

SEXUAL VIOLENCE: BETWEEN STIGMA AND JUSTICE.

MONITORING REPORT 2025



Center for Curriculum Development and Gender Studies: FILIA

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March, 2025

Publication created within the project "*Empowering Women: Shaping Politics for Equality*" funded by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Bucharest.

This work does not necessarily represent the position or views of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Bucharest, nor the official positions of its staff members.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Sexual violence remains a serious and underreported phenomenon at both the European and national levels. Data from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA, 2024) indicates that only 1 in 8 victims of gender-based violence report their experiences to authorities. According to the Gender Equality Index, 3% of women in the European Union reported experiencing physical and/or sexual violence in the past 12 months. Young women, aged 18 to 29, are the most vulnerable, with 7% of them stating that they have been victims of gender-based violence in the past year. Romania has the highest prevalence in the EU, at 9%, compared to 2-5% in other member states (EIGE, 2024).

Sexual violence is also a subject surrounded by silence and stigma, with many victims experiencing shame and fear, which prevent them from seeking help or reporting their assaults. Additionally, the dynamics of violent relationships are complex, often placing victims in a vulnerable position where emotional, economic dependence, and fear of repercussions limit their options. More than half of Romanians believe that rape can be justified in certain situations, such as if the victim had been drinking alcohol, was dressed provocatively, or went home with the perpetrator (Eurobarometer 449, 2017). These biases persist, with 29% believing that a victim under the influence of alcohol or drugs is at least partially responsible (Eurobarometer 544, 2024).

Sexual violence remains a topic we do not talk about enough, and this silence contributes to the perpetuation of prejudices.

In this context, this research report aims to highlight the legal and institutional barriers that survivors of sexual violence face in accessing justice. The report is intended for experts and professionals working in the field of sexual violence, including those in public institutions, civil society organizations, the legal system, and victim support services. At the same time, it is relevant to anyone interested in this issue, including researchers, activists, journalists, policymakers, and individuals committed to preventing and combating gender-based violence in society.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In developing this research report, we employed a mixed-method approach, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods to gain a detailed perspective on the challenges faced by survivors of sexual violence in accessing justice. The qualitative methods included an analysis of relevant documents, such as rulings from the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), as well as reports from the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) and the United Nations (UN). These sources were selected to provide a comprehensive perspective on international standards regarding the protection of sexual violence victims, the challenges in implementing these standards, and the recommendations for improving access to justice. The quantitative approach involved data collection through an online survey, as well as requests for statistical data from public institutions, based on Law No. 544/2001 on free access to public information.

To analyze existing legal and institutional barriers, we designed and administered an online questionnaire targeting lawyers, available from January 27 to February 12, 2025, via Google Forms. The questionnaire was structured to capture various aspects of sexual violence, ranging from an assessment of the level of professional training on this subject in educational and legal institutions, to an exploration of professionals' perceptions regarding the impact of sexual violence on vulnerable groups.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Additionally, respondents' opinions on the effectiveness of current legislation and the need for normative improvements were evaluated, along with the obstacles faced by survivors of sexual violence in their interactions with the police, prosecutors, and courts. Another dimension of the questionnaire focused on the accessibility and effectiveness of support services available to survivors, such as legal counseling, psychological assistance, and specialized centers. In addition to closed-ended questions, the questionnaire included open-ended questions, allowing respondents to provide suggestions for improving access to justice and support mechanisms for victims. In total, we collected 84 responses from lawyers across different counties in Romania, contributing to a relevant portrayal of systemic issues in the field, even though the results are not nationally representative.

Complementary to the information obtained through the questionnaire-based survey, in order to gain a broader understanding of the phenomenon, in January 2025, I submitted requests for access to public interest information to several relevant institutions. More specifically:

- to the General Inspectorate of the Romanian Police, we requested statistical data on sexual offences (rape, sexual assault, sexual corruption of minors, and sexual harassment) as defined by the Criminal Code, reported in 2024 and between 2018-2021, broken down by county and by districts of Bucharest.
- to the Ministry of Justice, we requested data on the number of cases adjudicated in Romanian courts in 2024 for sexual offences, as well as the average duration of case resolution.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- to the Prosecutor's Office attached to the High Court of Cassation and Justice, we requested information on cases resolved in 2024 related to sexual offences, the rate of indictments, and the average duration of criminal proceedings in such cases.
- to the National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men (ANES), we requested statistical data on victims of domestic and sexual violence, as well as their access to social services, broken down by county.
- to the National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights and Adoption (ANPCDA), we requested information on the number of calls received via the national emergency number 119 for reporting cases of sexual abuse against minors in 2024.
- to the 10 Sexual Violence Intervention Centres within emergency units of ten county hospitals, we requested information on the number of individuals who accessed their services.

It is important to note that this research is exploratory in nature and does not aim for national representativeness. The number of respondents is limited, and the geographical distribution does not allow for extrapolation of conclusions to the entire Romanian judicial system. However, the collected data offers a valuable perspective on systemic challenges, as it incorporates the direct involvement of lawyers—professionals with experience in assisting survivors of sexual violence and navigating legal proceedings. Thus, we believe that the information gathered and presented in this report contributes to a better understanding of existing deficiencies and helps identify possible solutions and recommendations for improving victims' access to justice.

3. THE CURRENT SITUATION

3.1 LEGISLATIVE ASPECTS REGARDING SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Following Romania's ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention)[1], progress has been made in the legislative framework. This includes the introduction of protection orders and provisional protection orders, the operationalization of an electronic monitoring system for offenders, and the requirement for local authorities to allocate budgets for services dedicated to victims of domestic violence.

Cu toate acestea, există în continuare provocări referitoare la implementarea legislației, cât și aspecte care încă nu au fost armonizate cu prevederile Convenției de la Istanbul, cum ar fi lipsa analizării consimțământului în cazul infracțiunii de viol, lipsa incriminării căsătoriilor forțate, mutilării genitale a femeilor, avortului forțat și sterilizării forțate ca forme ale violenței de gen. Directiva (UE) 1385/2024 privind prevenirea și combaterea violenței împotriva femeilor și violenței domestice prevede, la rândul său, obligația statelor membre în ceea ce privește incriminarea unor forme specifice de violență împotriva femeilor, precum mutilarea genitală a femeilor, căsătoria forțată/ căsătoria timpurie sau între copii, partajarea neconsensuală de materiale intime sau manipulate, urmărirea cibernetică în scopul hărțuirii, hărțuirea pe internet, incitarea cibernetică la violență sau la ură precum și instigarea, complicitatea și tentativa la comiterea acestor infracțiuni. Statele au obligația ca în termen de trei ani de la adoptarea Directivei să transpună prevederile sale în legislația internă, adică până cel târziu la data de 14 iunie 2027.

[1] The Istanbul Convention (The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence) – <https://rm.coe.int/168046253e>

3. THE CURRENT SITUATION

*"GREVIO urges the Romanian authorities to amend the provisions of the Penal Code covering rape and sexual assault, **fully incorporating the notion of lack of freely given consent**, in accordance with Article 36 of the Istanbul Convention, and to ensure that such provisions are effectively applied in practice by law enforcement, the prosecution, and the judiciary, including in the absence of the victim's resistance and when the circumstances of the case prevent valid consent." [2]*

The United Nations Human Rights Council also highlights that the Romanian Penal Code does not define rape based on the lack of consent, "which can lead to an excessive reliance on physical resistance in characterizing the crime" [3].

Furthermore, Directive (EU) 1385/2024 establishes measures to protect victims of rape and ensure the criminal accountability of perpetrators, regardless of the existence or withdrawal of a prior complaint. According to paragraph (5), "Member States must ensure that the investigation and prosecution of rape are not dependent on the victim or their representative filing a complaint, and that procedures are not interrupted solely because the complaint has been withdrawn".

[2] Raportul GREVIO: <https://anes.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Raport-de-evaluare-Grevio-RO.pdf>

[3] <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/47/38/Add.1>, para. 74, pag.15.

3.THE CURRENT SITUATION

The GREVIO report[4] identifies a number of issues that require urgent action from the authorities to comply with the provisions of the Istanbul Convention, including continuing efforts to establish crisis centers for rape and reference centers, harmonizing the definition of "family members" in the Penal Code with the provisions of the Convention, investigating, prosecuting, and imposing appropriate sanctions in cases of violence against women, including by increasing reporting levels.

The definition of the concept of "family member" in the Penal Code does not include relationships between the victim and their partner or former partner, if they do not live together.

Istanbul Convention	Law No. 217/2003	The Criminal Code
Domestic violence shall mean all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur in the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, <u>regardless of whether the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim.</u>	"Domestic violence" means any intentional action or inaction of physical, sexual, psychological, economic, social, spiritual, or cyber violence that occurs within the family or domestic environment or between spouses or former spouses, as well as between current or former partners, <u>regardless of whether the perpetrator lives or has lived with the victim.</u>	Article 199 (1) – Domestic Violence: If the acts provided for in Articles 188, 189, and 193-195 are committed against a family member, the maximum special penalty provided by law shall be increased by one-fourth.[1] Article 177 (1) – Family Member: a) Ascendants and descendants, siblings, their children, as well as persons who have become such relatives through adoption, according to the law; b) The spouse; c) Persons who have established relationships similar to these between spouses or between parents and children, <u>provided that they live together.</u>

[4] Idem.

[5] Art. 188 – Murder; Art. 189 – Aggravated Murder; Art. 193 – Battery or other acts of violence; Art. 194 – Bodily harm; Art. 195 – Battery or injuries resulting in death

3. THE CURRENT SITUATION

The M.G.C. v. Romania group of cases (M.G.C. v. Romania, E.B. v. Romania, I.C. v. Romania, A.Ö. and H.Ö. v. Romania, A.E.J. v. Romania, T.M.V. v. Romania) has highlighted structural issues in the investigation and resolution of rape cases. These include the lack of a child-friendly approach for minor victims, inconsistencies in judicial practice regarding the validity of consent given by minor victims—to differentiate between rape and sexual intercourse with a minor (M.G.C. v. Romania)—and consent given by victims with intellectual disabilities (E.B. v. Romania).

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) concluded that courts and prosecutors failed to properly assess the applicants' capacity to give valid consent. Instead, they wrongly presumed consent based solely on the victims' behavior, their lack of physical resistance, and their reaction during and after the sexual abuse, without considering psychological expert assessments. Moreover, jurisprudence in rape cases remains inconsistent, particularly when no physical violence is involved.

The most recent review by the Committee of Ministers [6] regarding the implementation of ECHR rulings in the M.G.C. group of cases against Romania took place in its March 12-14, 2024 session, resulting in a series of recommendations, including:

- Additional information is needed on the purpose and content of practical measures and capacity-building efforts aimed at ensuring procedural safeguards and protection for child victims of crimes.

[6] The most recent analysis by the Committee of Ministers can be accessed here - [https://hudoc.exec.coe.int/eng?i=CM/Del/Dec\(2024\)1492/H46-26E](https://hudoc.exec.coe.int/eng?i=CM/Del/Dec(2024)1492/H46-26E)

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- Romanian authorities are encouraged to capitalize on their initiatives and draw inspiration from best practices developed by other member states, with the support of the Council of Europe, to develop and implement a child-friendly justice model that is multidisciplinary and interinstitutional, particularly in response to violence against children, including sexual abuse.
- The Committee notes with concern the findings of specialized bodies within the Council of Europe, which confirm previous conclusions that deficiencies persist in the criminal justice response to rape allegations involving adult victims, particularly women. It deeply regrets that the previously reported positive developments in national practice have not been consolidated.
- The Committee urges authorities to develop and adopt, without further delay, adequate and sufficient measures to prevent the recurrence of violations. In this context, it also calls for the implementation of specific measures and approaches to ensure effective access to justice for victims whose capacity may be impaired, who therefore require increased vigilance and enhanced protection throughout criminal investigations and proceedings.

3. THE CURRENT SITUATION

3.2 SEXUAL VIOLENCE REPORTED TO THE POLICE

More than 1 in 2 Romanians believe that rape is justified in certain circumstances, such as if the victim had consumed alcohol or drugs, was dressed provocatively, or agreed to go home with their partner (Eurobarometer 449, 2017). These biases persist, with 29% of Romanians still believing that a victim who experienced sexual violence while under the influence of alcohol or drugs is at least partially responsible (Eurobarometer 544, 2024). Despite widespread societal prejudices against victims of sexual violence, there is a growing trend in reporting such crimes to the police. This may indicate an increased awareness of different forms of violence among the population.

In 2024, the police registered **1271 cases of rape involving adult victims, compared to 1056 cases in 2023**, reflecting a 20% increase in reported incidents[7].

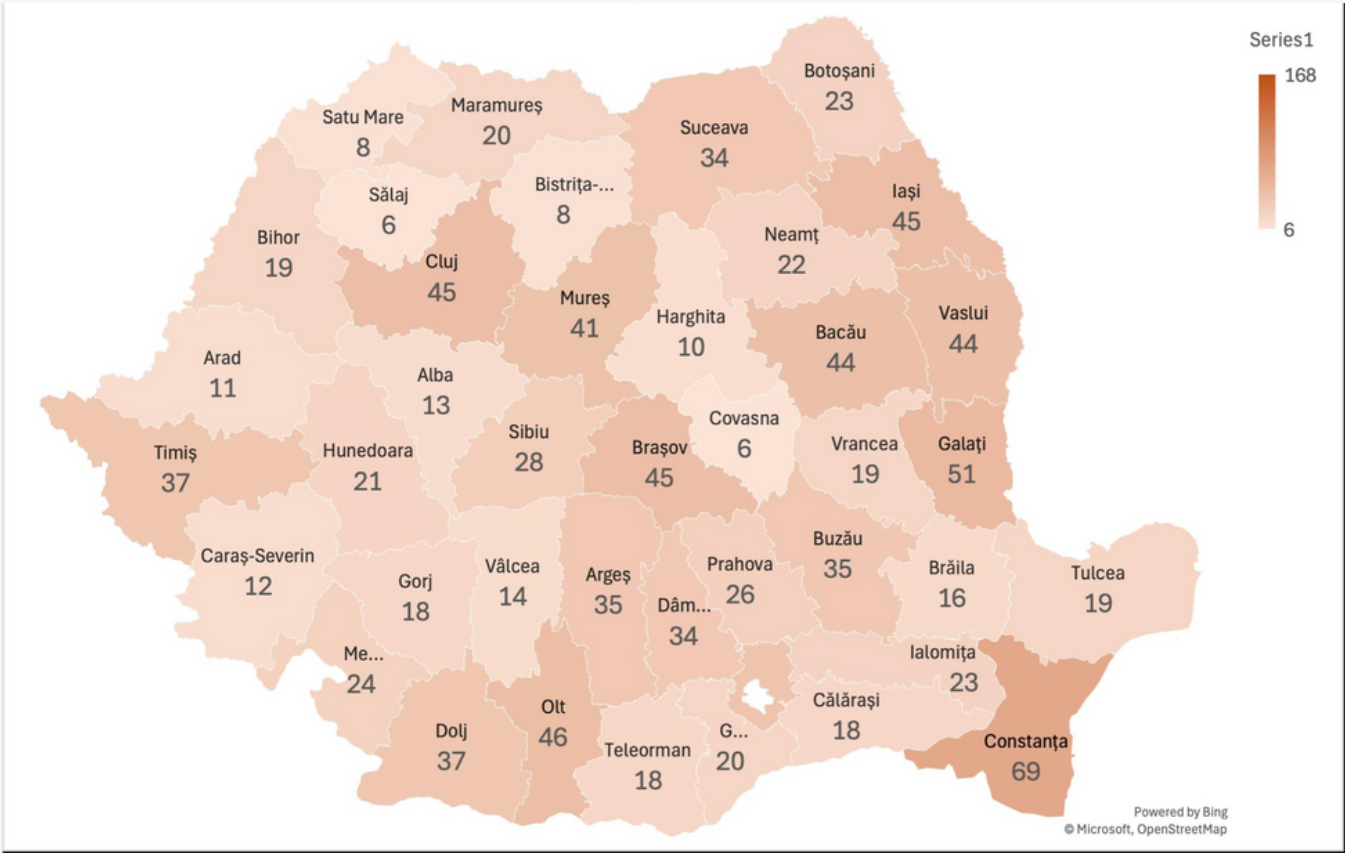
Of the 1271 reported rape offences, 132 occurred between family members, **96% of the victims in cases of rape within the family are women and all perpetrators in these cases are men**. In 33 cases, the perpetrator was the victim's husband or ex-husband. In 47 cases, the perpetrator was the victim's current or former partner.



[7] The data analyzed in this chapter was provided by the Romanian Police in responses 296.666/04.02.2024 and 296.807/24.02.2024, following information requests submitted by Centrul FILIA under Law No. 544/2001 on Free Access to Public Information.

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Rape cases recorded by the police in 2024



For non-family rape offenses committed, i.e. 90% of all offenses of this kind, the Romanian police doesn’t collect gender-disaggregated data and as a result we cannot know how many of these adult victims are women.

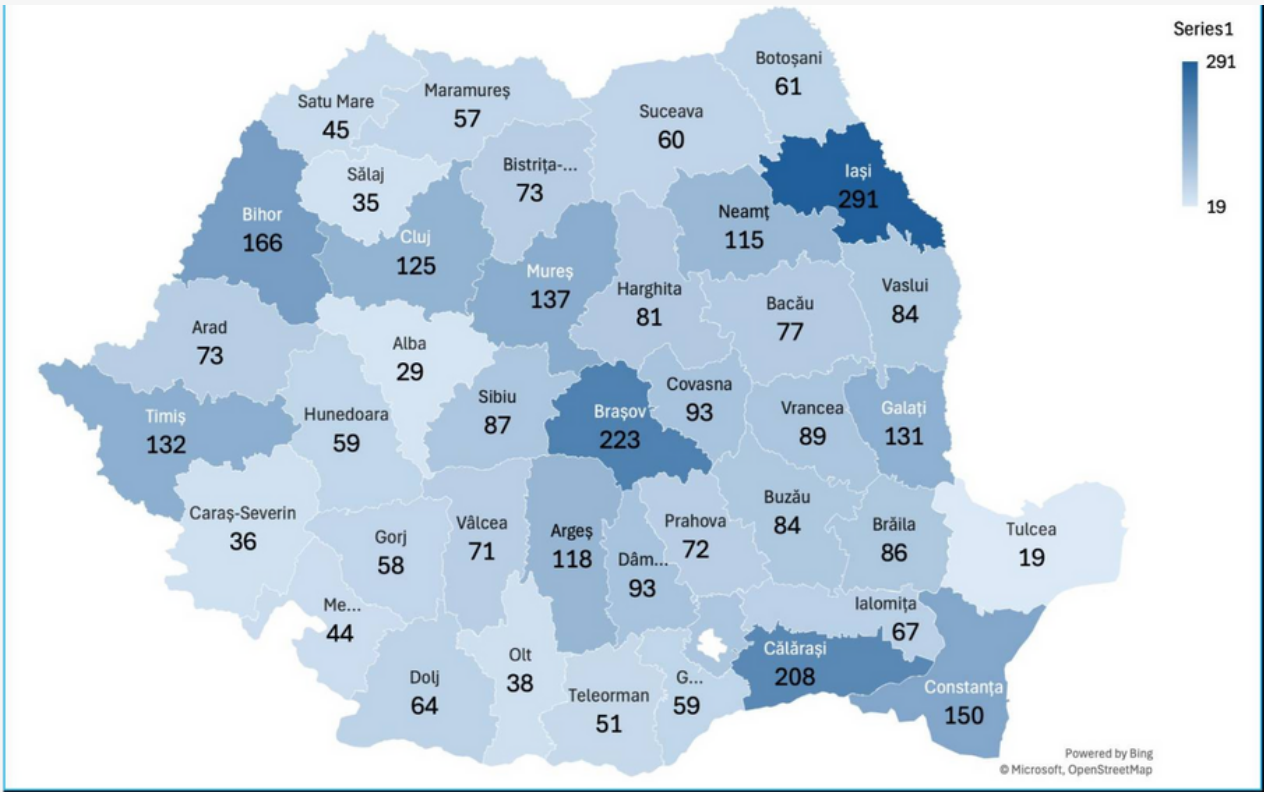
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Rape	1.999	2.139	1.864	1.951	1.997	1.922	1.271
Of which against a minor	770	779	726	795	869	866	-

3.THE CURRENT SITUATION

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Rape (with a minor victim)	770	779	726	795	869	866	3.999 [8]
Sexual act with child / a minor	1.884	2.130	2.034	2.658	3.097	3.546	-

Of the 3.999 offenses of rape of a minor, **421 victims were family members, 27 boys and 394 girls**. The victim is the current or former partner of the aggressor in 206 cases, son/daughter in 100 cases, or other in 115 cases. 97% of perpetrators are male.

