programme on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence for the years 2023–2027; international partners supporting protection services, training and support infrastructure.

73 OSCE study on violence against women: Women's well-being and safety, p. 66. Available at: https://cdn.osce.org/sites/default/files/f/documents/e/f/425867_0.pdf.

74 The Gagauzia police have learnt more about the Istanbul Convention. Available at: <https://civic.md/stiri/ong/67442-politia-din-gagauzia-a-aflat-mai-multe-despre-conventia-de-la-istanbul.html>.

Recommended measures / how this can be addressed:

- strengthening local prevention, protection and referral mechanisms for victims of domestic violence;
- developing support infrastructure: shelters, counselling centres, integrated services and legal aid;
- expanding legal and psychological literacy programmes for women and communities;
- training police officers, social workers, healthcare professionals and local authorities in the application of the standards of the Istanbul Convention;
- establishing clear and confidential local reporting and referral procedures;
- developing multi-sectoral cooperation between authorities, social services, the police, the healthcare system and community organisations;
- public information and education campaigns on recognising, reporting and preventing violence;
- shifting the approach from a strictly reactive one to a preventive, victim-centred and community-based one.

Opportunities and lessons learnt:

- The Republic of Moldova already has a robust regulatory framework following the ratification of the Istanbul Convention and the adoption of the National Programme on the Prevention and Combating of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence for 2023–2027⁷⁵;
- in ATU Gagauzia, a centre for victims of violence has been opened with UNDP support, demonstrating that protection infrastructure can also be developed at regional level⁷⁶;

75 National Programme on the Prevention and Combating of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence for 2023–2027. Available at: https://social.gov.md/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Programul-VFF-si-VF_-15.03.2023_final.pdf

76 A centre for victims of violence has been opened in the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia, with support from the UNDP. Available at: <https://www.zdg.md/stiri/stiri-sociale/un-centru-pentru-vic-timele-violentei-a-fost-deschis-in-uta-gagauzia-cu-suportul-pnud/>

- the organisation of seminars for police officers on the Istanbul Convention, including in Ceadîr-Lunga, demonstrates that training specialists can lay the groundwork for a better-prepared institutional response⁷⁷;
- There is a genuine need in the region for infrastructure providing protection, counselling and access to justice, and this need can form the basis for the development of stronger local and national partnerships;
- Experience at national and local level shows that the problem cannot be addressed solely through punishment, but requires a combination of prevention, education, services and a shift in social norms.

Success stories from the Republic of Moldova show that the problem of domestic violence and weak protection mechanisms can be addressed by combining the regulatory framework, support infrastructure, training of specialists and multi-sectoral cooperation. The ratification of the Istanbul Convention and the adoption of the National Programme on the Prevention and Combating of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence for 2023–2027 have created an important foundation for the transition from fragmented interventions to more integrated policies⁷⁸. At a practical level, a centre for victims of violence has been opened in ATU Gagauzia with UNDP support, demonstrating that protection infrastructure can also be developed at the regional level⁷⁹. At the same time, the training of police officers on the application of the standards of the Istanbul Convention, including the seminar organised in Ceadîr-Lunga, shows that the development of local institutional capacities is both possible and necessary⁸⁰. In the same vein, the conclusions of the OSCE Study on Violence against Women, Women's Well-being and Safety confirm the need for a coordinated community response and the strengthening of local protection services⁸¹. These examples show that results are achieved when interventions

77 The Gagauzia police have learnt more about the Istanbul Convention. Available at: <https://civic.md/stiri/ong/67442-politia-din-gagauzia-a-aflat-mai-multe-despre-conventia-de-la-istanbul.html>

78 The National Programme on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence for 2023–2027. Available at: https://social.gov.md/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Programul-VFF-si-VF_-15.03.2023_final.pdf

79 A centre for victims of violence has been opened in the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia, with support from the UNDP. Available at: <https://www.zdg.md/stiri/stiri-sociale/un-centru-pentru-victimele-violentei-a-fost-deschis-in-uta-gagauzia-cu-suportul-pnud/>

80 The Gagauzia police have learnt more about the Istanbul Convention. Available at: <https://civic.md/stiri/ong/67442-politia-din-gagauzia-a-aflat-mai-multe-despre-conventia-de-la-istanbul.html>

81 OSCE study on violence against women: Women's well-being and safety, p. 66. Available at: https://cdn.osce.org/sites/default/files/f/documents/e/f/425867_0.pdf.

combine prevention, protection, training of professionals and the development of services accessible to victims.

Desired outcome: *Reducing social tolerance of domestic violence and strengthening a local system of prevention, protection and support that enables women and children to have real, safe and rapid access to services and justice.*

Strategic communication objective: *To raise awareness and change community attitudes towards domestic violence by promoting the message that it is a matter of human security and public interest, not a private matter, and by providing accessible information to women and communities about their rights, available services and protection mechanisms.*

2.6. Under-representation of women in decision-making processes

Relevance of the issue

Despite the existence of positive examples of female leadership in ATU Gagauzia, women's participation in public life remains limited. These cases illustrate the potential for change rather than a consolidated trend at the societal level. Furthermore, the education system and social norms perpetuate stereotypical representations, according to which women must adopt modest and reserved behaviour, avoiding active involvement in the public sphere or challenging male authority. Although some projects and initiatives highlight the need to integrate gender equality into early childhood education, these efforts are not yet reflected in coherent public policies.

The absence of a systemic approach at the local policy level constitutes a major vulnerability. Currently, local strategies are, for the most part, 'gender-blind', neglecting the distinct needs of women and girls in areas such as education, health or political participation. This gap contributes to the perpetuation of inequalities and limits the development of institutional mechanisms to support equal participation.

Overall, the low participation of women in public life in ATU Gagauzia is not the result of a lack of interest or capacity, but of a combination of structural,

cultural and institutional factors. Overcoming these barriers requires an integrated approach, combining public policy reforms, educational interventions and support for civil society initiatives, with a view to building a framework conducive to equal participation and strengthening social cohesion.