Cases of rape of a minor recorded by the police in 2024



***In Bucharest, 271 rape crimes against a minor were recorded.**

[8] In 2024, acts were recorded that fall within the scope of the new crime of rape of a minor.

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Also in 2024, 628 offenses of sexual assault and 934 offenses of sexual assault of minors, 9 offenses of causing or facilitating sexual acts or acts of a sexual nature between minors, 133 offenses of sexual corruption of minors, 105 cases of solicitation of minors for sexual purposes and 30 cases of sexual harassment were registered with the police. Many forms of sexual violence against minors are difficult to bring to the attention of the authorities because of the power relationship between the perpetrators (in most cases adults or those of considerable age difference) and the victims, as well as the particular vulnerabilities that minor victims may have, namely disabled minors, minors from families with limited material resources or Roma minorities. UNICEF estimates that 1 in 8 girls and women have experienced rape or sexual abuse by the age of 18.[11].

Only 421 charges of suspected child sexual abuse were registered in 2024 by the National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights and Adoption (ANPDCA), at 119 - the single nationwide hotline for children. Given that the number of complaints regarding the various crimes against sexual freedom and integrity affecting minor victims is much higher and that many of these crimes remain unreported, we consider the necessity of a campaign that promotes and informs the general public about this way of reporting suspected child sexual abuse.

[9] One such case took place in the very institution where the disabled minor victim was in state care

[10] UNICEF, October 9 th , 2024, Press release

[11] Data provided by the ANPDCA following a request submitted by FILIA Center and formulated on the basis of Law 544/2001 on free access to information of public interest.

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Given that the number of complaints regarding various offenses against the sexual freedom and integrity of minor victims is much higher and that many of these offenses go unreported, we consider it necessary to launch a public awareness and information campaign on this method of reporting suspicions of child sexual abuse.

3.3 ACCESS TO SERVICES FOR VICTIMS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

The National Agency for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (ANES) provides an emergency hotline 0800500333 for victims to report situations of domestic violence, human trafficking or gender/multiple discrimination. In 2024, 12.985 victims of domestic violence benefited from services nationwide, including 2.669 adults (183 men and 2.486 women) and 10.316 minors (4.772 boys and 5.544 girls), according to data recorded at the level of the Social Assistance and Child Protection Directorates (DGASPC) and submitted to ANES. 534 minors and 43 adult victims of sexual violence benefited from services at national level in 2024. The number of victims who accessed the available services at local level is extremely low compared to the number of police interventions in cases of domestic violence (over 130.000) and the number of victims registered by the police following complaints of domestic violence (over 60.000).

[12] More information about the emergency hotline 0800500333 can be accessed here: <https://anes.gov.ro/asistent-a-pentru-victim-e/call-center/>

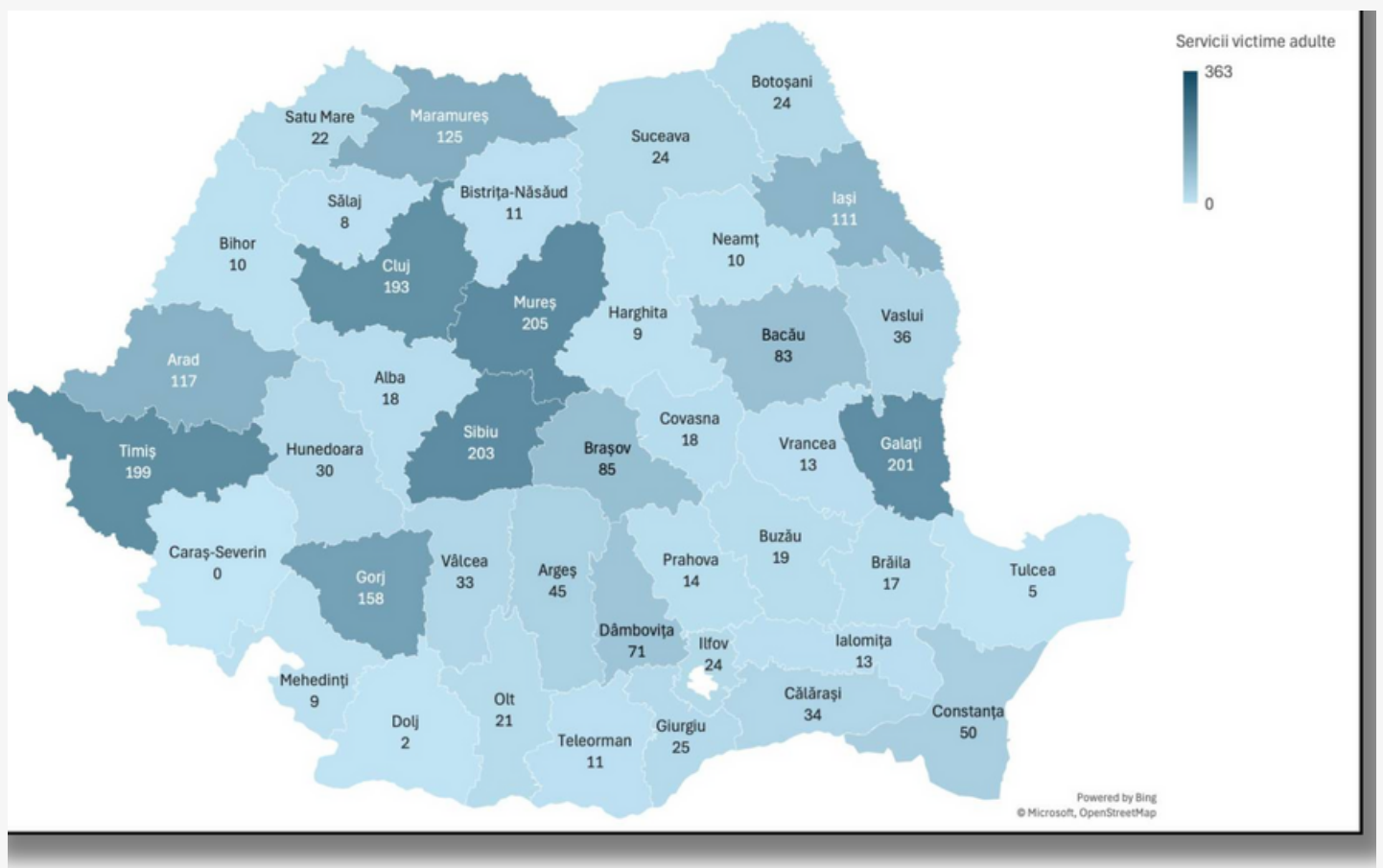
[13] According to response no. 777/6/CRP/03.03.2025 issued by ANES following a request made under Law no. 544/2001 on free access to public information.

[14] Ibid.

3.THE CURRENT SITUATION

All the more so when we compare the number of sexual violence survivors who accessed DGASPC services to the number of reported complaints **(543 minor victims of sexual violence vs. 3,999 cases of rape against a minor recorded by the police, and 43 adults vs. 1,271 cases of rape recorded by the police).**

How many adults accessed domestic violence services in 2024?



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The activity of non-governmental organisations with expertise in providing services in the field of preventing and combating domestic violence, as well as the allocation of public funds for services for adult victims of domestic violence are directly proportional to the number of beneficiaries reported, as we have also shown in the Monitoring Report on Violence against Women published in 2023 [15]. The counties where a higher number of adult beneficiaries were reported are the counties where there are active non-governmental organisations or public funds allocated - Mureş, Sibiu, Cluj, Galaţi, Timiş, Bucharest.

	THE NUMBER OF ADULTS WHO BENEFITED FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICES IN BUCHAREST		
	TOTAL	MEN	WOMEN
BUCHAREST SECTOR 1	13	0	13
BUCHAREST SECTOR 2	231	15	216
BUCHAREST SECTOR 3	40	0	40
BUCHAREST SECTOR 4	46	3	43
BUCHAREST SECTOR 5	24	0	24
BUCHAREST SECTOR 6	9	0	9

The source of the data: ANES

[15] Available at: https://centrulfilia.ro/new/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Raport-monitorizare-VIF_2023_Centrul-FILIA.pdf

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However, in Bucharest, we can still see significant differences between the six sectors, with the highest number of adults receiving services for victims of domestic violence being recorded in Sector 2.

In 2021, Intervention Centres for Victims of Sexual Violence were set up at the level of the emergency reception units of ten county hospitals, with the aim of providing an integrated intervention through free services, provided in the same location by a multidisciplinary team consisting of a doctor/medical assistant, forensic doctor, psychologist, social worker, police officer. In June 2024, we sent requests for information to the ten Intervention Centres for Victims of Sexual Violence, as the number of people who benefited from the services of these centres was extremely low between **January 2021 and May 2024**:

Sexual Violence Victim Intervention Center	Number of beneficiaries
University Emergency Hospital Bucharest	24
Bacău County Emergency Hospital	0
Brăila County Emergency Hospital	3
Constanța County Emergency Hospital	1
Craiova County Emergency Hospital	2
Piatra Neamț County Emergency Hospital	15
Satu Mare County Emergency Hospital	1
Sibiu County Emergency Hospital	9
Slobozia County Emergency Hospital	5
Timișoara County Emergency Hospital	13

[16] More information about the Sexual Violence Victim Intervention Center can be accessed here: <https://mfamilie.gov.ro/1/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Anexa-2-Centrul-IVVS-003.pdf>

3. THE CURRENT SITUATION

The Intervention Center for Victims of Sexual Violence no longer exists within the County Emergency Hospital of Brăila because there were no victims registered at the UPU or in the outpatient clinic [17], the collaboration protocol between institutions has been disestablished. With the exception of Sibiu County Emergency Hospital and Brăila County Emergency Hospital (where there is no longer a center), the responses received from the other eight hospitals are identical:

"There are no staff employed to exclusively ensure intervention in cases of sexual violence, each person involved being on duty"

"There is no annual budget allocated for this intervention center"

"Psychological counselling for victims of sexual violence is provided by the hospitals clinical psychologists"

"Intervention activity for victims of sexual violence is carried out by staff already existing in the space and at the level of the institutions involved in the intervention (social welfare services, police, forensic services)"

All the responses received indicate **the absence of public funding** for the services provided to victims for the operation of these centers, as well as **the lack of specialized staff**—here, only the hospital's clinical psychologists are mentioned, along with attending seminars on this subject.

[17] According to the reply 23091/04.06.2024 sent by the hospital following a request made under Law no. 544/2001 on free access to information of public interest.

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It is important to mention that ANES, in partnership with the Eastern European Institute of Reproductive Health (IEESR), organised in 2023 a course for health care providers "Clinical Management of Victims of Sexual Violence" in Bucharest, Satu Mare, Sibiu, Mures, Bacau, Craiova, Timisoara, but the monitoring report doesn't specify how many people have benefited from this course.

As for the number of victims of sexual violence who benefited from the services of the 10 Intervention Centres in 2024, it is extremely low - **only 32 victims were registered nationwide.**

The 2023 Monitoring Report on Existing Services for Domestic Violence Victims and Perpetrators highlights that the websites of the General Directorates of Social Assistance and Child Protection do not include information about the Sexual Violence Victim Intervention Centers. Since these are relevant services for victims of violence against women, "an access path for them is essential" [19]. The time victims spend online to identify support services must be as short as possible to avoid exposing them to danger from the perpetrator or abandoning their search [20].

[18] More information about the course in the field of sexual violence can be found here: <https://anes.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Raport-de-monitorizare-a-stadiului-implementarii-Strategiei-%E2%80%99ESINERGIE-2021-2030-pentru-anul-2023.pdf>

[19] Săsărman, M. (coord.), 2023, Monitoring Report on Existing Services for Domestic Violence Victims and Perpetrators 2023, p. 36, available at: <https://violentaimpotrivafemeilor.ro/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/RAPORT-SERVICII-VIF-2023.pdf>

[20] Ibid.

3. THE CURRENT SITUATION

The monitoring report also points out that sexual violence is not included in the county strategies for the prevention and combating of domestic violence, and the existence of centers for trafficking victims in some counties cannot be considered as services for victims of sexual violence on their own [21].

3.4 THE SITUATION OF SEXUAL OFFENSE CASES PENDING IN PROSECUTOR'S OFFICES IN 2024

In 2024, there were 4,884 cases related to the crime of rape under investigation by the prosecutors' offices. Of these, 1,678 cases were resolved, representing 34% of the total number of cases [22].

78% of the rape cases resolved at the prosecutors' offices were closed.

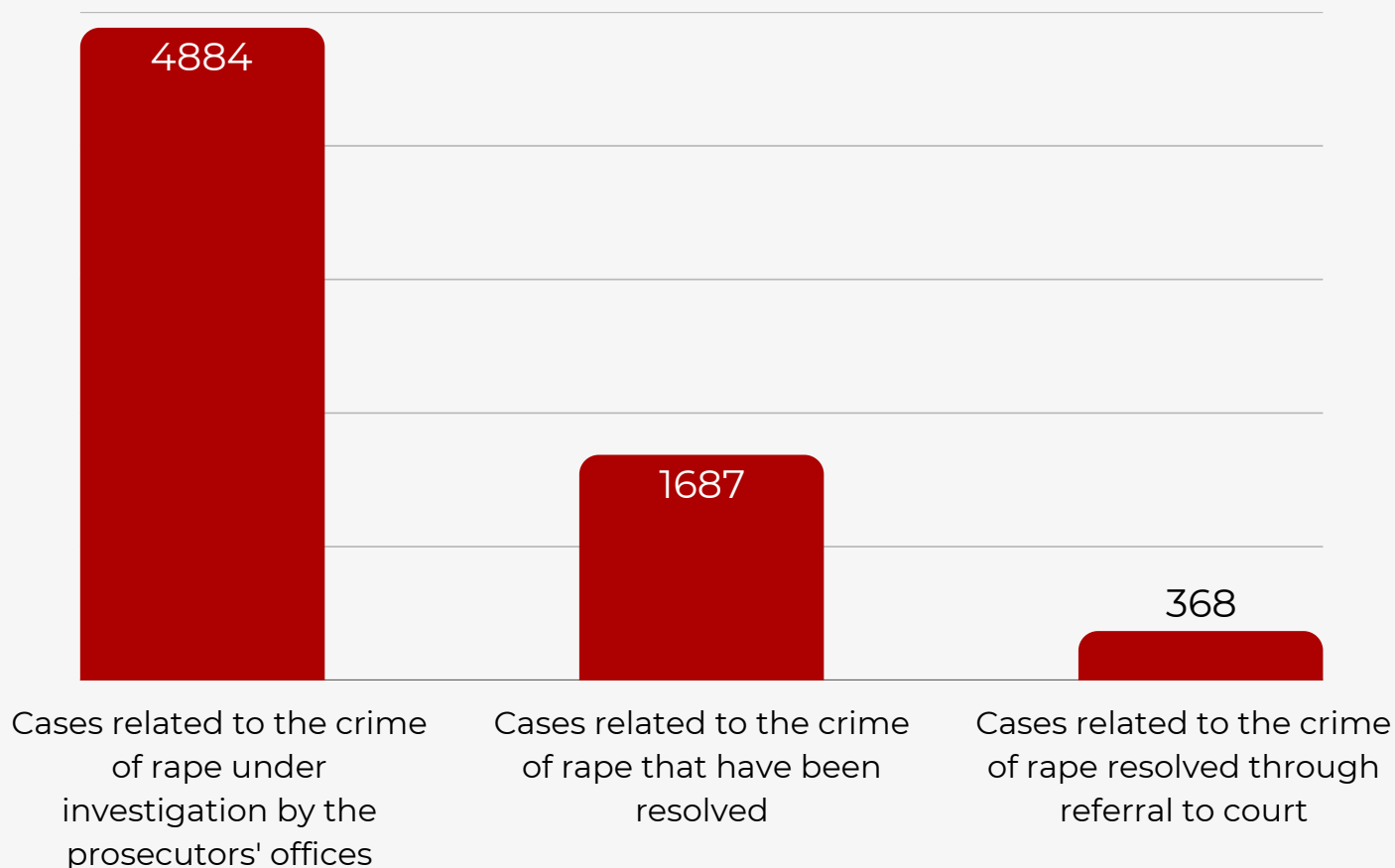
Only 1 in 5 resolved rape cases is sent to court.

[21] Ibid.

[22] The data analysed in this chapter was submitted by the Prosecutors Office of the High Court of Cassation and Justice through reply no. 140/VIII-3/2025 following requests for information made by FILIA Center under Law no. 544/2001 on free access to information of public interest.

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Cases related to the crime of rape



Unfortunately, there is a noticeable trend of an increase in the percentage of rape cases resolved through closure compared to 2023, when 73% of such cases were closed[23]. There are several grounds for closure that prevent the initiation or continuation of criminal proceedings, including the fact that the act is not specified by criminal law or was not committed with the culpability required by law, lack of evidence, withdrawal of the criminal complaint, reconciliation, or the conclusion of a mediation agreement (Article 16 of the New Criminal Procedure Code).

[23] 1.223 rape cases solved by dismissal in 2023 compared to 1.679 rape cases solved in that year. The data was provided by the General Prosecutors Office following a request from FILIA Center made under Law 544/2001 on free access to information of public interest.

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It is essential to understand the criteria that led to the closure of these cases in order to identify possible solutions for holding perpetrators criminally accountable and to prevent discouraging sexual violence victims from reporting these offenses to the authorities.