Developments in the context of ATU Gagauzia

Women's involvement in decision-making processes in ATU Gagauzia remains limited, a fact reflected in their low representation in leadership roles at local and regional levels. Although there is a willingness to get involved, women face cultural and structural barriers, such as social prejudices, insufficient family support and limited access to opportunities. Their contribution is recognised mainly at an informal level, but is insufficiently valued at an institutional level.

Data from the questionnaire conducted as part of the project (16 respondents) highlights this discrepancy: 87.5% (14 respondents) associate women with mediation and the resolution of community issues, 31.3% (5 respondents) with peacebuilding, 18.8% (3 respondents) with conflict prevention, and only 6.3% (1 respondent) with initiating solutions. These results suggest the existence of an 'invisible ceiling', which limits the association of women with leadership and strategic roles. At the same time, only 25% of respondents believe that women are sufficiently involved in decision-making processes, with the majority considering their participation to be partial or insufficient.

The main obstacles identified are patriarchal norms (56.3%), insufficient institutional support (50%) and a lack of information and training (43.8%), alongside stereotypes and low pay (6.3% each). Respondents' perceptions also indicate unequal access to power, low levels of awareness in some institutions, limited involvement of the education and business sectors, as well as informal barriers linked to a lack of family support and fear of stigmatisation.

Open-ended responses confirm these findings, highlighting limited access to decision-making positions, insufficient professional support, and the influence of family and social factors on women's participation. Quantitative data indicate that the main obstacles are a lack of information and training opportunities (36.4%), patriarchal norms (27.3%), insufficient institutional support (27.3%) and the lack of a safe space for expression (9.1%). These results, confirmed by the Russian-language version of the questionnaire (11 responses), show

that the barriers are simultaneously cultural, institutional and communicational and require an integrated approach combining education, institutional strengthening and the transformation of social norms.

Perceptions of women's role in peace and security processes are ambivalent. Women are associated with empathy, responsibility and social cohesion, but these qualities do not always translate into institutional recognition or access to decision-making processes. There remains, particularly among men, a tendency to underestimate women's competencies in areas such as security and leadership.

Gagauz society is in a state of transition between traditional models and modern trends. Although there is growing recognition of the importance of women's participation and openness on the part of some local leaders, including in Comrat and Ceadâr-Lunga, these foundations for change remain limited in the absence of institutional mechanisms and concrete measures for inclusion. Thus, a discrepancy persists between women's recognised potential and their actual level of involvement in decision-making processes. Civil society organisations play a key role in promoting women's participation, contributing to the creation of spaces for dialogue, facilitating community interaction and building trust. Local initiatives, including small-scale ones such as discussion platforms or community activities, can have a significant impact on stimulating engagement and changing perceptions. In this process, young people represent an important vector of transformation, demonstrating greater openness towards the values of gender equality and inclusive participation.

Areas for action and opportunities for rebuilding trust

Main causes:

- the persistence of social and educational norms that associate women with modesty, reserve and non-decision-making roles;
- 'gender-blind' local policies that do not reflect the specific needs of women and girls;
- the under-representation of women in leadership positions and in local and regional representative bodies;
- social prejudices, lack of family support and limited access to informa-

tion on opportunities for participation;

- the lack of concrete institutional mechanisms to support equal participation;
- eroding confidence in the idea of women leaders, including against the backdrop of previous controversial experiences of representation;
- a lack of safe spaces for expression and fear of stigmatisation or social consequences;
- a lack of information and training, as well as insufficient institutional support;
- unequal access to power and insufficient understanding of the issue in certain public and private institutions, as also evident from the open-ended responses to the questionnaire.

Actors who can contribute to a solution: local and regional public authorities, including representative bodies within autonomous regions; educational institutions, through the integration of gender equality into early childhood and civic education; civil society organisations, including women's forums and networks; local leaders and women already in positions of authority or public visibility; central authorities and partners who support women's participation in governance and peace;

Recommended measures / how this can be addressed:

- integrating the gender equality dimension into local public policies and sectoral strategies;
- creating institutional mechanisms to support women's equal participation in decision-making processes;
- developing early childhood and civic education programmes that challenge stereotypes and normalise female leadership;
- expanding opportunities for information, training and mentoring for women;
- developing safe spaces for expression and local platforms for dialogue;
- increasing the visibility of women leaders and local examples of successful participation;

- support for civil society initiatives that facilitate community interaction and women's participation;
- combining institutional reforms with changing social norms and building trust;
- using survey data to tailor interventions to the barriers perceived by the community: patriarchal norms, information gaps, insufficient institutional support and a lack of safe spaces for expression.

Opportunities and lessons learnt:

- there are initiatives and examples that demonstrate the potential for women's mobilisation and solidarity. Women's forums and networks have highlighted their capacity to act collectively and transcend local boundaries, suggesting the existence of underutilised women's social capital. However, these initiatives remain sporadic and are not yet supported by robust institutional mechanisms;
- the discourse of some local leaders and community dialogue initiatives show that the conditions for change exist, even if these have not yet been translated into stable policies and mechanisms⁸²;
- the high level of recognition of women's role in mediation and the resolution of community issues (87.5%) indicates that the social basis for legitimacy exists, but needs to be extended beyond informal roles to strategic and institutional roles;
- the survey results clearly show that interventions must be integrated: information and training, changing social norms, institutional support and the creation of safe spaces for expression;
- the fact that only 25% of respondents consider women to be sufficiently involved confirms the need for concrete and visible mechanisms for participation;
- open-ended responses regarding insufficient institutional support indicate that solutions must include not only public policies, but also engagement with educational institutions, the business community, colleagues and families.