Of the 413 defendants indicted for rape, 409 are men and 4 are women. Among the defendants indicted in 2024, 1 police officer and 1 magistrate are reported by the Prosecutors Office.

The long duration of the processing of cases concerning offenses against sexual freedom and integrity and the intervention of the statute of limitations discourage victims and decrease their trust in justice. **37 rape cases were solved in 2024 after the statute of limitations had expired, meaning that perpetrators can no longer be held accountable for their crimes.** The statute of limitations for criminal liability starts to run from the date of commission of the offense and is different depending on the length of the prison sentence prescribed for a particular crime. As of November 2nd, 2020, the statute of limitations will no longer apply to the crimes of rape (Article 218) and sexual intercourse with a minor (Article 220 [24]). As of July 1st, 2021, the crime of sexual assault will be added to the list of crimes for which the statute of limitations no longer applies, and as of January 1st, it will also apply to the new crimes of rape of a minor (Article 218, index 1) and sexual assault of a minor (Article 219, index 1).

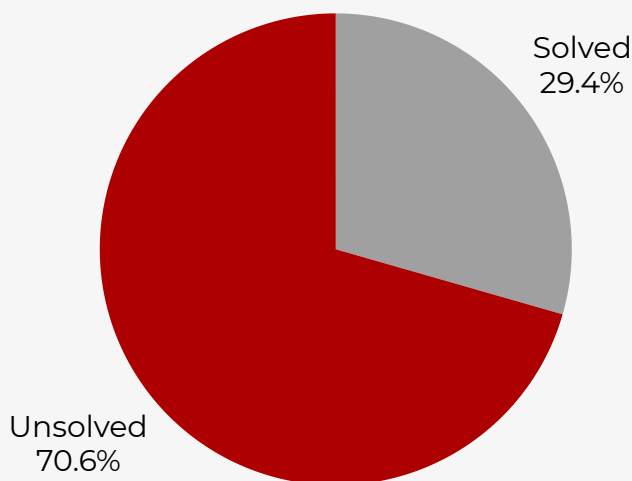
[24] This provision was introduced by Law no. 217/2020 for the amendment and completion of Law no. 286/2009 regarding the Penal Code, as well as for the amendment of Article 223 paragraph (2) of Law no. 135/2020 regarding the Criminal Procedure Code.

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We have made these clarifications in order to understand how we relate the limitation period to the date of commission of the offense, taking into account the penalties provided for on the same date for the crime of rape and the other crimes against sexual freedom and sexual integrity, and also taking into account the more favorable law of application. **The 37 rape cases that were solved in 2024 after the expiry of the statute of limitations indicate that we can take into account a period of 8 years or more from the commission of the act until the expiry of the statute of limitations, so these cases refer to acts committed in 2016 or before.** A detailed analysis and additional data are needed to understand in how many of these cases we can talk about facts committed in the past and reported to the authorities a long time after the facts were committed, or about a lengthy criminal investigation and failure of the authorities to hold the perpetrators criminally liable before the statute of limitations had expired.

With regards to the crime of sexual intercourse with a minor, 6.619 such cases were pending before prosecutos offices in 2024, of which 1.949 were solved (29%).

Cases regarding the crime of sexual intercourse with a minor



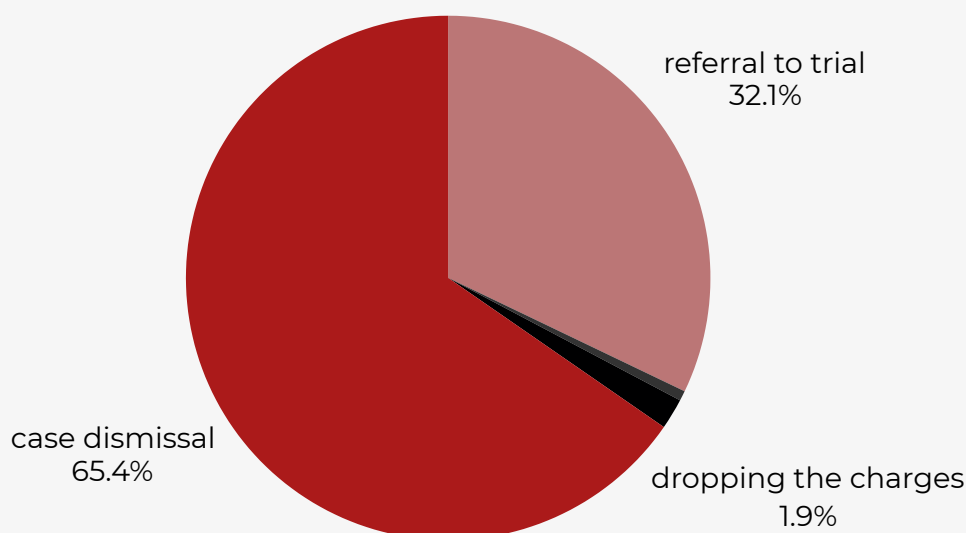
[25] Amendment provided by Law no. 186/2021.

[26] Amendment provided by Law no. 217/2023.

3. THE CURRENT SITUATION

Only 626 cases of sexual acts with a minor were resolved by referral to court, and 12 cases were referred to the court through a plea agreement. In 37 cases of sexual acts with a minor, the prosecution was discontinued, and 1,274 cases were closed. 27 cases were resolved after the statute of limitations had expired.

Resolved cases regarding the crime of sexual acts with a minor



In 2024, there were **3711 cases** pending before the prosecutors' offices concerning crimes of rape against a minor, sexual assault committed against a minor, and the inducement or facilitation of sexual acts or sexual relations between minors [27].

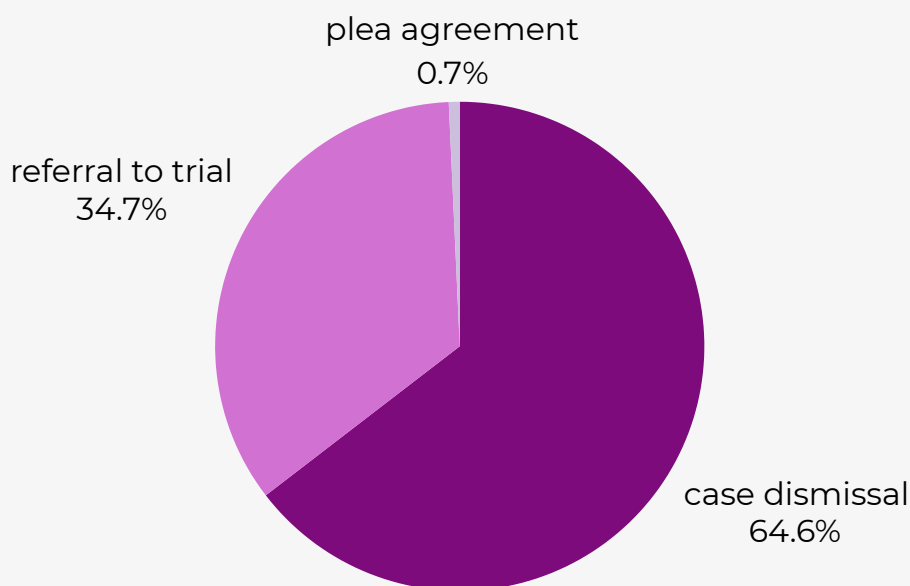
Of these, **1112 cases were resolved during the past year**, representing 30% of the total number of such cases pending before the prosecutors' offices.

[27] The data collection matrix regarding sexual offences pending before courts in 2024 does not include indicators for the new offences 218¹, 219¹, and 219² separately; instead, they are calculated together.

3. THE CURRENT SITUATION

Of the resolved cases, **718 cases were closed through dismissal (65%)**, while only 386 cases were sent to trial, and 8 cases were resolved through a plea agreement.

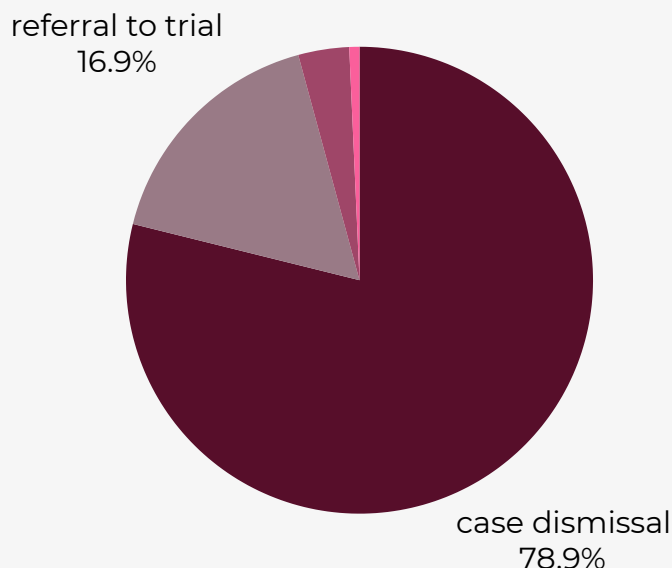
Resolved cases regarding the crimes of rape of a minor, sexual assault against a minor, and the inducement or facilitation of sexual acts between minors



There were **522 cases concerning the crime of sexual corruption of minors pending before the prosecutors' offices**. Of these, 142 cases (27%) were resolved in 2024. 24 cases resulted in indictments, and 1 case was referred to the court through a plea agreement. 112 cases of sexual corruption of minors were closed (79%), and in 5 cases, prosecution was dropped.

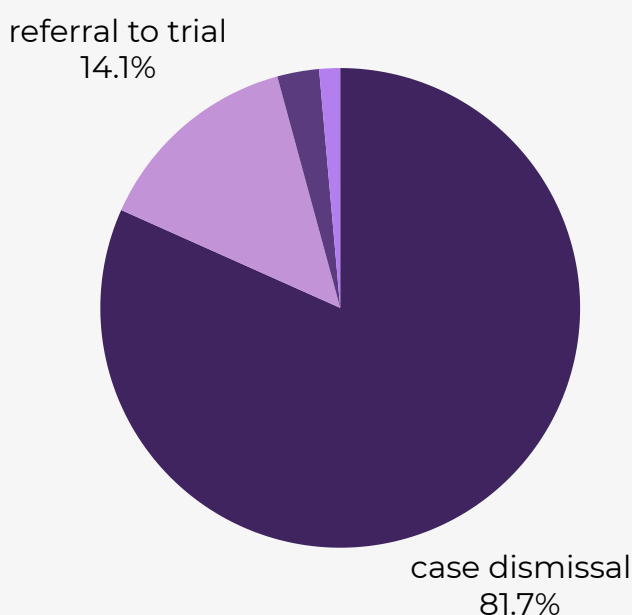
3.THE CURRENT SITUATION

Cases regarding the crime of sexual corruption of minors



Also in 2024, there were **239 cases concerning the recruitment of minors for sexual purposes**, with 71 of these cases being resolved last year (30%). 10 cases were resolved through indictment, and 1 case was referred to the court through a plea agreement. 58 cases of recruiting minors for sexual purposes were resolved through closure, representing 82% of the total resolved cases of this type, while in two cases, prosecution was dropped.

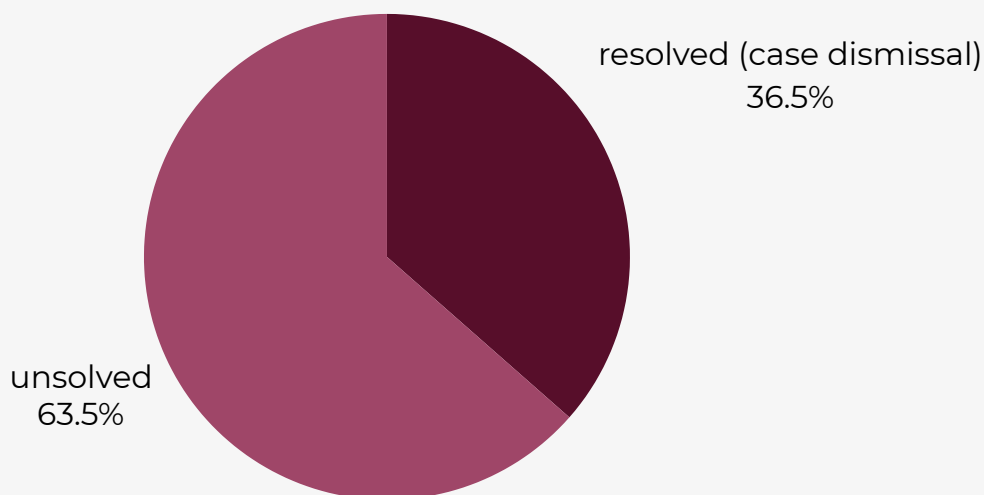
Cases regarding the crime of soliciting minors for sexual purposes



3. THE CURRENT SITUATION

Regarding sexual harassment, all 27 cases resolved in 2024 were closed, with a total of 74 cases of sexual harassment pending before the courts.

Cases regarding the crime of sexual harassment



Although the issue of sexual harassment has been highly publicised in the past year, especially concerning cases occurring in the university environment (28), the number of criminal complaints regarding sexual harassment remains low.

[28] More details about media-covered cases of sexual harassment in university settings in 2024 can be found here:
<https://hotnews.ro/cazul-bulai-modifica-legea-sesizarile-privind-hartuirea-sexuala-nu-vor-mai-fi-clasate-ci-trimise-de-indata-la-politie-si-parchet-1828311>

3. THE CURRENT SITUATION

3.5 THE SITUATION OF SEXUAL OFFENSE CASES PENDING IN COURTS

In 2024, a total of **1953 cases related to the crime of rape were pending before the courts** at various procedural stages, with 1299 new cases entered during the year. A **total of 1101 rape cases were resolved in 2024**, representing 56% of the total number of such cases [29].

A total of 1,104 rape cases were in the first procedural stage, at trial in the first instance, with 651 new rape cases registered in 2024. **The average resolution time at trial in the first instance is 3258 days.**

In 2023, there were 1648 cases of rape pending before courts across all procedural stages, of which **1022 were resolved** [30].

Regarding the number of individuals convicted for the crime of rape, I have extracted the available data from the National Institute of Statistics database, with the most recent data being for the year 2023 – **the number of individuals definitively convicted being 231.**

[29] The data on cases pending before courts in 2024 were provided by the Ministry of Justice in response no. 4243/2025/28.01.2025 following an information request made by FILIA Center under Law no. 544/2001 on free access to public interest information.

[30] According to response no. 7011/07.02.2024 issued by the Ministry of Justice following an information request submitted by FILIA Center under Law no. 544/2001 on free access to public interest information.

3. THE CURRENT SITUATION

Regarding the number of individuals convicted for the crime of rape, data extracted from the National Institute of Statistics database indicate that the most recent available figures are for 2023, with 231 individuals receiving final convictions. This reflects a downward trend in the number of final convictions for rape compared to previous years (264 individuals in 2022 and 546 in 2021) [31].

Currently, there is no way to track what happens to a case from the moment a complaint is filed with the police, through its progression to the prosecutors' offices, and subsequently to the courts, making it difficult to analyse the length of time a survivor of sexual violence must endure before justice is served and the perpetrator is held accountable.

The data analysed in this research report suggest that there is often a prolonged period (sometimes even leading to the statute of limitations expiring), during which it is crucial to have support services available for survivors of sexual violence to prevent discouragement in pursuing justice.

[31] Data available from the National Institute of Statistics, Tempo Online, JUS104D – Final Convictions by Crime Category: Crimes Against the Person – Rape (considered the most severe crime in cases where individuals were convicted for multiple offenses).

4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

As previously mentioned, access to justice for victims of sexual violence remains a complex issue marked by multiple legal and institutional barriers. To better understand these obstacles, we designed an online questionnaire addressed to lawyers. Through this initiative, we aimed to gain insights into their perceptions of professional training on sexual violence, the existing legislation, and the challenges victims face in their interactions with authorities. The questionnaire was completed by 84 lawyers from various counties in Romania, providing valuable insight into systemic issues in this field.

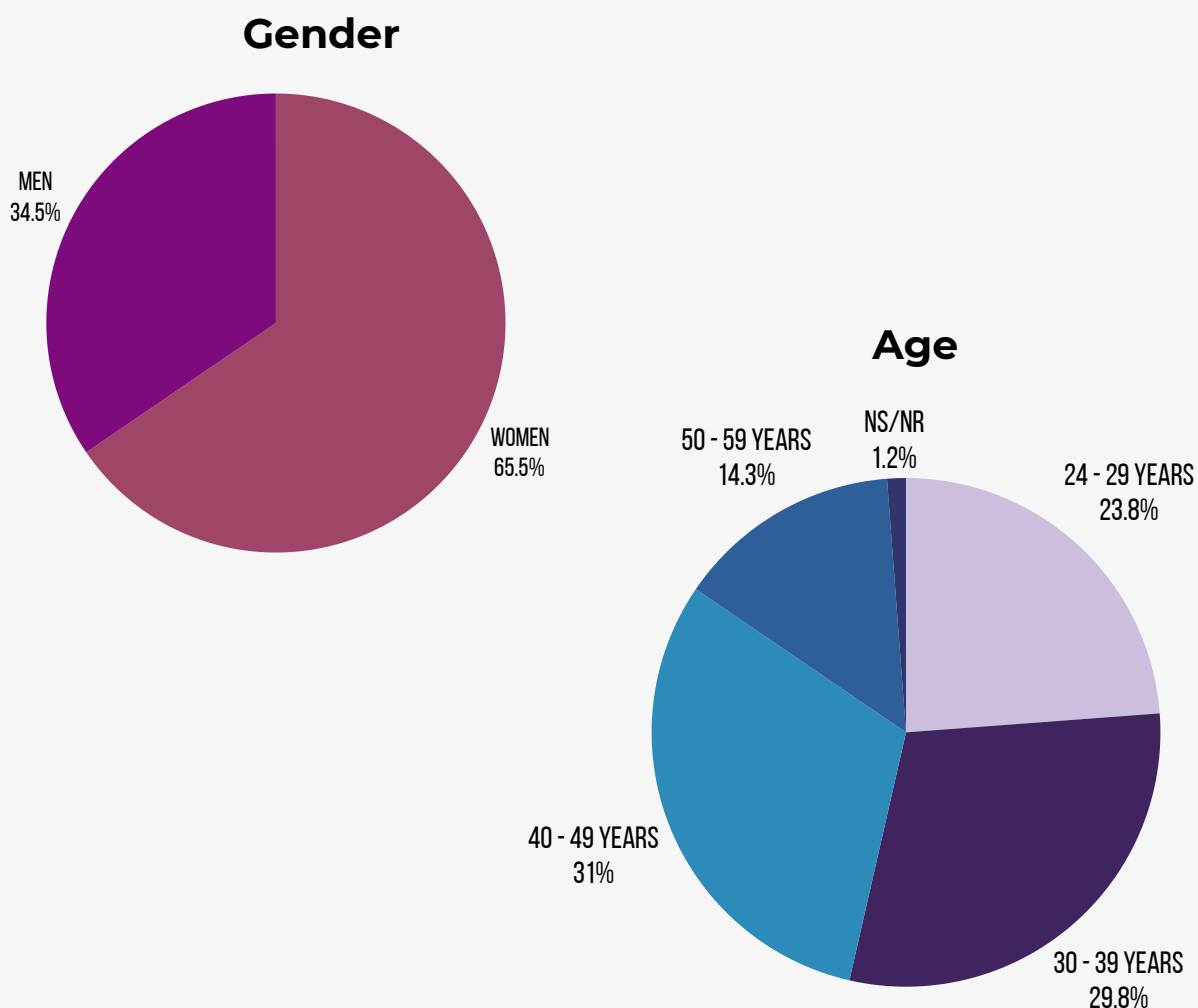
We chose to divide our data analysis into two distinct sections: "Perspectives in numbers" and "Perspectives beyond numbers" to provide a comprehensive view. Closed-ended responses allow us to identify general trends, statistical distributions, and patterns of perception, while open-ended responses add context, nuance, and direct experiences from lawyers assisting victims. This helps us better understand practical obstacles and lawyers' recommendations for improving access to justice for victims of sexual violence. We believe that this combined approach enables a thorough and balanced analysis of the collected data.

4.LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

4.1 PERSPECTIVES IN NUMBERS

This section, as explained previously, is dedicated to the analysis of responses to closed-ended questions. We will, therefore, examine the structured responses that reflect the opinions of lawyers regarding professional training, the existing legal framework, barriers encountered in the justice system, and services available for victims of sexual violence.

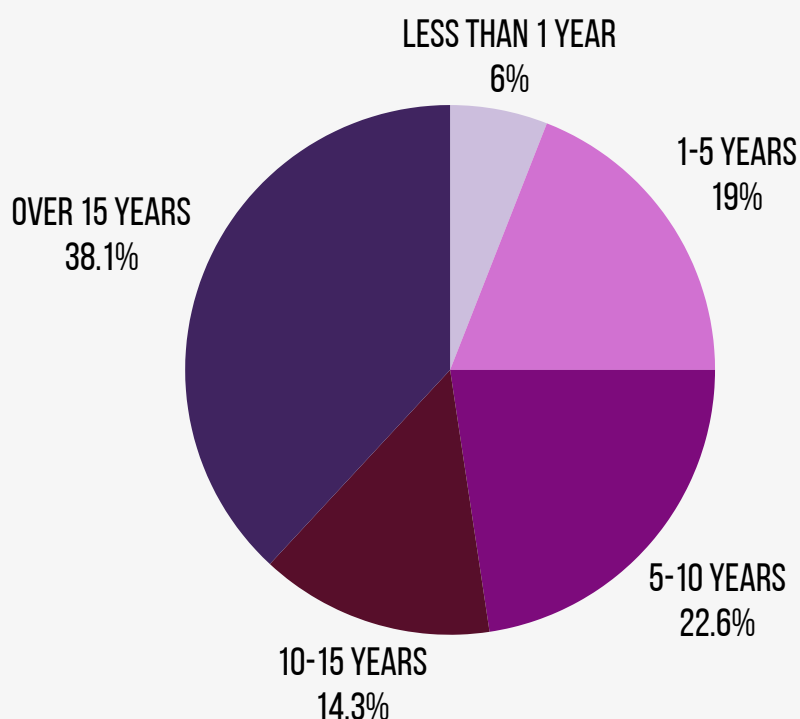
Regarding the profile of the respondents, the majority are women (65%), with the largest groups falling within the age categories of 40-49 years (31%), 30-39 years (30%), and 24-29 years (24%).



4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Regarding professional experience, the majority of respondents (38%) have over 15 years of experience, indicating a significant core of professionals with solid expertise in the field. A quarter (23%) fall into the 5-10 years of experience category, while 19% are in the first 1-5 years of activity. Only 6% are newcomers, with less than one year of experience.

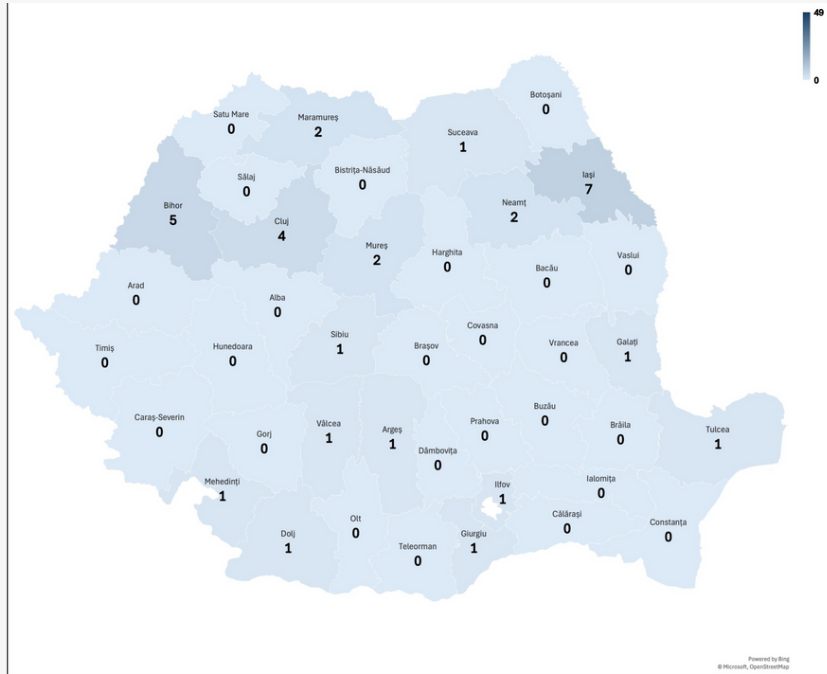
Experiența profesională



Regarding the distribution of professional activity, the majority of respondents work in Bucharest (49 individuals, or 58% of the total). Other counties with significant presence include Iași (7 individuals, 8%), Bihor (5 individuals, 6%), and Cluj (4 individuals, 5%), along with others.

4.LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

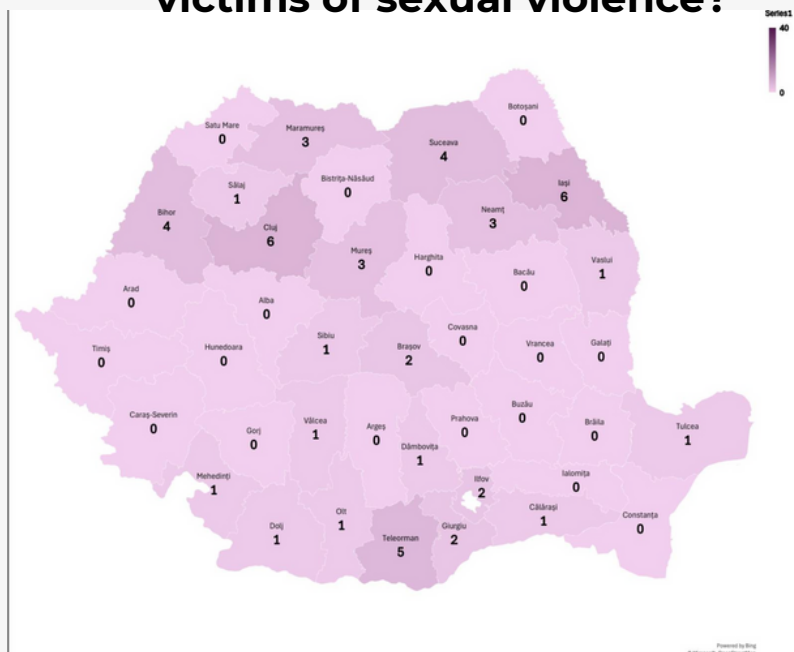
In which county do you currently carry out your activity?



***49 of the respondents carry out their activity in Bucharest.**

When asked about the counties in which they have assisted/represented victims of sexual violence, Bucharest is again in first place (44%), followed by Cluj, Teleorman, Suceava, and others.

In which counties have you assisted/represented victims of sexual violence?



***40 of the respondents have assisted victims in Bucharest.**

4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Beyond socio-demographic data, we divided the questionnaire into four main sections:

- About professionals' training, where we aimed to understand the perception of training, the availability of information on sexual violence at the level of undergraduate, master's, and doctoral studies, as well as the training provided by the Bar Association.
- About legislation, where we sought to evaluate the perception of the existing legal framework and the need for improvements to protect and support victims of sexual violence.
- About barriers, where we aimed to understand the obstacles faced by victims of sexual violence in the justice system.
- About services, where we sought to assess the availability and efficiency of support provided to victims.

Next, we will analyze the results obtained from these sections.

There is sufficient information on addressing sexual violence cases at the undergraduate level in the Faculty of Law

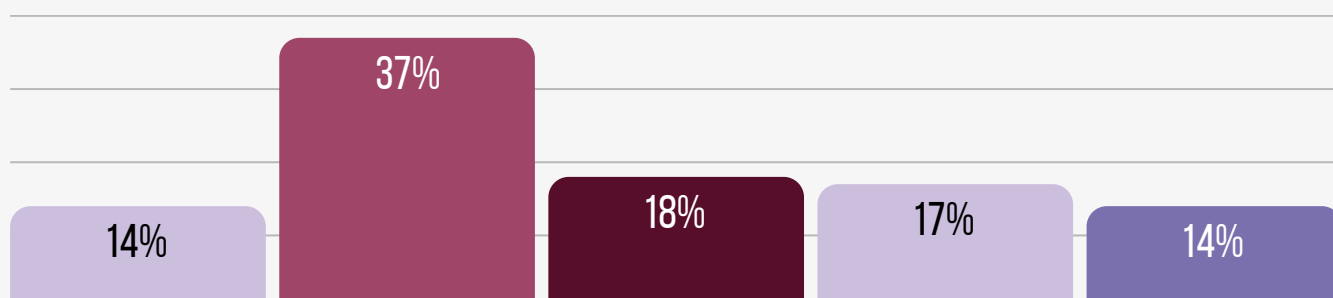
● TOTAL AGREEMENT

● PARTIAL AGREEMENT

● NEITHER AGREEMENT NOR DISAGREEMENT

● PARTIAL DISAGREEMENT

● TOTAL DISAGREEMENT



4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

There is sufficient information about addressing sexual violence cases at the master's level in the Faculty of Law



TOTAL AGREEMENT



PARTIAL AGREEMENT



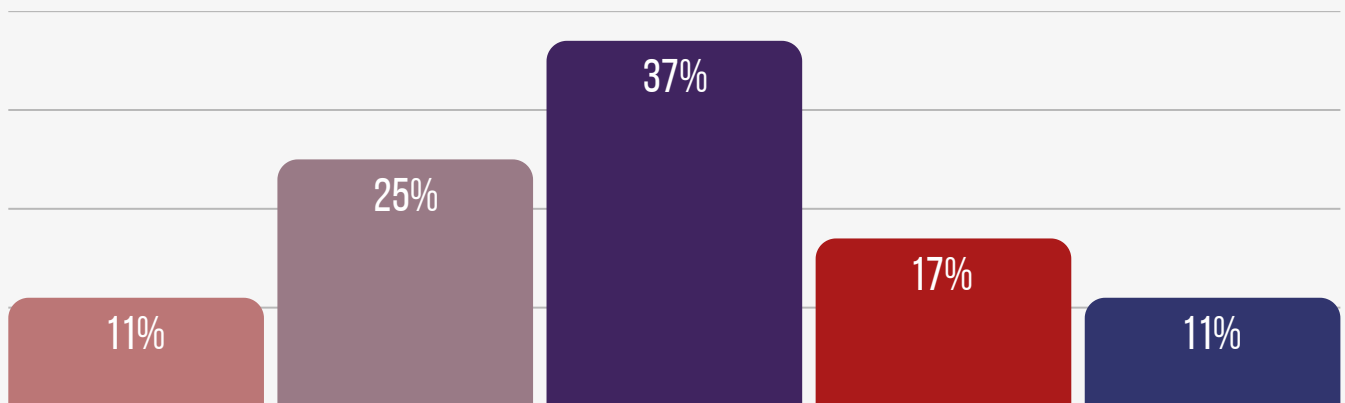
NEITHER AGREEMENT NOR DISAGREEMENT



PARTIAL DISAGREEMENT



TOTAL DISAGREEMENT



51% of respondents consider that the topic of sexual violence is somewhat adequately covered at the undergraduate level in Law Faculties. However, when combining the categories "partially disagree" (17%) and "totally disagree" (14%), a total of 31% of respondents believe that there is insufficient information on sexual violence in undergraduate studies.

At the level of training within the Bar Association, the data reveals a divided perception: 12% of respondents completely agree that information about sexual violence is sufficient, while 21% partially agree, suggesting a general appreciation. However, 27% are undecided ("neither agree nor disagree"), and 39% express dissatisfaction (14% partially disagree and 25% totally disagree).

4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Overall, data on professionals' training (lawyers, magistrates) indicate the need to integrate more information about sexual violence and ensure adequate preparation for future legal professionals so they can effectively respond to specific situations.

To assess the perception of existing legislation and the level of protection offered to victims of sexual violence, respondents were invited to express their opinions on the following statements:

- There are sufficient legislative provisions in our criminal system to protect and support victims of sexual violence.
- The protective measures regarding the rights of crime victims are sufficient.
- The protective measures regarding the rights of crime victims are insufficiently implemented.
- The legal assistance provided under Law no. 211/2004 is accessible to victims of sexual violence.
- Improvement of the legislation regarding sexual violence is necessary to truly protect and support victims.

The data obtained shows that 64% of respondents believe that legislative provisions are sufficient to protect and support victims of sexual violence, with 18% expressing total agreement and 46% partial agreement. However, a significant percentage (30%) believes that the current provisions are inadequate (25% partially disagree and 5% totally disagree).

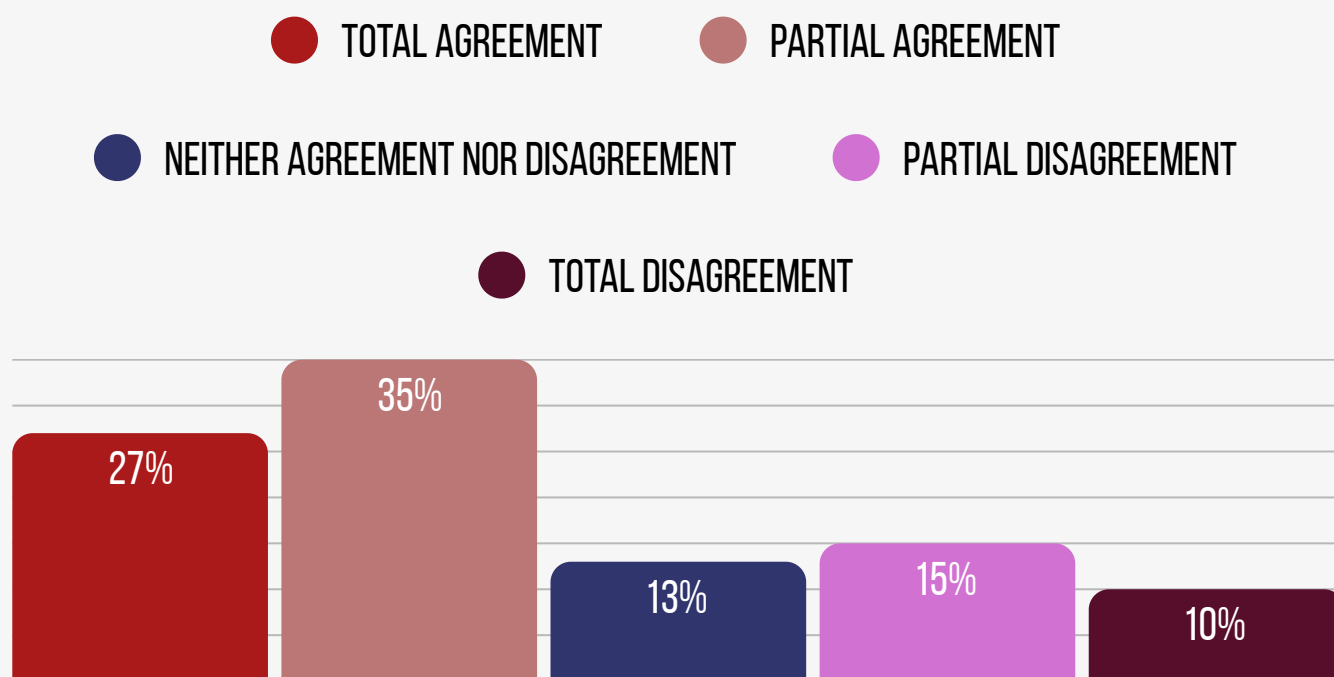
The data obtained shows that 64% of respondents believe that legislative provisions are sufficient to protect and support victims of sexual violence, with 18% expressing total agreement and 46%

4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

partial agreement. However, a significant percentage (30%) believes that the current provisions are inadequate (25% partially disagree and 5% totally disagree).

Moreover, 62% of respondents believe that protection measures are insufficiently implemented (27% total agreement and 35% partial agreement), indicating possible issues related to law enforcement, access to specialised services, and the effectiveness of protection mechanisms.

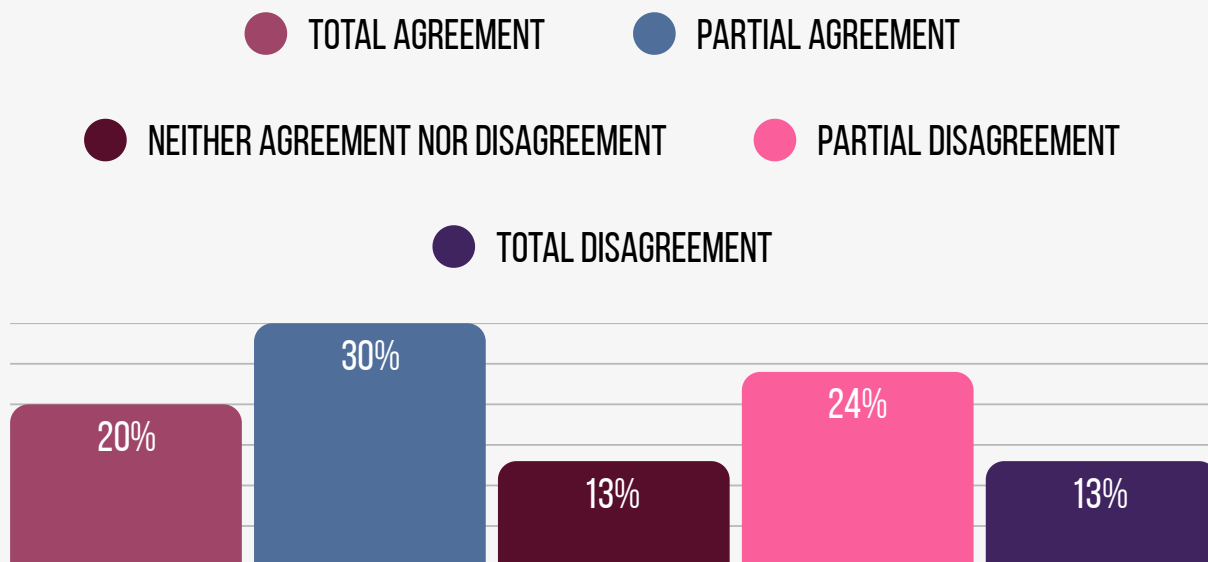
The protective measures regarding the rights of crime victims are insufficiently implemented



The perception of accessibility to legal assistance under Law no. 211/2004 is mixed. Half of the respondents (50%) believe that it is accessible (20% total agreement and 30% partial agreement). However, 37% have a contrary opinion (24% partially disagree and 13% totally disagree). Additionally, 13% of respondents do not have a clear opinion on this aspect.