82 CMI – Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation, Gagauzia: CMI strengthens women's role in peacebuilding and local dialogue Available at: <https://cmi.fi/2026/01/14/gagauzia-cmi-strengthens-womens-role-in-peacebuilding-and-local-dialogue/>

Success stories from the Republic of Moldova show that the under-representation of women in decision-making processes can be addressed through training, mentoring, support networks and local gender-sensitive governance mechanisms. The programmes implemented demonstrate that women's participation increases when local authorities receive support to integrate the gender dimension into governance processes⁸³. At the same time, the "WHY ME?" campaign supported by UNDP and CALM shows that women can be encouraged to enter politics and decision-making processes when they benefit from visibility, training and support. For ATU Gagauzia, the example of local dialogue initiatives supported by CMI – the Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation is also relevant, confirming that women's participation can be strengthened even in sensitive contexts, provided that genuine spaces for the involvement and legitimisation of women's leadership are created.

Desired outcome: *To increase women's genuine and legitimate participation in decision-making processes at local and regional level, by reducing structural, cultural and institutional barriers and by transforming women's recognised potential into effective public influence.*

Strategic communication objective: *To increase social and institutional acceptance of women's participation in decision-making processes at local and regional level, by promoting female leadership role models, the benefits of balanced representation, and the message that women's involvement contributes to more inclusive, legitimate and effective governance.*

83 Women's Local Leadership Drives Gender-Responsive Governance in 22 Moldovan Communities. Available at: <https://moldova.un.org/en/299356-womens-local-leadership-drives-gender-responsive-governance-22-moldovan-communities>

FINAL CONCLUSIONS

The promotion of the *Women, Peace and Security* Agenda in ATU Gagauzia takes place in a context marked by socio-economic vulnerabilities, geopolitical pressures, information fragmentation and low trust in institutions – factors that influence women’s participation and the capacity of communities to respond inclusively. The study shows that the WPS Agenda is relevant locally precisely because it can translate security from an abstract concept into a framework of human security, social cohesion and community resilience.

- In Gagauzia, **there is already real local potential for the localisation of the WPS Agenda**, as evidenced by the presence of women active in entrepreneurship, local government, education, social work, the media, and civic initiatives. At the same time, the study highlights the presence of credible local organisations and community leaders covering areas such as social support, local consultation, civic education, counselling, cooperation and the creation of spaces for discussion. However, **this human and institutional capital remains underutilised**, as it has not yet been transformed into a stable network of women’s leadership, public influence and systemic participation of women in decision-making processes in the fields of peace, security and community development.
- This conclusion has direct implications for the quality of public policies and the effectiveness of localising the WPS Agenda. In the absence of a meaningful women’s participation, decision-making processes tend to reflect a narrow understanding of security, centred primarily on institutional or traditional dimensions and insufficiently connected to the everyday realities of the community. Consequently, issues such as economic security, domestic violence, access to services, child safety, community cohesion and information vulnerability risk remaining under-represented on the local agenda. Consequently, **policies developed without integrating gender perspectives or an inclusive approach may become one-sided, reactive and less capable of addressing diverse security needs and strengthening community resilience.**

- **Another conclusion concerns the persistence of cultural and regulatory barriers.** The study shows that women's participation is affected by patriarchal stereotypes, the incomplete legitimacy of female leadership, and the persistence of traditional representations that accept women predominantly in roles of support, care, communication and social mediation, but find it harder to recognise them as strategic actors in decision-making, leadership and public influence.
- At the same time, the study highlighted that the patriarchal model in Gagauzia is undergoing a partial and contradictory transformation. The election of women to the office of Bashkan demonstrates a significant openness of society towards female leadership at the executive level, yet the low representation of women in the People's Assembly and other political structures confirms the persistence of cultural, institutional and electoral barriers. Thus, **patriarchy can no longer be interpreted as an absolute explanation for voters' political behaviour**, but it continues to influence women's access to power, particularly in competitive institutions.
- An important conclusion is that **the localisation of the WPS Agenda in ATU Gagauzia is conditioned by how it is understood and communicated at the community level.** The study shows that the population associates security primarily with economic, social and everyday issues, and the region's information landscape is dominated by local, regional and informal sources. For this reason, the relevance of the WPS Agenda increases when it is linked to concepts such as 'peace', 'social cohesion', 'community safety', 'violence prevention', 'child protection', 'access to services' and 'family support', which more directly reflect the community's everyday experiences and concerns.
- **Cooperation between central authorities, local authorities and civil society is not sufficiently established.** The study shows that the main difficulties arise in terms of communication, coordination and the building of mutual trust, which hinders the transformation of the WPS Agenda from a regulatory framework into a practical mechanism for local action. The analysis highlights a lack of awareness of the need for constructive dialogue between Chişinău and Comrat, civil society and local councils, educational institutions, the local media and cultural actors regarding

the implementation of the WPS Agenda. At the same time, examples of collaboration between some local organisations and local public authorities show that, where there is openness, trust and constant communication, functional mechanisms for consultation, participation and community mobilisation can be created.

- **Information vulnerability constitutes a major barrier to the implementation of the WPS Agenda.** The study highlights that the information landscape in ATU Gagauzia is dominated by regional and informal sources, and that disinformation, the influence of politicised local channels and dependence on external sources in Russian affect public perceptions. In this context, the promotion of the WPS Agenda depends on the existence of credible information alternatives that are linguistically accessible and adapted to the channels used by the local public.
- The study's findings establish that **domestic violence and everyday insecurity remain central issues for human security in the region.** The study situates domestic violence at the intersection of patriarchal norms, a culture of silence, and insufficiently established prevention and protection mechanisms. Although the problem is well known, it remains insufficiently addressed, and services, reporting mechanisms, psychological support and institutional coordination remain limited. This situation confirms that the relevance of the WPS Agenda at the local level increases when it is directly linked to the protection of women and children, the prevention of violence and the community's capacity to respond to situations of risk.
- **Projects for women are increasingly common, but remain fragmented and dependent on external support.** Local analysis shows that in recent years a relevant portfolio of initiatives dedicated to women has emerged, covering economic support, violence prevention, leadership, civic participation and community dialogue. However, these initiatives are not yet integrated into a sustainable local mechanism capable of ensuring continuity, coordination and long-term impact. Furthermore, at the regional level, there is a lack of stable women's centres, functional cooperation platforms, mentoring programmes and a local support infrastructure to ensure the continuity of interventions after projects have been completed.