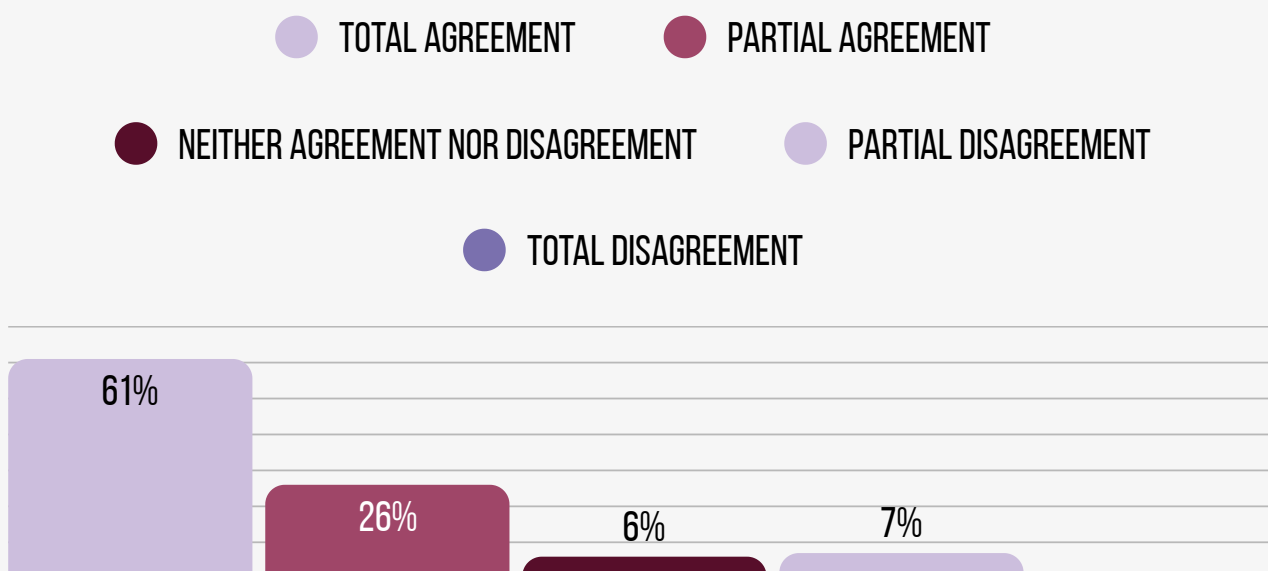
4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

The legal assistance provided under Law no. 211/2004 is accessible to victims of sexual violence



A strong consensus emerges regarding the need to improve legislation to ensure more effective protection for victims of sexual violence. 87% of respondents agree that legislative changes are necessary (61% total agreement and 26% partial agreement). Only 13% do not have a clear stance or do not consider this aspect a priority (6% neither agree nor disagree, and 7% partially disagree).

Improving the legislation regarding sexual violence is necessary to truly protect and support victims of sexual violence

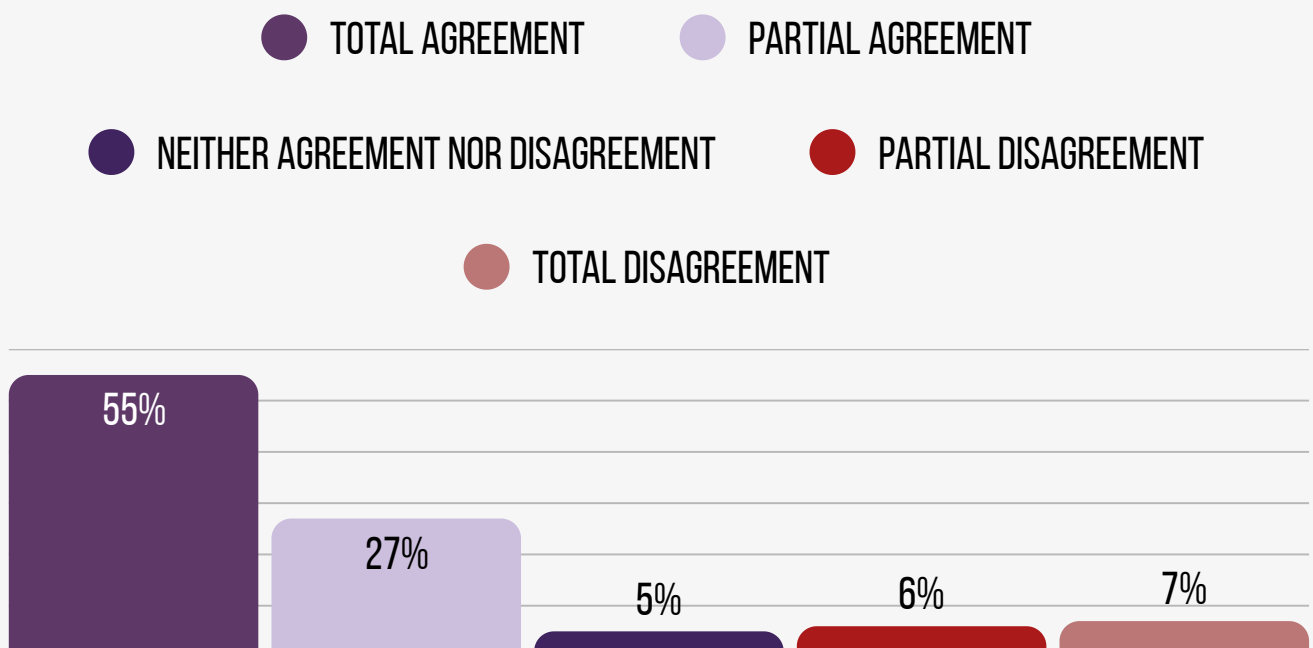


4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Thus, the results indicate that although the current legislation is perceived as having a generally sufficient framework for protecting victims of sexual violence (64%), issues arise in the implementation of protection measures (62%) and real access to legal services (50%). The majority of respondents believe that legislation should be improved (87%).

Next, we present the barriers identified by lawyers regarding victims' access to the justice system. These obstacles reflect both structural difficulties within the legal system and gaps in the professional training of those involved in handling these cases (police officers, prosecutors, and judges). For example, 82% of respondents (55% total agreement and 27% partial agreement) believe that the long duration of criminal proceedings discourages victims from filing complaints.

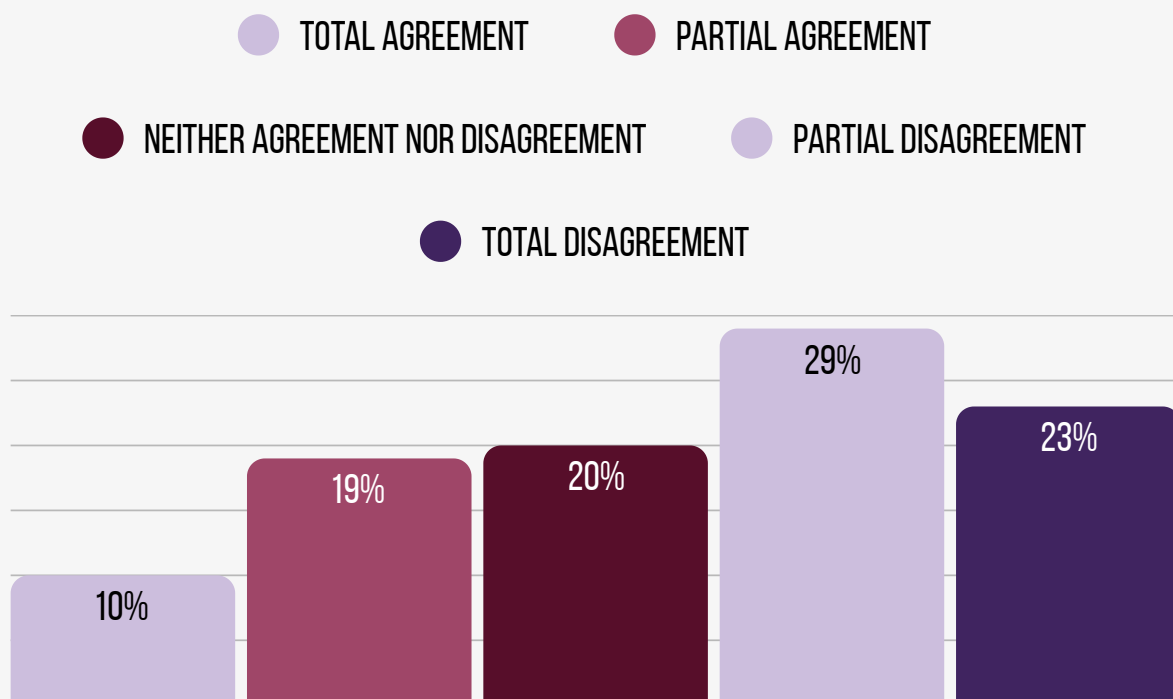
The long period of time between the registration of the criminal complaint with the police and its resolution by the prosecutor, and subsequently by the court, discourages victims of sexual violence from filing such complaints



4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Another significant barrier is the insufficient training of police officers. Only 10% of respondents believe that police officers have complete and accurate knowledge of the forms of sexual violence, and 30% partially agree with this statement. However, 51% partially (29%) or totally (23%) disagree, suggesting a general perception of inadequate police training in this field.

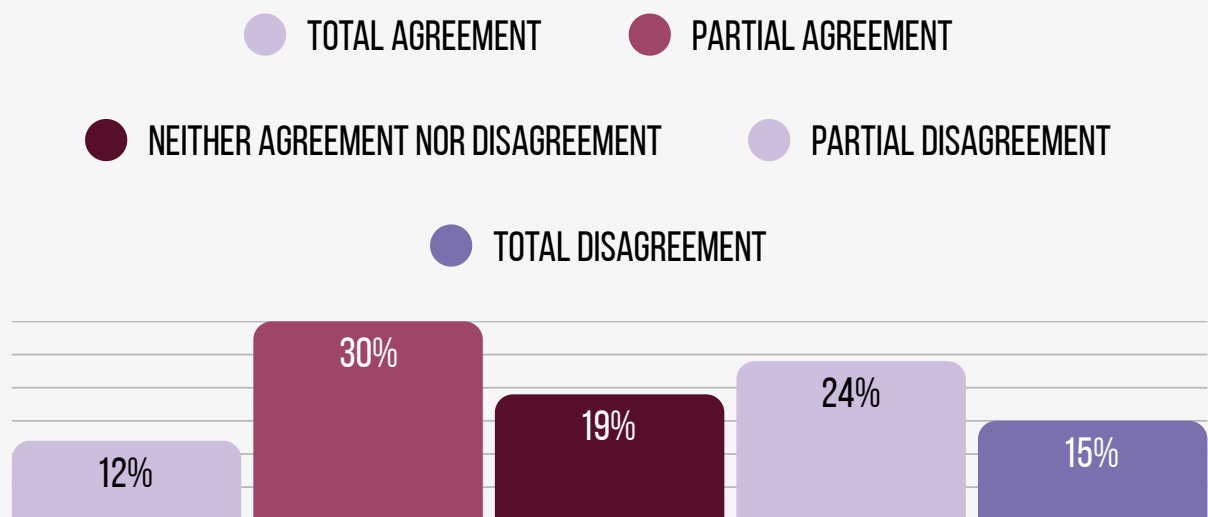
Police officers have complete and accurate knowledge about the different forms of sexual violence



Prosecutors and judges are perceived as having better knowledge than police officers regarding sexual violence, but still insufficient. Only 12% of respondents believe that prosecutors have complete and accurate knowledge about the forms of sexual violence. 30% partially agree, while almost 40% (24% partial disagreement and 15% total disagreement) disagree, highlighting a perception of insufficient training among prosecutors in handling sexual violence cases.

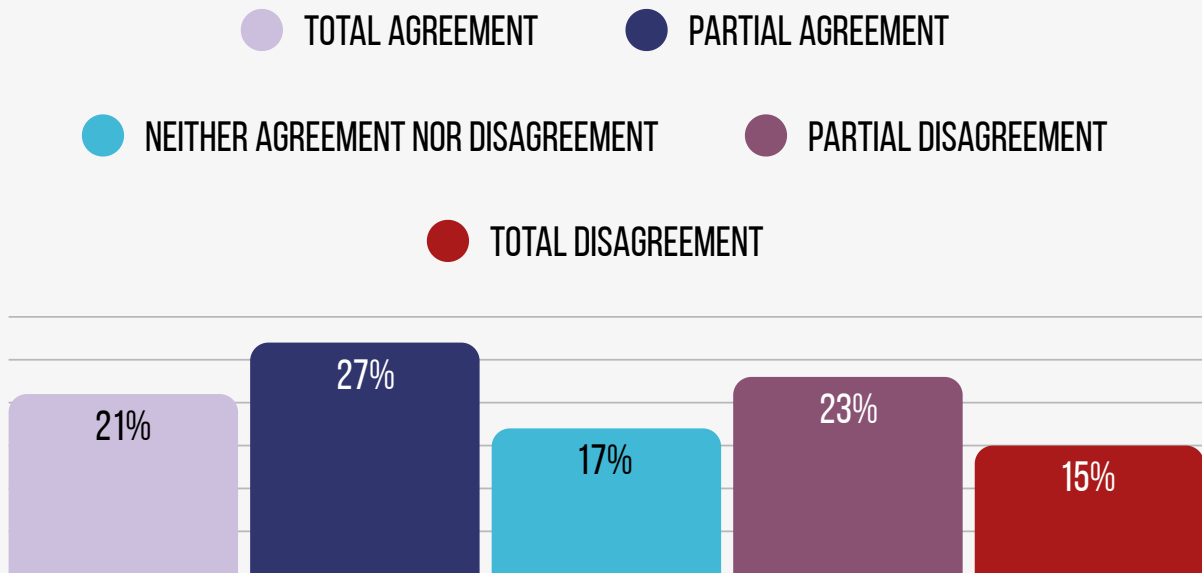
4.LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Prosecutors have complete and accurate knowledge about the different forms of sexual violence



Regarding judges, 35% of respondents totally (12%) or partially (23%) disagree with the statement that they have an accurate understanding of sexual violence. However, 49% believe that judges have complete and correct knowledge, with 21% totally agreeing and 27% partially agreeing, indicating a more favourable perception but still a significant division in opinions on their level of training.

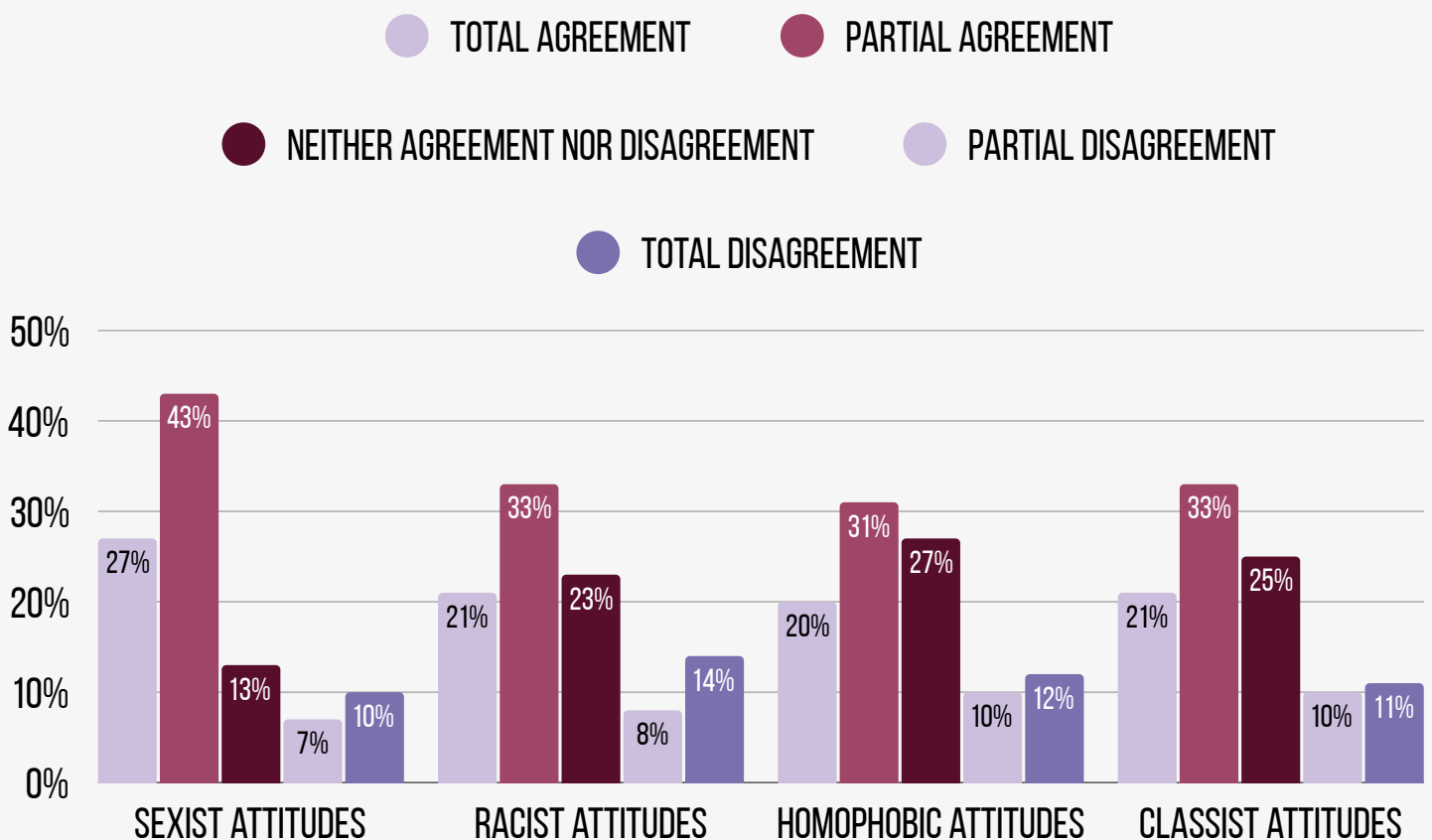
Judges have complete and accurate knowledge about the different forms of sexual violence



4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Respondents also identified the presence of discriminatory attitudes (sexist, racist, homophobic, classist) in victims' interactions with the justice system. These attitudes can represent a major obstacle in reporting cases and obtaining justice.