- An important conclusion is that **local resilience in ATU Gagauzia can be built and strengthened by capitalising on existing forms of solidarity and community participation.** Al
- though the general level of trust remains low, there are informal mobilisation practices within communities, such as local communication groups, activities in libraries and cultural centres, educational initiatives, community discussions, and inviting respected local figures (both women and men) to participate in thematic discussions. These examples confirm that community engagement becomes possible when it is based on relationships of trust, topics relevant to everyday life, and credible local spaces, which can be utilised to promote the WPS Agenda and strengthen social cohesion.

Thus, the implementation of the WPS Agenda in ATU Gagauzia cannot be reduced to promoting women's participation as a sectoral objective, but must be understood as a broader process of strengthening trust, social cohesion and human security at the local level. The study's findings show that there are community resources, active women, local organisations and examples of co-operation that can support this agenda, but their impact remains limited in the absence of stable mechanisms for coordination, communication and participation. Consequently, the value of the WPS Agenda in Gagauzia lies in its ability to connect local actors, to transform women's informal contributions into public influence, and to integrate the community's everyday security needs into decision-making processes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

General recommendations:

- **Identifying how the WPS Agenda can be integrated into the institutional and decision-making system of the public administration in ATU Gagauzia**, including by establishing the responsibilities of regional and local authorities, coordination points and mechanisms through which women's perspectives can be included in peace and security processes.
- The promotion of women in decision-making processes must go beyond the logic of individual examples and aim **to institutionalise women's participation at all levels of public administration**. Support measures must aim both to change perceptions and to empower women in practice, including through training for potential candidates, equitable access to campaign resources, commitments by political parties to promote women to eligible positions, and monitoring of women's representation in local public administration institutions.
- **Developing an integrated training and mentoring programme for women, aimed at local government, civic organisations, education, the media and communities**. The programme should combine leadership, advocacy, public communication, understanding of decision-making processes, management of local initiatives and knowledge of the WPS Agenda.
- **Adopting a culturally and linguistically adapted strategic communication approach that presents the WPS Agenda using terms and themes rooted in the community's daily life**. Messages must be formulated in languages relevant to the local audience, distributed through channels close to the community, and supported by credible messengers such as teachers, doctors, local journalists, activists, librarians, community leaders and volunteers.

- **Strengthening partnerships with local and regional media to promote the WPS Agenda** through real-life stories about women involved in leadership, mediation, culture, education, health, policing, entrepreneurship and civic engagement. Local voices and examples close to the community can have a greater impact than standardised or strictly institutional messages.
- **Supporting local civil society through organisational development mechanisms and micro-grants**, to transform existing organisations into more influential actors in documentation, consultation, monitoring and community mobilisation. Within the region, local capacities vary significantly from one locality to another. Therefore, the support provided must be phased, adapted to the local context and geared towards leveraging existing community infrastructure.
- **The development of a periodic mapping of local actors and resources relevant to the WPS Agenda:** *women leaders, NGOs, journalists, cultural institutions, libraries, youth councils, local professionals, initiative groups and institutional partners.* This would support cooperation, mutual visibility and the more efficient use of resources already available in the region.

Recommendations by stakeholder category:

- **For central public authorities:** The WPS Agenda can be used as a practical framework for cooperation between central and local public authorities, provided it is grounded in concrete community issues such as everyday safety, violence prevention, the protection of women and children, social cohesion and crisis response. In this regard, central authorities should ensure regular consultations with local authorities, civil society organisations and other community stakeholders, so that national priorities are adapted to the realities and needs of ATU Gagauzia.

For local public authorities in ATU Gagauzia:

- *As an immediate action*, with the potential to become a regular practice, it is proposed to develop safe, formal and informal spaces for dialogue between women and local authorities and decision-makers. These may

include ‘tea talks’ with representatives of the authorities, thematic discussions or other activities organised in community centres for women and young people. These spaces can facilitate free expression on sensitive issues and help the authorities to better understand the needs and vulnerabilities of the community.

- *In the medium term*, it is recommended that a local framework for implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in ATU Gagauzia be developed and piloted, in the form of a **roadmap** or a local strategy, aligned with the National Programme for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 and tailored to local needs and regional specificities. This framework should establish clear mechanisms for coordination and cooperation between relevant actors, including local public authorities, regional institutions, the public administration, civil society, etc.
- *In the long term*, it is recommended that permanent consultation mechanisms be established between local councils, women’s groups, civic organisations, educational institutions and community leaders. In this regard, local councils can become key hubs for information, dialogue and linking local services to the real needs of women, young people and families.

For civil society, educational institutions and youth cultural centres:

- *Promoting initiatives to develop a local roadmap for the implementation of the WPS Agenda in ATU Gagauzia*, through community consultations, the identification of local priorities and the involvement of women, young people and community leaders.
- *Developing a local WPS network of organisations and initiative groups in Gagauzia* to link existing projects, reduce fragmentation and strengthen cooperation among stakeholders promoting the role of women in peace and security processes.
- *Integrating civic education, gender equality, media literacy and a culture of peace into school, extracurricular and community activities*. Schools, universities, libraries, cultural centres and youth centres can become spaces for dialogue and learning through interactive activities, themed clubs, summer schools, debates and intergenerational projects.

For institutions responsible for protection and response to violence:

- *Strengthening local mechanisms for prevention and intervention in cases of domestic violence*, through cooperation between the police, social services, the healthcare system, schools, specialist NGOs and the media.
- *Establishing clear reporting and referral procedures in cases of domestic violence* through accessible information on rights and services, psychological and legal support, practical guides for women at risk, and public campaigns on violence as a human security issue.
- *Organising prevention activities with men, young people and families* to reduce tolerance of violence and overcome the perception that abuse is a private matter.

For development partners:

- *Support initiatives to develop a local research and monitoring agenda*, with regular data collection on women's participation, perceptions of peace and security, gender-based violence, information consumption, barriers to cooperation and levels of trust. This data can help inform interventions, monitor progress and adapt the support provided to the realities in ATU Gagauzia.
- *Alongside one-off projects, long-term programmes should be initiated, with mentoring and post-project support*. To ensure sustainable results, initiatives for women could include, alongside training and grants, long-term support: mentoring for women entrepreneurs, support networks for women leaders, ongoing legal and psychological counselling, cooperation with local public authorities, and public campaigns to change social norms, thereby ensuring local ownership.
- *Support for regional partnerships and exchanges of experience with other localities* that have implemented similar initiatives, to facilitate the transfer of good practices, mutual learning and the consolidation of sustainable intervention models.

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Vox Populi

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ANNEXES

ANNEX 1.

THE MEANING OF THE CONCEPT OF INCLUSIVE SECURITY

An inclusive approach to security acknowledges the risks that people from diverse backgrounds may face and actively provides them with the guidance and support they need to participate fully and feel protected.

Inclusive security is a people-centred approach that integrates the dimensions of human security, gender equality and the active participation of all social groups – particularly women – in the processes of conflict prevention, crisis management and peacebuilding.

In this study, *inclusive security* is based on the premise that *state security* and *individual security* are interdependent and that sustainable peace cannot be achieved without including those traditionally excluded from decision-making processes. Drawing on feminist international relations theory, it challenges traditional models, dominated by militarised and androcentric approaches, and promotes the equal participation, representation and protection of all citizens.

The concept entails:

- recognising women not merely as a vulnerable group, but as active actors and agents of change in the field of security;
- the integration of a gender perspective into all security policies and institutions;
- collaboration between state institutions and civil society for more effective and sustainable solutions;
- promoting dialogue, consensus and reconciliation as essential elements of security.

Inclusive security is an essential operational framework for implementing the WPS Agenda at local level, helping to reduce inequalities and strengthen community resilience. Accordingly, it features on the local agenda when community issues are addressed not merely through the prism of public order or institutional response, but from the perspective of people's everyday safety, participation and the protection of vulnerable groups.

When applied at the local level, inclusive security requires local public authorities to consult the community before making decisions, to collaborate with civil society organisations, to create safe spaces for dialogue, and to integrate women's perspectives into policies on local development, crisis prevention and community protection. A relevant example is the planning of infrastructure projects and the design of public spaces, which must take into account the safety, accessibility and protection needs of different groups within the community. In this way, the WPS Agenda is not merely a regulatory framework, but becomes a practical tool for identifying real risks, formulating tailored responses and building trust between citizens and institutions.

THE CORRELATION BETWEEN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, SECURITY AND GENDER EQUALITY

Figure 2 highlights the fact that perceptions of security are closely linked to the level of human development. In countries with low and medium Human Development Index (HDI) scores, the proportion of people who feel moderately or very insecure is considerably higher, whilst in countries with high and very high HDI scores, the proportion of those who say they feel secure increases. This trend confirms that security cannot be analysed solely through the prism of defence or the military dimension, but must be understood as the result of social, economic, institutional and community factors. International examples support this approach. In Colombia, the participation of women's organisations in the peace process has facilitated the inclusion of provisions on gender justice, victims' rights

and social reintegration, thereby strengthening the legitimacy of the agreement. In Sweden, feminist foreign policy has demonstrated that integrating a gender perspective into diplomacy and security can support international cooperation and conflict prevention. In the context of the war in Ukraine, in the Republic of Moldova, the response to the refugee crisis has demonstrated the role of women, civil society organisations and local services in supporting vulnerable people, facilitating access to services and maintaining community cohesion. This experience confirms the relevance of the WPS Agenda as an instrument of human security, protection and local resilience.



Figure 2. Perceptions of human insecurity are widespread globally

Source: UNDP, *New Threats to Human Security in the Anthropocene: Demanding Greater Solidarity*, 2022, Figure 1, based on World Values Survey, waves 6 and 7.

PEACE, INCLUSION AND FRAGILITY: COMPARATIVE INDICATORS OF HUMAN SECURITY

Annex 3 highlights a significant structural correlation between three dimensions: **the level of peace**, as measured by the Global Peace Index; **gender inclusion** and **equality in peace and security processes**, as reflected in the Women, Peace and Security Index; and **state fragility**, as assessed by the Fragile States Index. Within this framework, the interdependence between human development and human security is highlighted, and a human security index can determine the extent to which living standards, access to services, protection of rights, gender equality and trust in institutions influence people's perceptions of safety and societies' capacity to respond to crises.

The comparative analysis highlights several relevant findings:

- *Countries with high scores on the WPS and peace* (Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden) are also the least fragile, ranking lower in fragility indices. This suggests a direct link between inclusion, gender equality and institutional stability.
- *The WPS Index*, structured around dimensions such as inclusion, justice and security, shows that women's participation, access to resources and the protection of rights contribute to increased societal resilience. The more women are integrated into economic, political and social life, the more capable society is of managing security risks.
- *State fragility* is closely linked to perceptions of insecurity and low levels of trust in institutions. Fragile states are characterised by weak institutions, social polarisation and multiple vulnerabilities, which amplify the risks of conflict.
- *The human security dimension* (illustrated by the population's perceptions of safety) shows that in low- and middle-income countries, the majority of the population feels insecure, confirming that security is not merely a military matter, but is deeply linked to socio-economic conditions and governance.

In the case of the Republic of Moldova, its mid-table positions in these rankings reflect a *hybrid security* profile, characterised by economic, institutional and informational vulnerabilities, as confirmed by the analysis of the security environment (energy crisis, war in the neighbourhood, gender-based disinformation).