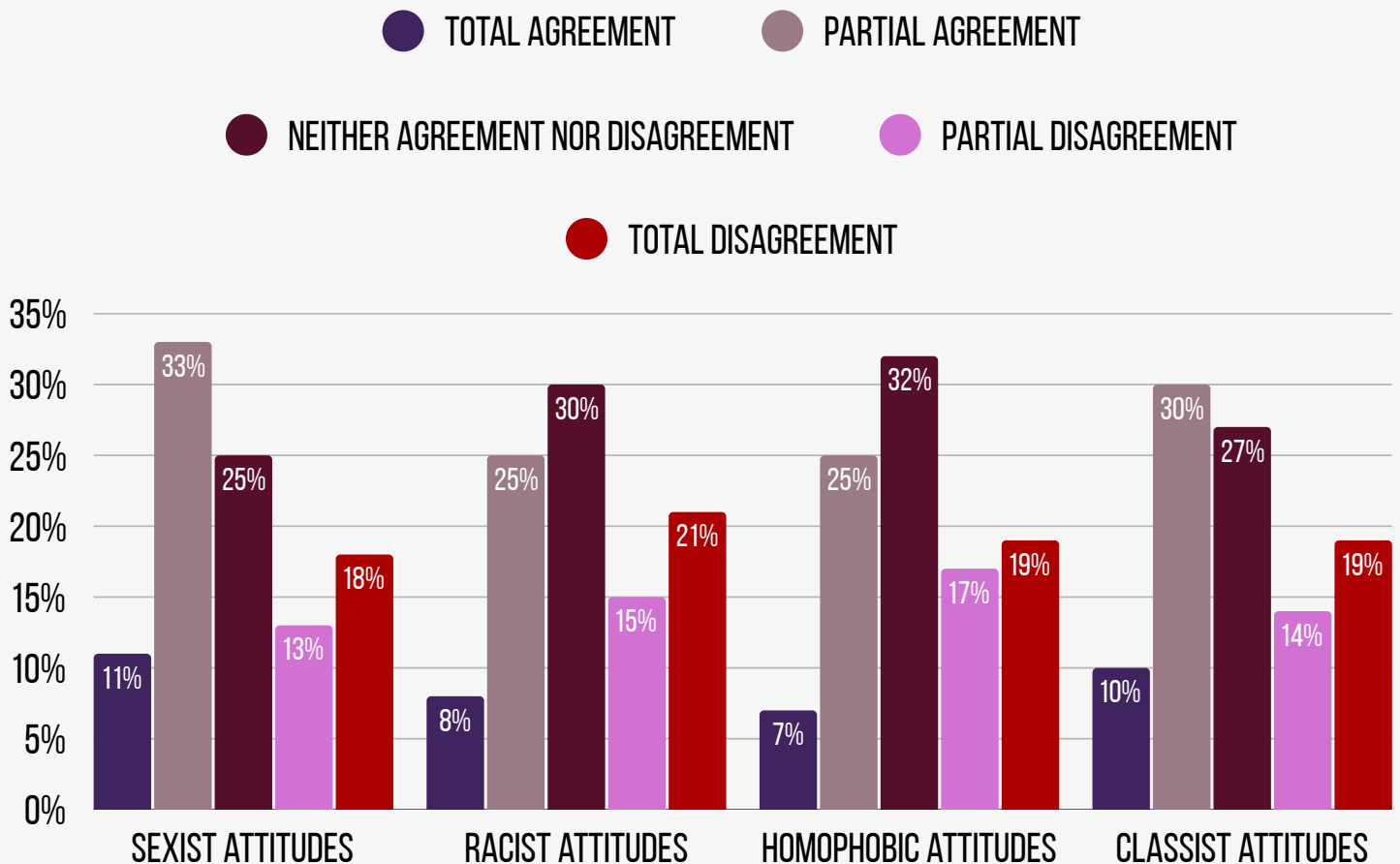
When deciding to file a criminal complaint with the police, victims of sexual violence face:



For example, 27% of respondents strongly agree, and 43% partially agree that victims of sexual violence face sexist attitudes when filing complaints. 11% totally agree, and 33% partially agree that victims encounter sexist attitudes in interactions with prosecutors. However, only 5% of respondents fully agree that victims face sexist attitudes in court, while 18% partially agree.

4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

When they come into contact with prosecutors, victims of sexual violence face:

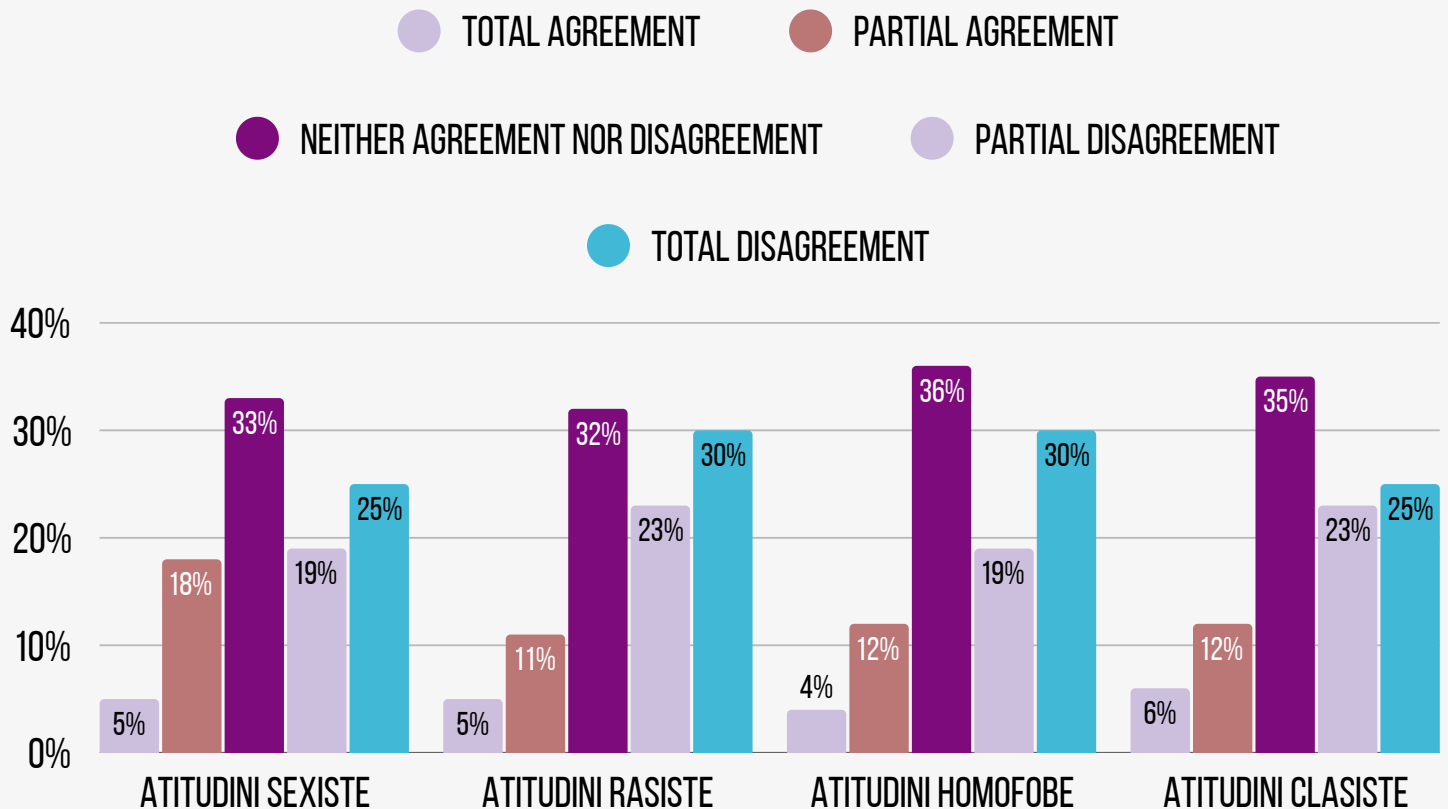


Regarding racist attitudes, 21% of respondents fully agree, and 33% partially agree that victims of sexual violence face racist attitudes from the police. 8% fully agree and 25% partially agree that victims experience racist attitudes from prosecutors. Only 5% fully agree and 11% partially agree that victims face racist attitudes in court.

Additionally, 20% of respondents fully agree, and 31% partially agree that victims of sexual violence encounter homophobic attitudes when filing a complaint. 7% fully agree and 25% partially agree that homophobic attitudes exist among prosecutors. Only 4% fully agree and 12% partially agree that victims face homophobic attitudes in court.

4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

When they come into contact with judges, victims of sexual violence face:



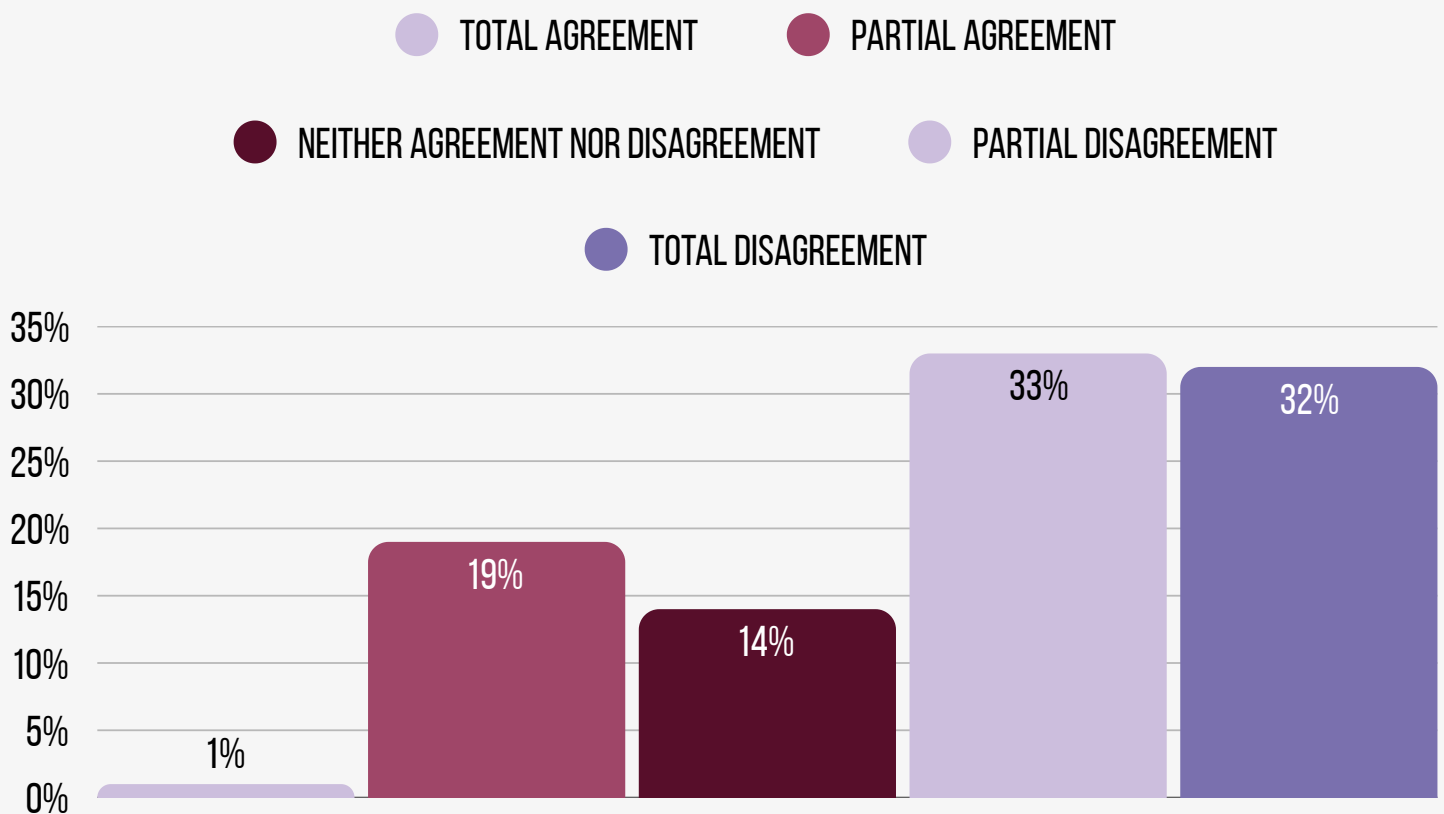
As shown, the data analysis highlights several significant barriers that prevent victims of sexual violence from accessing the justice system: from the prolonged duration of criminal proceedings and major deficiencies in the professional training of those handling these cases (police officers, prosecutors, and judges) to the presence of discriminatory attitudes (sexist, racist, homophobic, classist) in victims' interactions with the justice system.

Next, we present data on respondents' perceptions regarding services available to victims of sexual violence.

4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

The results suggest a predominantly negative perception of funding for services dedicated to victims of sexual violence, particularly for essential services such as shelters, psychological counselling, and issuing medical-legal certificates. Only 1% of respondents believe that these services are sufficiently funded. The majority of respondents (65%) express disagreement, either partial (33%) or total (32%).

Services for victims of sexual violence (shelter, psychological counseling, forensic certificate) are adequately funded

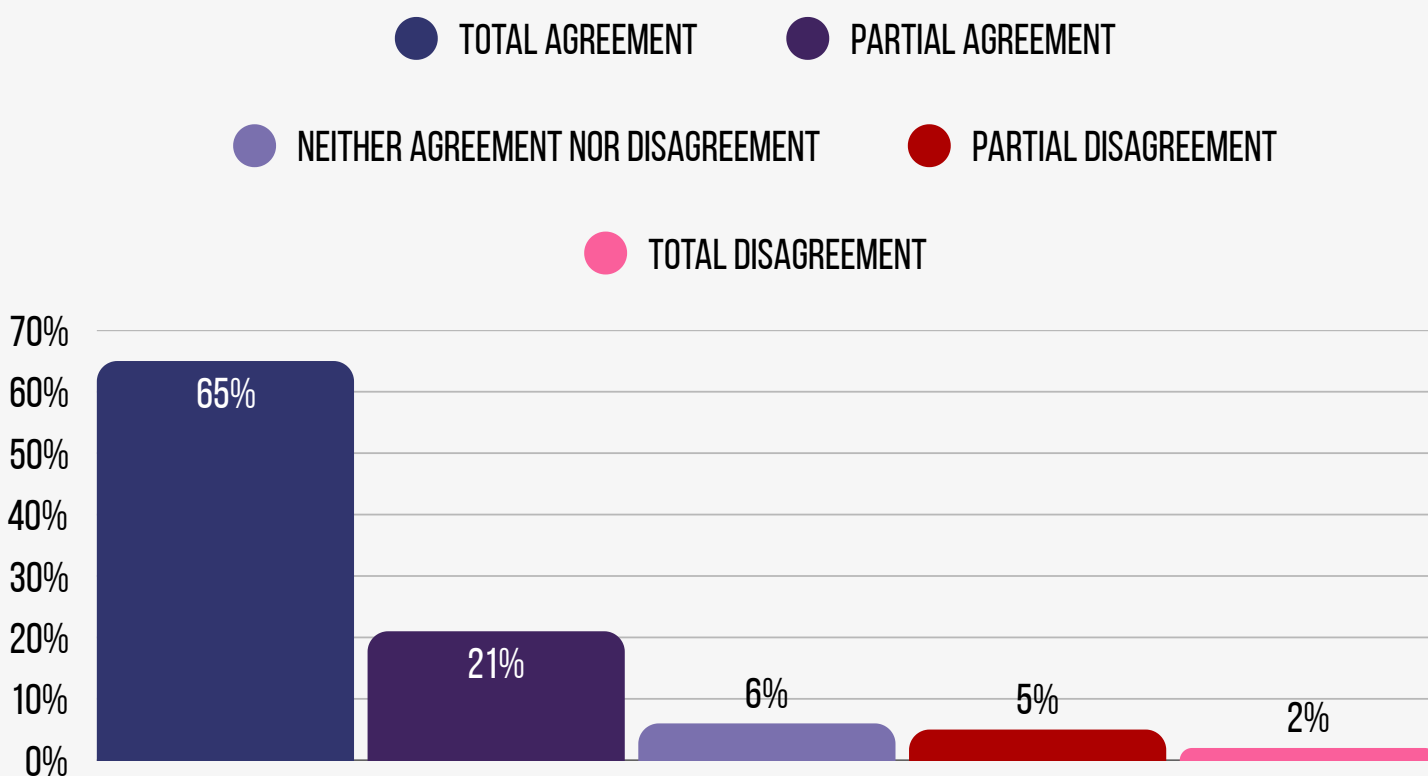


Additionally, the results indicate a widespread perception that all actors in the justice system (police officers, prosecutors, and judges) need specialised awareness training to properly respond to sexual violence cases.

4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

There is a strong majority consensus that police officers lack sufficient training in handling sexual violence cases. 65% of respondents fully agree and 21% partially agree that police officers should undergo awareness training on sexual violence. Only 7% disagree (5% partial disagreement and 2% total disagreement).

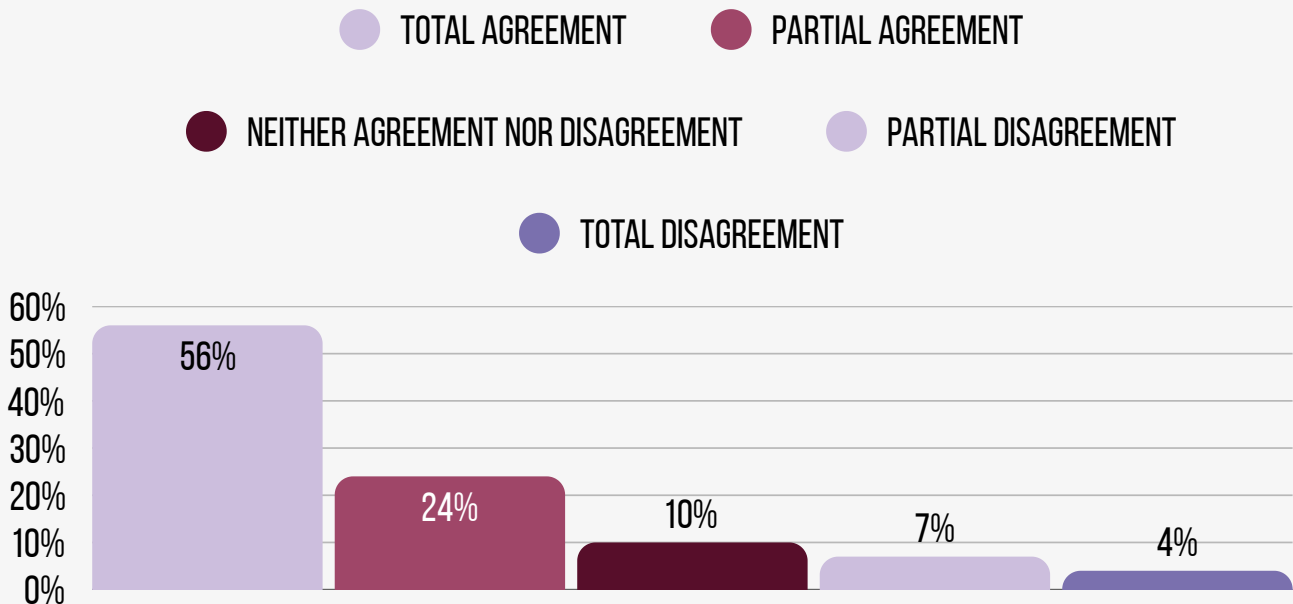
Police officers need awareness training regarding sexual violence cases



For prosecutors, 56% of respondents fully agree and 24% partially agree that they should receive awareness training on sexual violence. While the support is lower than for police officers, there is still significant backing for their training.