Annex 2 and Figure 3 highlight that the states with high levels of peace and good performance in the area of Women, Peace and Security tend to exhibit a lower degree of fragility. This correlation suggests that stability depends not only on the absence of conflict, but also on the quality of governance, the level of social trust, the protection of rights and the inclusive participation of women in public life. In relation to these indicators, human security emerges as the result of the interaction between functional institutions, social cohesion, gender equality and the state’s capacity to respond to the vulnerabilities of the population.

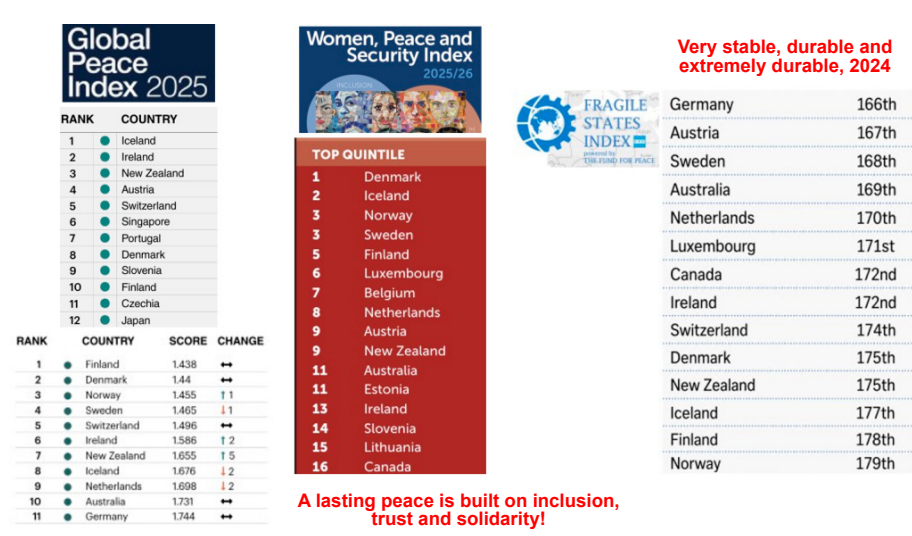
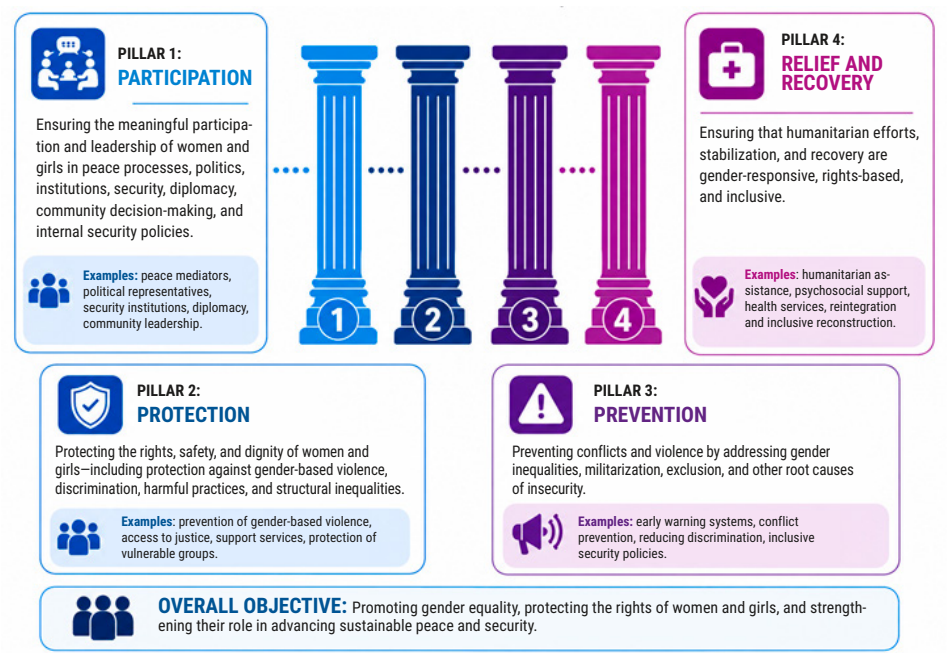


Figure 3. Top countries according to indicators of peace, inclusion and resilient sustainability

Source: *Global Peace Index*, <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/global-peace-index/>; *Women Peace and Security Index*, <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/the-index/>; *Fragile States Index 2024. Annual Report – A Word Adrift*, <https://fragilestatesindex.org>

FOUR PILLARS OF UNSCR 1325
ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY



SECURITY ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS DURING
GROUP EXERCISES CONDUCTED THROUGHOUT THE TRAINING

During the group exercises, participants identified a number of security issues that directly affect vulnerable communities and groups. It was highlighted that, in crisis situations, existing risks are amplified, and women and children may be exposed to additional forms of insecurity, including violence, lack of protection, limited access to services and informational vulnerability.

Target group	Identified security issues
Boys	Child labour; limited access to healthcare; risk of illiteracy or poor-quality education; lack of a father figure; drug and alcohol use; gambling; conflicts with friends or strangers; peer pressure; natural disasters; political instability.
Girls	Domestic violence; limited access to healthcare and education; malnutrition; risk of personal and professional underachievement; disruption to education; political instability; health problems; natural disasters; difficulties in choosing a career; social stigma.
Men	Risk of involvement in fighting or armed conflict; health problems; job loss; high mortality rate; unemployment; loss of stable income; forced mobilisation; road accidents; political instability; exposure to criminal organisations.
Women	Increase in gender-based violence; domestic violence; risk of job loss; lack of self-fulfilment; risks to the lives of family members; health problems; social pressure and risk of public criticism; economic vulnerability; loss of the breadwinner; illness and health crises; fires; reduced capacity to work; increased impact of social problems caused by economic instability.

Summary finding: The exercise confirms that security risks are perceived and experienced differently by each group. Girls and women are more frequently associated with risks related to violence, family, health, social pressure and economic insecurity, whilst boys and men are perceived as being more exposed to risks related to work, substance use, conflict, mobilisation and loss of income. This differentiation highlights the need for local responses tailored to the specific needs of each group.

DIFFERENT SECURITY ISSUES IN PEACETIME AND CRISIS SITUATIONS

Situation	Women	Men	Girls	Boys
PEACE	• Domestic and controlling violence • Economic dependence and low income • Limited access to medical and legal services • Overburdening due to family responsibilities • Misinformation and fear	• Unemployment and labor migration • Workplace accidents and risks • Pressure of the role of “family provider” • Alcohol abuse • Psychological problems	• Bullying at school and online • Risk of school dropout • Early pregnancies • Sexual harassment • Human trafficking	• Peer violence • Poor school performance • Involvement in criminal groups • Psychoactive substance use • Internet addiction
CRISIS / CONFLICT	• Increased risk of sexual violence • Loss of income and housing • Limited access to medical services • Energy poverty • Stress and psychological trauma	• Risk of mobilization or involvement in incidents • Loss of employment and income • Increased aggressiveness and trauma • Migration and family separation • Social pressure	• Interruption of education • Separation from family • Risk of exploitation and trafficking • Lack of adequate food and hygiene • Psychological trauma	• Recruitment into violent groups • Risk of injury or death • Interruption of studies • Normalization of violence • Traumatic stress



Security risks differ according to gender, age, and context, and in crisis situations existing vulnerabilities are intensified and generate additional protection needs

SOME PROJECTS IMPLEMENTED BY CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE AUTONOMOUS TERRITORIAL UNIT GAGAUZIA IN THE FIELD OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN⁸⁴

Project name	Implementing organisation	Funding body	Budget	Objective
Protecting women in Moldova and Ukraine from gender-based violence in crisis situations(2022–2023) ⁸⁵	AO Biaz Gul	IOM	1,754,800 MDL	Strengthening protection and support mechanisms for women affected by violence, including female refugees from Ukraine.
Institutional development of the NGO Biaz Gul as a prerequisite for providing quality services to women and children who are victims of violence (2023) ⁸⁶	Biaz Gul NGO	National Coalition “Life Without Violence”	50,000 MDL	Strengthening the organisational capacities of AO Biaz Gul and improving the services provided to beneficiaries.
Research on psychological violence (2023–2024)	AO Biaz Gul	National Coalition “Life Without Violence”	N/A	Analysis of the phenomenon of psychological violence and identification of prevention and intervention mechanisms.

⁸⁴ Note: information provided by Irina Mihalciuc, AO Mirkiras

⁸⁵ Completed and ongoing projects. Available at: <https://biazgul.md/%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%be%d0%b5%d0%ba%d1%82%d1%8b/>

⁸⁶ Ibid

Renovation of the playground at the Regional Rehabilitation Centre for Victims of Domestic Violence (2023–2024) ⁸⁷	AO Biaz Gul / Regional Centre	IOM	€470,027	Improving recovery and integration conditions for women and children benefiting from the centre.
Prevention and combating of violence against older people (2024) ⁸⁸	AO Biaz Gul	National Coalition “Life Without Violence”	362,200 MDL	Preventing and combating violence against older people and strengthening protection mechanisms.
Harmony in the community: support and integration ⁸⁹	Mirkiras NGO	The Swiss Government (through Helvetas, HEKS/EPER Moldova and the Norwegian Refugee Council)	N/A	Psychological support, social inclusion and facilitating access for women and girls to integration and employment opportunities.
Energy-efficient social services for the temporary accommodation of victims of domestic violence in ATU Gagauzia (2025–2026) ⁹⁰	AO Biaz Gul	Soros Foundation Moldova	€87,000	Improving accommodation conditions and social services for victims of domestic violence through infrastructure modernisation and energy efficiency.

87 Ibid

88 Ibid

89 NGO MIRKIRAS launches the project ‘Harmony in the Community: Support and Integration’. Available at: <https://mirkiras.md/2025/03/18/npo-mirkiras-zapuskaet-proekt-garmoniia-v-soo/>

90 Completed and ongoing projects. Available at: <https://biazgul.md/%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%be%d0%b5%d0%ba%d1%82%d1%8b/>

Together for Safety – regional co-operation against gender-based violence ⁹¹	Mirkiras NGO and CRDC NGO	The European Union and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic (through the ‘Transition’ programme)	N/A	Violence prevention campaigns, exchange of experience between regions and the development of a guide for women and girls affected by violence.
Improving access to essential protection services by strengthening the role of women-led local organisations in Ukraine and Moldova within the humanitarian response (2024–2026) ⁹²	AO Biaz Gul	HIAS Moldova	€107,000	Strengthening access to protection services and building the capacity of local women-led organisations in the humanitarian response.

91 Together for Safety – Regional cooperation to combat gender-based violence. Available at: <https://crdc.md/ru/proekty/zavershjonnye-proekty/impreuna-pentru-siguranta-colaborare-regionala-pentru-combaterea-violentei-de-gen>

92 Completed and ongoing projects. Available at: <https://biazgul.md/%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%be%d0%b5%d0%ba%d1%82%d1%8b/>

STRUCTURES AND MECHANISMS AIMED AT ENSURING COMMUNITY SECURITY IN THE AUTONOMOUS TERRITORIAL UNIT GAGAUZIA

Materials provided by participants in the project⁹³ indicate the existence of local conditions for applying the Community Security Councils model in ATU Gagauzia, based on cooperation between local public authorities, the police, public institutions, civil society and other community actors. Thus, *community safety* issues are addressed through: (-) Community Safety Councils (Comrat and Ceadâr-Lunga municipalities); (-) partnerships between the police and local public administration authorities; (-) citizen engagement programmes; (-) information and prevention campaigns; (-) joint projects with international organisations.