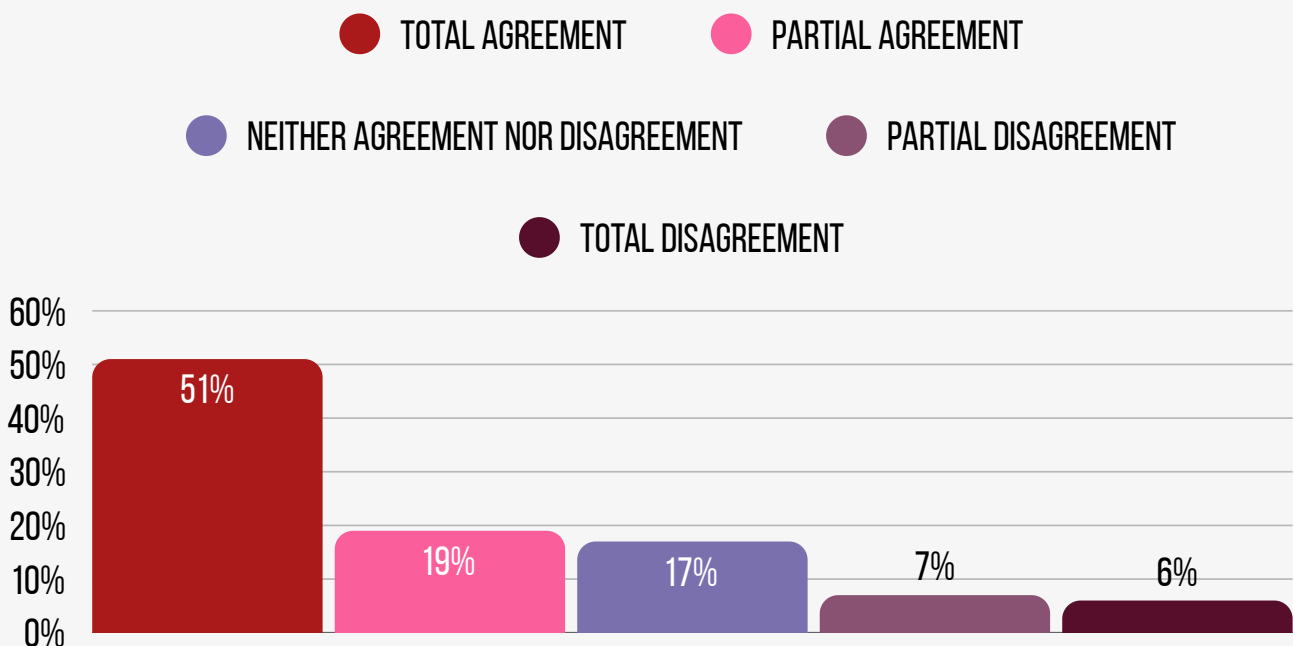
4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Prosecutors need awareness training regarding sexual violence cases



Regarding judges, 51% of respondents fully agree and 19% partially agree that they should receive awareness training on sexual violence. Although the percentage is lower than for police officers and prosecutors, the majority still believe that judges also need training in this area.

Judges need awareness training regarding sexual violence cases

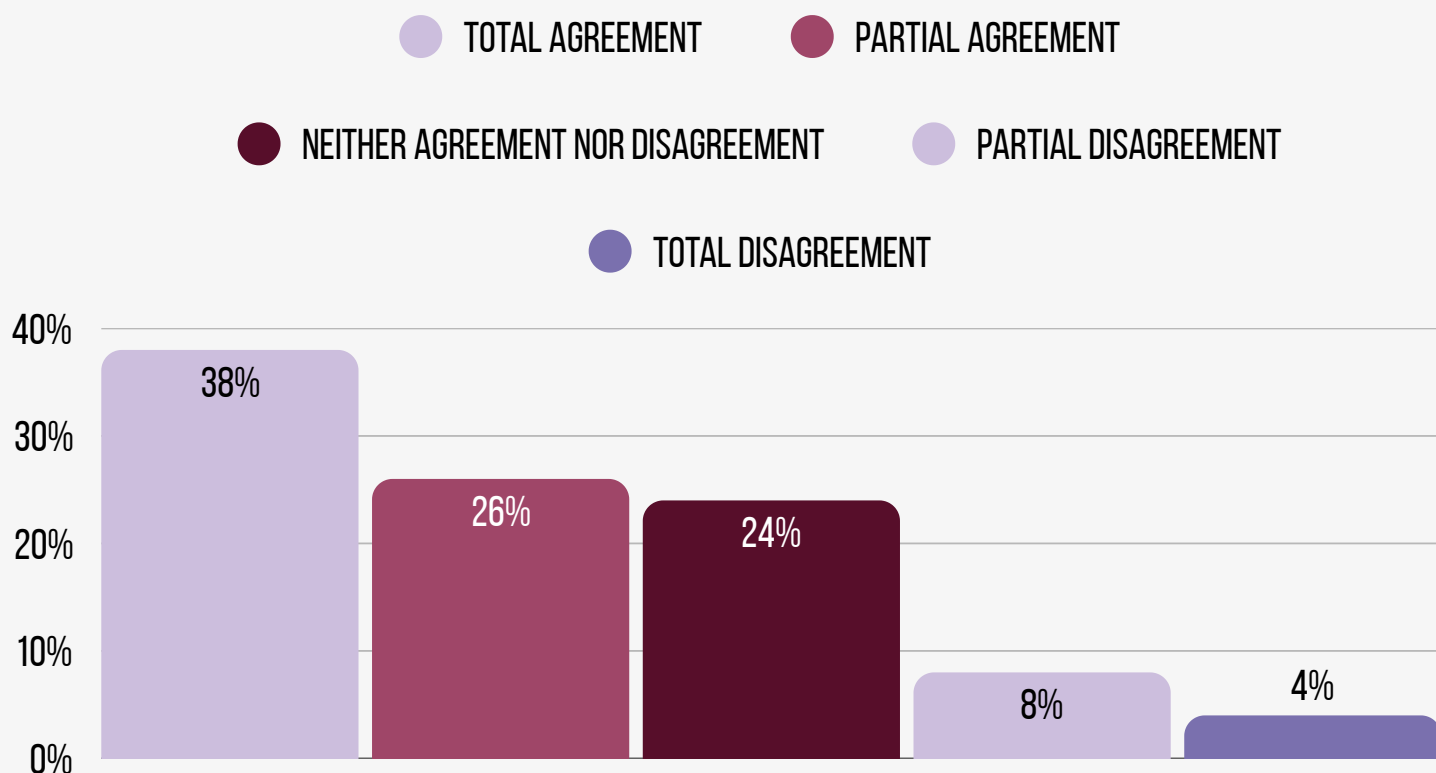


4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

According to responses, 38% of respondents fully agree and 26% partially agree that victims of sexual violence prefer to seek help from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) rather than from state-provided public services. These percentages suggest that, in general, NGOs are seen as more accessible and better equipped to support victims compared to public services.

On the other hand, 24% of respondents do not have a clear opinion (neither agree nor disagree), and only 12% (8% partial disagreement and 4% total disagreement) believe that victims do not prefer to seek help from NGOs.

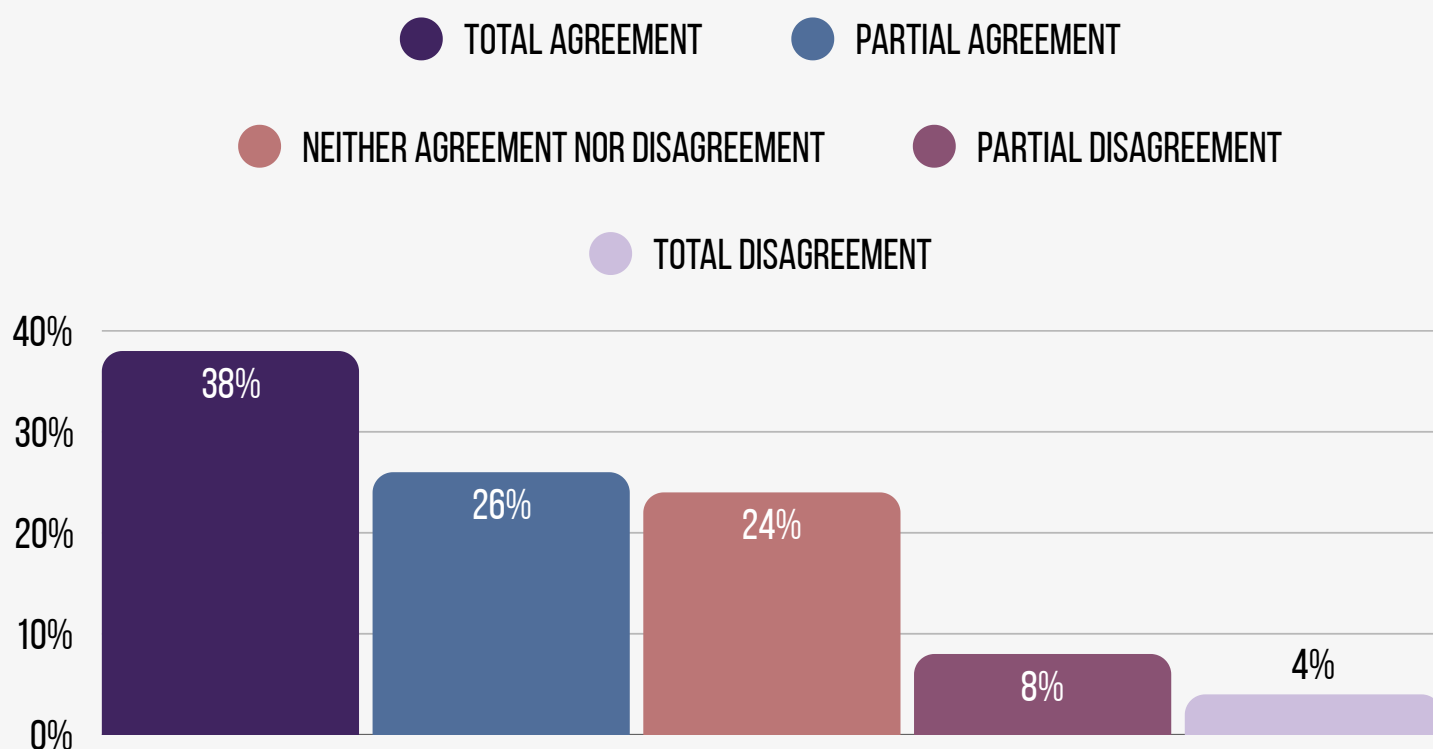
Victims of sexual violence prefer to seek help from non-governmental organizations rather than from public services provided by the state



4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Regarding the need for additional human resources for NGOs providing support to victims of sexual violence, 50% of respondents fully agree and 27% partially agree. This emphasises the need for additional support, especially in legal assistance and representation. 15% of respondents are neutral, possibly reflecting uncertainty about the role of NGOs or a lack of sufficient information. In contrast, only 7% of respondents (1% partial disagreement and 6% total disagreement) believe that NGOs do not need additional resources.

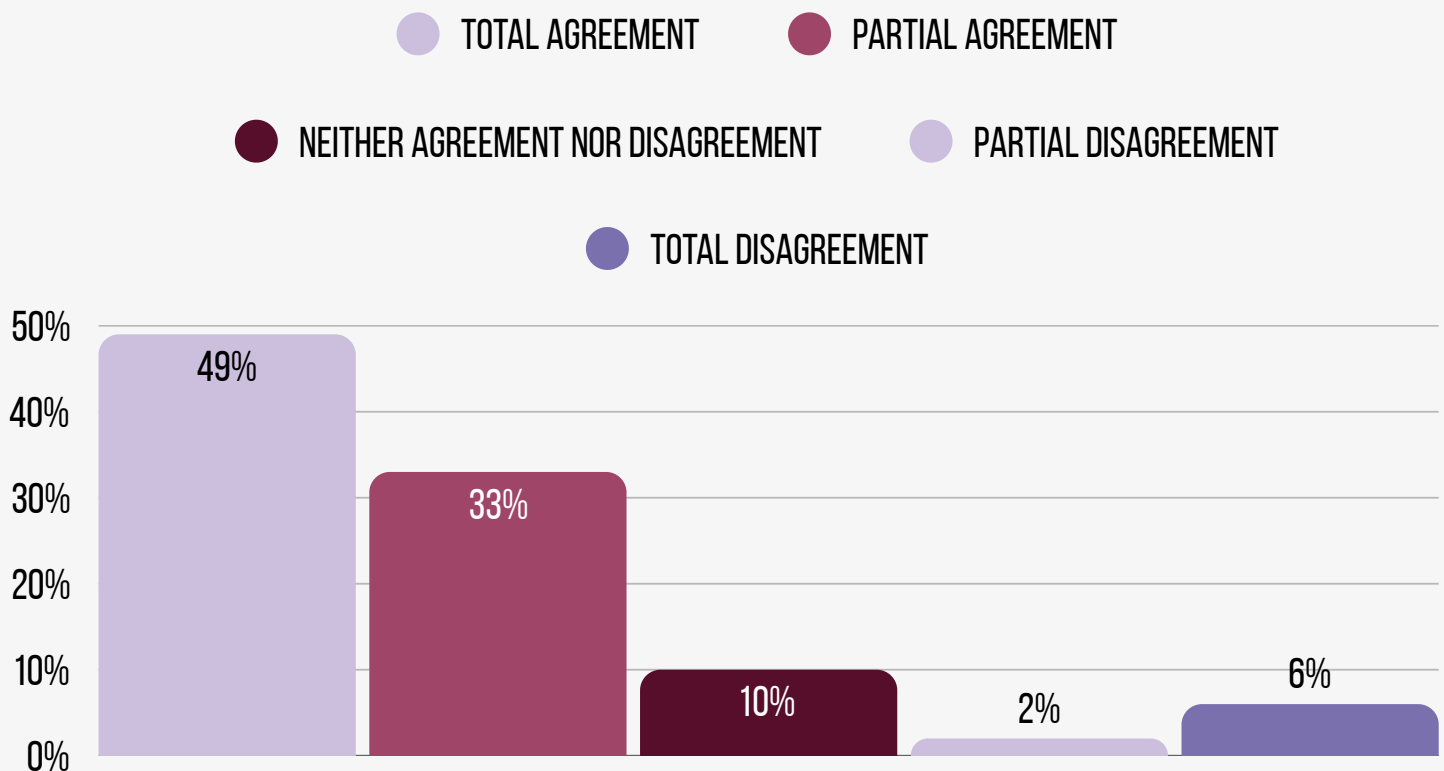
NGOs that provide support to victims of sexual violence need more human resources for assistance and legal representation



Finally, 49% of respondents fully agree and 33% partially agree that victims of sexual violence have a limited understanding of the laws that protect their rights and regulate their access to justice. Only 10% of respondents disagree, and the partial and total disagreement percentages are low (2% and 6%, respectively).

4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Victims of sexual violence have a limited understanding of the legislative aspects regarding sexual violence



From this data analysis, it is evident that most respondents consider services for victims of sexual violence to be underfunded. Furthermore, justice professionals (police officers, prosecutors, and judges) are seen as needing awareness training. The majority believe that victims prefer to seek help from NGOs, which are perceived as more accessible and better prepared than public services. Additionally, NGOs are seen as requiring more resources to effectively provide legal assistance and representation. Finally, respondents believe that victims of sexual violence have a limited understanding of the laws that protect their rights.

4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

4.2 PERSPECTIVES BEYOND NUMBERS

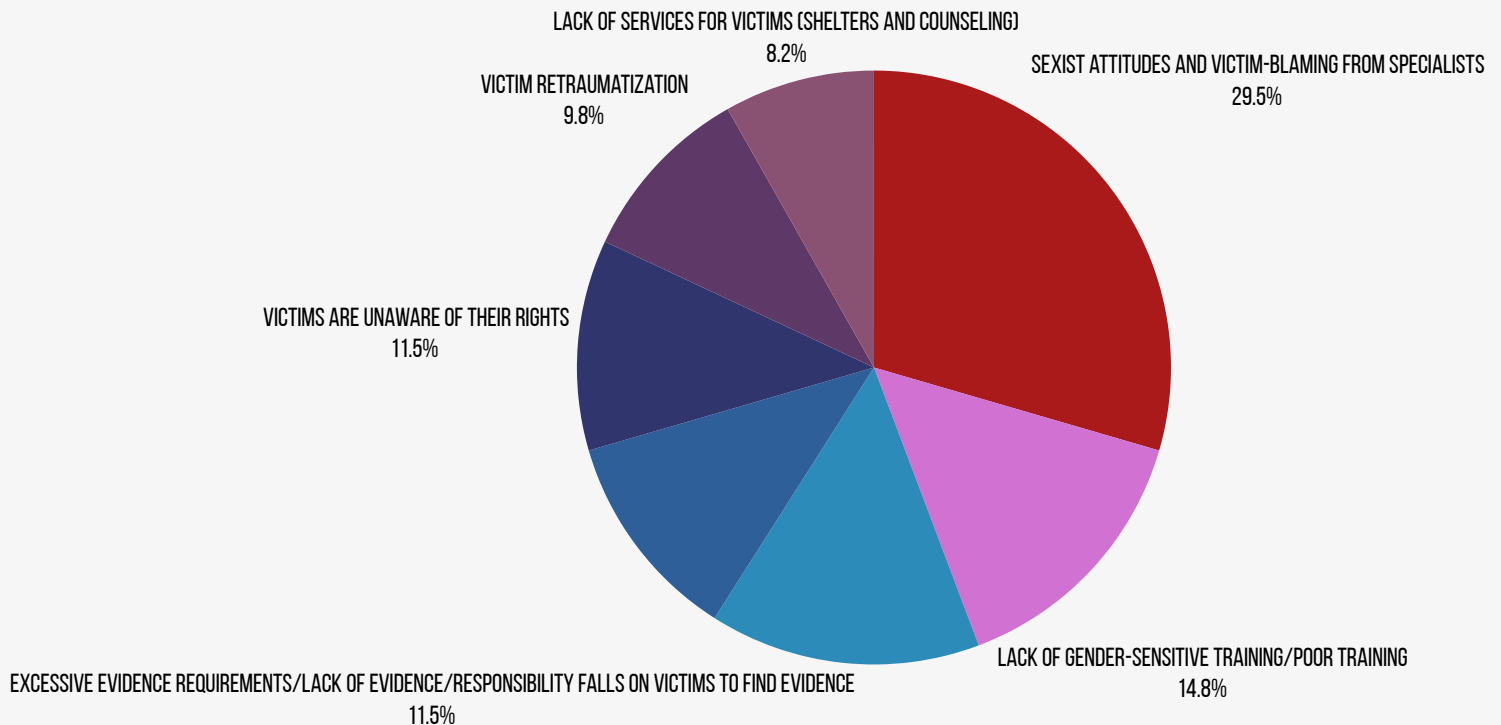
For a better understanding of the difficulties that attorneys encounter when navigating the system for the purpose of representing victims of sexual violence and what measures could be implemented, we had a series of open questions.