This structure was established following the implementation of the project ‘Promoting Civil Society Engagement in Strengthening Community Security’, implemented by the Institute for Public Policy (IPP) with financial support from the US Department of State. Project objective: to develop a *community policing* model and strengthen cooperation between public authorities, the police and the local community. Main partners: local public authorities (the municipalities of Comrat⁹⁴ and Ceadâr-Lunga⁹⁵), police inspectorates and civil society representatives. The project represented an important step in the development of local community security mechanisms in ATU Gagauzia and contributed to expanding civil society participation in the processes of crime prevention, reducing social risks and strengthening public trust in state institutions.

According to the Regulations of the Comrat Municipal Community Security Council, it is “a public advisory body that examines issues related to security and public order within the territory of Comrat Municipality and determines the necessary measures to address them”.

The document confirms that the Council: (-) coordinates cooperation between the police, the municipality, social services and NGOs; (-) examines public order issues; (-) draws up recommendations; (-) organises prevention activities; (-) contributes to the implementation of security projects.

Composition of the Council:

⁹³ Note: information provided by Irina Mihalciuc

⁹⁴ A meeting of the Public Safety Council was held in Comrat. Available at: <https://comrat.md/2115-v-komrate-sostojalos-zasedanie-soveta-obshchestvennoj-bezopasnosti.html>

⁹⁵ A Public Safety Council has been established in the municipality. Available at: <https://ceadir-lunga.md/novosti/item/2642-v-munitsipii-sozdan-sovet-obshchestvennoj-bezopasnosti>

- *Representatives of the local public administration:* the mayor; the deputy mayor; local councillors.
- *Representatives of public institutions:* the Police Inspectorate; the head of the community safety department; the head of the local police department; the Public Health Centre; the Environmental Inspectorate; the Food Safety Agency; the Emergency Services; the Education Department; the Social Assistance and Family Protection Department.
- *Representatives of municipal enterprises:* Apă Canal; municipal services.
- *Other members:* representatives of local non-governmental organisations; opinion leaders; media representatives; entrepreneurs and other interested parties.

Through its advisory and coordinating role, the Council can help identify local security issues, prevent risks, build trust and engage the community in maintaining public order. Looking ahead, it is important that this structure be developed and strengthened to become a functional community security mechanism at local level, capable of integrating an inclusive approach to security and responding to the needs of different groups within the community.

ANNEX 9.

LIST OF ORGANISATIONS PROVIDING AID AND SUPPORT

No.	Organisation name	Contact details
1.	Comrat Police Inspectorate	str. Treiakova 20, Secr.: +373 (298) 20011, Disp: +373 (298) 20002 / 22980 / 25795, e-mail: ip_comrat@igp.gov.md
2.	Ceadîr-Lunga Police Station	str. Lomonosova7, Secr.: +373 (291) 29906, Disp: +373 (291) 29902, https://politia.md/
3.	Vulcănești Police Station	str. Lenin 102, Secr.: +373 (293) 20315, Disp: +373 (293) 21404 / 20159, mob.: +373 67851505, e-mail: ip_vulcănești@igp.gov.md
4.	General Directorate of Health and Social Protection	Comrat, str. Pobeda 57, tel. +373 (298) 24547, e-mail: dsgagauzia@ms.md
5.	Comrat Community Mental Health Centre	Comrat, str. Pobeda 46, tel. +373 (298) 22855, e-mail: ccsm.comrat@ms.md
6.	Ceadîr-Lunga Community Mental Health Centre	Ceadîr-Lunga, str. Miciurina 2, tel. +373 (291) 24031, e-mail ccsm.ceadirlunga@ms.md

7.	Vulcănești Community Mental Health Centre	Vulcănești, str. Plotnicova 59, tel: +373 (293) 21946 e-mail: casm.vulcanesti@ms.md
8.	Ceadâr-Lunga Town Hall, Child Welfare Specialist	Ceadâr-Lunga, str. Lenin 91, https://ceadir-lunga.md/ , tel: +373 69787875
9.	Comrat Town Hall, Child Welfare Specialist	Comrat, str. Tretiakova 36, tel: +373 (298) 26864, e-mail: primaria.comrat@apl.gov.md
10.	Vulcanesti Town Hall, Child Welfare Specialist	Vulcănești, str. Gagarina 40, tel: +373 69329992, e-mail: vulcanesti.primaria@gmail.com
11.	National Agency for the Prevention and Combating of Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence	Helpline for women and girls (national helpline) 0 8008 8008; 0 (22) 822090 https://anpcv.gov.md
12.	Centre for Women's Rights (CDF)	Tel.: +373 22 811999 / +373 68855050 Free legal advice helpline: 0 800 80 000, e-mail: office@cdf.md
13.	The Regional Centre for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Domestic Violence provides shelter and comprehensive support	24/7 helpline: +373 67555299 e-mail: centrul.reabilitarea.victimelor@gmail.com
14.	Ombudsman (People's Advocate)	Comrat, str. Lenin 207, Tel: +373 (298) 25105 e-mail: comrat@ombudsman.md
15.	Regional Office of the National Council for State-Guaranteed Legal Aid	Comrat: Tel: +373 (298) 28853 e-mail: ot_comrat@cnaigs.md
16.	"Giving Hope" Crisis Centre	Mun. Ceadâr-Lunga, str. Cehov, 9 e-mail: giving.hopeceadir@gmail.com Tel: +373 68333568
17.	"BIAZ GÛL" Association (Comrat) – Rehabilitation Centre for Victims of Violence	Helpline (daily) +373 67555299 e-mail: belaja_roza@inbox.ru
18.	Social and Psychological Assistance Centre "Psychosocial Centre" Association	Vulcănești, tel. +373 68238386, e-mail: n.mocan@mail.ru
19.	"Vesta" Public Association (Comrat): Social, psychological and legal assistance	str. Pobeda 136, tel. +373 (787) 42183, e-mail: vesta.gagauzia@gmail.com



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