The first question was referring to obstacles: "Please tell us what are the challenges that you encounter when handling cases of sexual violence as defenders of victims?". From a total of 84 responses, 25 people did not respond (they refused to respond, they never represented victims or they mentioned that they did not handle enough cases in order to identify challenges).

The valid answers were operationalised in order to be quantified and then categorised. The most often listed obstacles by attorneys that answered the questionnaire were: sexist attitudes and victim blaming coming from specialists, weak gender sensitive training or lack thereof for specialists, the lengthy duration of criminal prosecution and trials, dense evidence/ lack of evidence/ responsibility for providing evidence falling on the victim, lack of knowledge of rights, the retraumatizing of the victim and the absence of services directed at victims (psychological and judicial counseling, shelters, etc.)

4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

The most common challenges faced by lawyers when handling sexual violence cases as defenders of the victims



However, we also identified other difficulties, although not as often brought up, but just as important: the lack of trust that the victim has in the judicial system, fear of the aggressor, the lack of support for the victim by their community and the lack of special designated areas for conducting the victim hearing. All of these responses were partially mentioned by at least four respondents.

4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

The problems that were identified are varied and reflect the different necessities of an integrated approach to sexual violence. In this respect, we have placed the obstacles into 5 big categories:

- 1. procedures/legislation and the absence of intervention focused on the victim;***
- 2. human resources;***
- 3. material resources;***
- 4. obstacles related to attitudes/ that pertain to the dynamics of domestic violence;***
- 5. lack of awareness.***

PROCEDURES/LAW AND LACK OF VICTIM-CENTERED INTERVENTION

The first category refers to both the current legislative framework and the way in which the procedures are being implemented. This category comprises:

- the lengthy duration of criminal prosecution and trials;
- the revictimisation by repeating the declaration and exposure to the abuser, failure to enforce protection measures;
- the absence of services directed at victims (shelters, psychological and judicial counselling services);
- the lack of confidentiality;
- the dense evidence/ lack of evidence/ responsibility for providing evidence falling on the victim;
- the limited time of interaction with the victim for appointed attorneys/ very short time for preparing the defence;
- low punishments;
- impossibility to retrieve moral and material compensation;
- the provisional measures imposed on the aggressor being very mild;
- the attempts by authorities to convince the victim to relinquish the complaint;

4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Although a legislative framework that incriminates sexual violence exists, the enforcement of the law continues to be deficient, while the judicial process is at often times burdensome and disheartening for the victims. The long time that criminal prosecution and trials take not only aggravates the trauma of the victims, but also increases the risk of the statute of limitations running out, just as it was demonstrated in the first part of this report.

The long time that criminal prosecution and trials for sexual violence take in Romania is stemming from an accumulation of a number of factors, including the vast amount of cases from courts, the deficit of human and material resources, as well as the complexity of the needed evidence. The complicated bureaucratic procedures, the lack of experts specialised in investigating sexual offences and the difficulties entailed by collecting evidence contribute to significant delays.

*“The absence of interest on the part of the prosecutors when the victims have reached adulthood, victim blaming, attempts to convince the victim to relinquish their complaint, the concealed solidarity with the aggressor, **leaving the cases in a pending state so that criminal liability ends up being statute-barred.**”*

What is more, the attitudes of the authorities, who sometimes do not prioritise these cases or discourage victims from pressing charges, aggravates the issue.

[32] In 2023, an average of 564 civil and criminal cases were assigned to a judge for resolution, according to data from the National Institute of Statistics, Tempo Online statistical database, JUS103A - Civil and criminal cases assigned to a judge for resolution.

4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

“The indifference of criminal investigation bodies when the investigated crimes do not have a high degree of severity. Offences such as harassment or acts of domestic violence are frequently being neglected.”

Judicial processes are oftentimes being prolonged by long deadlines, appeals and insufficient sentencing, which may discourage victims and affect their trust in the justice system.

Moreover, the provisional measures applied to aggressors are, in many cases, too mild to guarantee the safety of the victims, while final sanctions do not always reflect the severity of the acts that were committed.

Another relevant matter is represented by the revictimisation of survivors during the legal process. They are oftentimes forced to reiterate their story several times, to confront their aggressors in the court of law and to undergo procedures that were not designed from a victim-centred perspective. The lack of appropriate safety measures, such as safe shelters, free psychological and judicial counselling and effective confidentiality protection mechanisms contribute to the reluctance that victims have towards reporting abuse. Furthermore, in many of the cases, the responsibility for providing evidence falls on the victim, which further hinders the judicial process and may lead to cases being dismissed due to lack of sufficient evidence.

4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

“Victims face a lot of suspicion and lack of trust coming from criminal investigation bodies. During the trial phase, they are not always granted privacy and are frequently subjected to revictimisation in the trial phase, when they are brought face to face with the perpetrator and are required to talk about the crime again and answer many uncomfortable questions.”

Another significant impediment is related to the limited access to efficient legal support. Appointed attorneys often have a very short amount of time designated for handling the case, which may affect the quality of the defence. Moreover, retrieving moral and material compensation remains a challenge, because there are no clear and efficient mechanisms that can ensure compensation for the victims. The reduced sentences imposed on perpetrators and the attempts by authorities to convince victims to relinquish their claims, as mentioned by some of the respondents, are other elements that undermine trust in the justice system and discourage people from reporting cases of sexual violence.

HUMAN RESOURCES

With regard to the “human resources” section, we identified three main obstacles: **sexist and victim blaming attitudes coming from specialists, weak gender sensitive training or lack thereof and the deficient communication with criminal investigation bodies.**

4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

It is worrying how these attitudes and weak training can be found, according to our respondents, across all categories of specialists with whom victims come into contact: police officers, judges, magistrates, attorneys, psychologists, social workers. This showcases a systemic failure of the state to have an integrated approach to supporting victims of gender-based violence.

"Stereotypes especially for judges, a lack of understanding of the trauma and the effects that trauma has on the victims - we still have judges that ask "why didn't you scream, why didn't you leave/run?""

"Victims are treated like the "indicted" by the psychologists that attend hearings."

"I have encountered the same - unchanged, dusty and harmful - mentality, especially amongst male police officers (for example, the opinion of the officers while discussing with the 122 emergency line operators, contacted for the purpose of finding/saving a victim - the victim was "delusional"), but, unfortunately, amongst female police officers and prosecutors as well (for example, in the case of the online broadcasting, on specialised channels, for a fee, of images of the victim - motivating that the victim "enjoyed it"). I have even encountered female attorneys that, in the pursuit of defending the aggressors' rights, humiliate their victims during the trial."

4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

The reactions that specialists exhibit, the language that they use and their attitudes towards the victims, especially during their first encounter, are things that mainly influence their decision to commence and continue the legal process or, on the contrary, to give up and never talk about their experience again.

It is even more dangerous when the victim blaming reactions are coming from higher ranking officials. Not only do they have decisional power, but also legitimacy, therefore fostering sexist attitudes among institutions and discouraging victims from officially notifying the violence they go through. Amongst the main reasons for which female victims of violence do not notify the authorities are included: their fear for their life and/or their children's lives, their mistrust in the authorities' capacity to protect them, their shame, their low degree of familiarity with the law (Gender Violence Barometer 2022).

One of the solutions for eliminating these obstacles remains the timely and constant training of the specialised personnel that comes into contact with the victims. We will dive deeper into this subject in the following subchapter, "recommendations".

[33] <https://pressone.ro/ce-duce-la-omor-este-faptul-ca-femeile-nu-sunt-informate-indeajuns-interviu-cu-doi-sefi-din-politia-capitalei>

[34] Available at: <https://centrulfilia.ro/new/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Barometrul-Violenta-de-Gen.-Romania-2022.pdf>

4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

MATERIAL RESOURCES

In this category we included the **lack of special designated areas for conducting the victim hearings and the difficult financial situation of the victims (the lack of revenue or small revenue,** the absence of a shelter for getting away from the aggressor, etc). It is, however, important to mention the fact that, during the last years, efforts have been made for setting up hearing rooms for minors, as well as for preparing specialised personnel for interviewing minors.

Gender-based violence, including sexual violence, brings about a considerable amount of stigma among victims. The lack of awareness, victim blaming, sexist attitudes causes victims to feel tremendously ashamed and guilty. Hearing the victims in a common space, with other people present, will discourage and inhibit women from talking about the experiences they have gone through.

Another notable hardship is the financial situation of the victims. A victim with a lower income or one that has no income at all will experience a much more hampered access to the justice system. The trial costs, transport costs, and even the necessity to miss work are systemic setbacks that victims come across. In some instances, victims have to support the cost of the medical forensic certificate. On a national level, in 2024, only 87 medical forensic certificates for minor victims of domestic violence were settled, while 68 medical forensic certificates for adult victims were settled.

4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

In addition to these financial barriers that are directly connected with the judicial system, those necessary for physical and mental safety shall be added: expenses such as the cost of psychological counselling, the cost of finding shelter in order to escape the aggressor, etc.

Moreover, oftentimes, multiple forms of violence overlap. Along with sexual violence, victims might face economical violence: control over their revenue or spending or the interdiction of entering the workforce by their partner. The data from the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights shows that 49% of Romanian women have experienced at least one form of physical violence or threats, sexual violence, psychological violence and/or economical violence during their lifetime (FRA, 2024). We understand, therefore, that, in the case of women who struggle with multiple forms of violence, the access to justice is even more difficult.

OBSTACLES RELATED TO ATTITUDES/ THAT PERTAIN TO THE DYNAMICS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

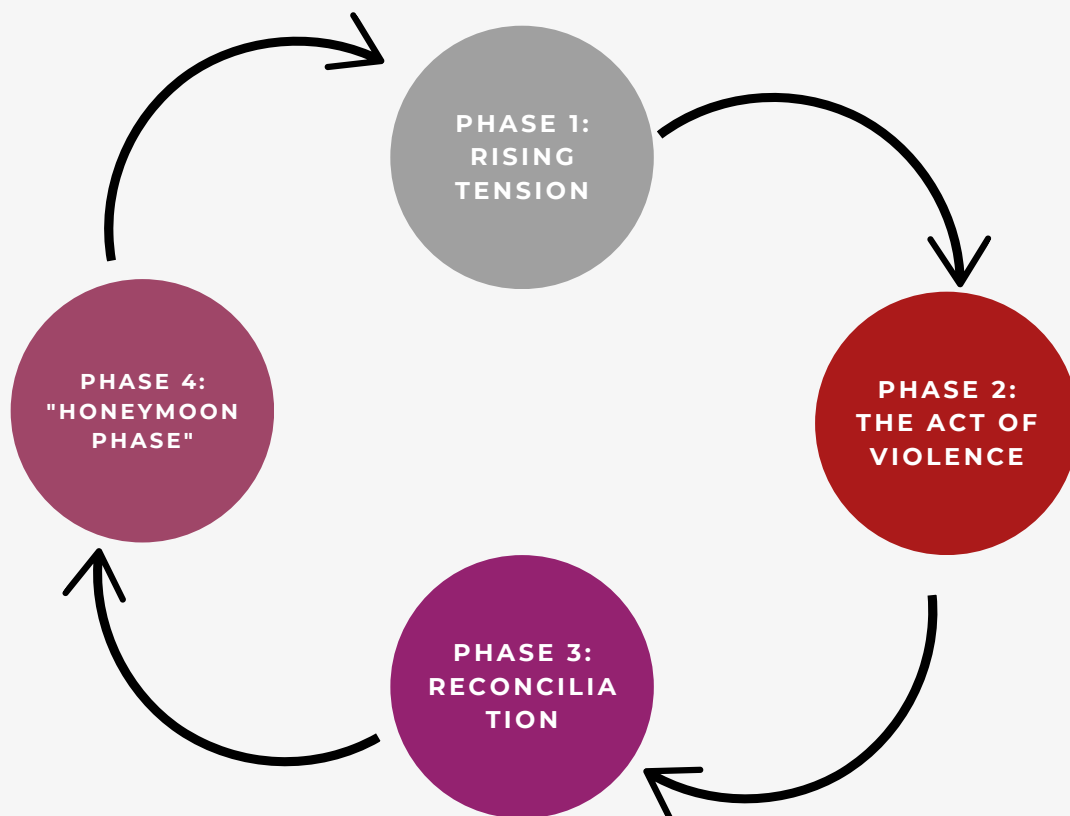
We reference here: **the pressure from the aggressor, the victim's attachment towards the aggressor, their refusal to fully expose the aggressor, the victim's lack of trust in the justice system, the fear of the aggressor, the fear of being stigmatised and the authorities' solidarity towards the aggressor.**

The dynamics of a violent relationship are complex. On average, a victim needs **8-9 tries** in order to successfully exit an abusive relationship.

[35] <https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/eu-gender-based-violence-survey-key-results>

4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Financial and emotional dependency, the lack of self-confidence, isolation from friends and family are just a few of the reasons. In the literature, the emotional process that a victim goes through is called the “cycle of abuse”.



After abuse and violence, there always exists a moment in which the aggressor reconciles with the victim, excessively manifests their love (through compliments, gifts, etc) for the purpose of convincing them to stay in the relationship.

Attachment towards the aggressor might occur even during the legal process, which is exactly why a victim needs constant support, especially from experts such as specialised psychologists or psychologists sensitised to gender-based violence.

4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

The lack of trust in authorities that a victim has is mainly caused by sexist and victim blaming attitudes, also previously explained. The first reaction that a victim receives when exposing their abuse is a determining factor on the way in which they will react later. Other reasons for developing a lack of self-confidence could be the lengthy duration of the process, the attitudes of the authorities that are more understanding towards the aggressor than towards the victim, the minimisation of their experience. For example, in a study on psychological violence, a survivor recounted:

"I called the police, they came, they fined my husband for 200 lei and then said that they wouldn't do anything else because we would make up the next day"

Another discouraging practice for the victims, which decreases their trust in authorities, is mediation, which is mentioned by one of our respondents as an example of an obstacle faced by victims:

"The attitude of police officers, especially those from police stations in rural areas (they insist on "reconciliation"!)"

It is important to mention that the lack of trust does not only come from personal experience, but also from **the collective perspective**. Institutional communication, the statements and the actions of specialists in the system and the cases that have ended up in the press shape a public image which will influence this trust.

[36] The Unveiling of the Hidden Part of the Iceberg: Psychological Violence in the Republic of Moldova and Romania, research study available at:

<https://arcromania.ro/arc/documente/CercetareViolentaPsihologica.pdf>

[37] <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/cazul-caracal-filmul-celor-doua-crime-trase-la-indigo-detalii-cutremuratoare-descrie-de-procurori-2370771>

4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

The fear and pressure coming from the aggressor are systemic problems that hinder access to justice as well. The failure to apply existing protection measures discourages women from officially notifying the authorities. For example, electronic bracelets are not sufficiently used for electronically monitoring protection orders. Out of 13.274 temporary protection orders issued in 2024, only in 944 cases was the measure of restraining the aggressors through the permanent wearing of a surveillance device ordered. Last year, as well, 13.151 protection orders were issued by the courts, however, the measure of restraining the aggressors through the permanent wearing of a surveillance device was ordered in only 802 of the cases.

The authorities' solidarity with the aggressor represents another obstacle that discourages the victims, according to the respondents. This solidarity emerges as a consequence of sexist attitudes and the lack of an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of a violent relationship. In order to overcome this impediment, gender-based violence sensitive training is fundamental.

[38] According to response no. 296.666/04.02.2024 sent by the Police following an information request made by the FILIA Center under Law no. 544/2001 regarding free access to public interest information.

[39] Ibid.

4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

LACK OF AWARENESS

Another issue that was identified by the respondents is the lack of awareness: victims are not aware of their rights. It occurs as a result of the scarcity of national awareness and information campaigns and the lack of sexual education that informs the youth about consent, about the signs of an abusive relationship, about their rights and what they can do in such scenarios.

Non-governmental organisations constantly carry out awareness campaigns, but their resources are limited. The state, through its institutions, is the only body that has the responsibility and the resources needed for carrying out such campaigns at the national level and that can provide education that prevents and counters gender-based violence.

The second open question was: "If you have assisted/represented victims belonging to vulnerable groups (e.g. belonging to ethnic minorities, the LGBTQIA+ community, people with disabilities, etc.), did you notice specific barriers to their access to justice? If so, please detail below."

Out of a total of 47 responses, 4 were N/A, 9 respondents mentioned the fact that they did not represent or assist people pertaining to vulnerable groups, 12 said they did not notice or encounter any obstacles, while 22 said they did. The obstacles they encountered were: **the linguistic barrier, racist prejudice, a lack of financial resources, victim blaming and homophobic and transphobic attitudes.**

4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Regarding racist attitudes and victim-blaming, one respondent stated:

*"The lack of access to information makes them unaware of who to turn to, within what timeframe, and when they finally muster the courage to do so, they are often humiliated by the police officers investigating the case, sometimes giving up on pursuing it further. **In the case of the Roma minority, there is an informal presumption that victims are lying, that it's not the state's job to intervene, they are humiliated, and often misdirected by the police officers.**"*

We thus observe that the faced obstacles are, on the one hand, caused by the lack of material and human resources and, on the other hand, by the lack of training and awareness among individuals within the justice system, which results in sexist, racist, homophobic, classist etc. attitudes.

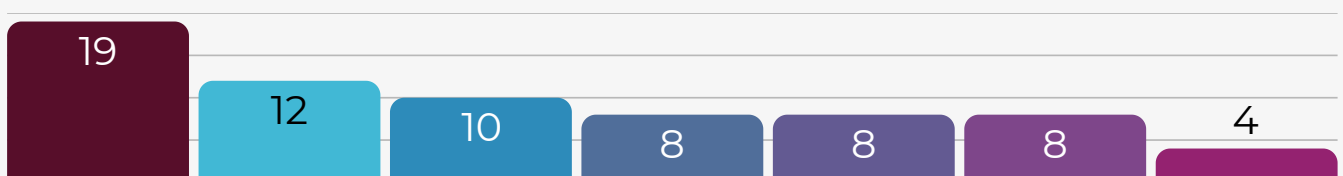
"Yes, but while over 10 years ago the barriers were predominantly legislative and/or administrative (still improvable, of course), today they are mainly attitudinal (i.e. the mentality of people within the judicial system, as well as the fact that they do not refrain from expressing their opinions aligned with this mentality – probably because they are neither professionally trained in this regard nor is there an effective sanctioning mechanism for such behaviours."

4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Through this questionnaire we also aimed to find out what measures could be implemented. Therefore, the third open-ended question was *'At present, what do you believe would be necessary improve sexual violence victims' access to justice and hold perpetrators accountable?'*

A total of 59 responses were recorded, operationalized and categorized. The most frequently mentioned measures were: **awareness and prevention campaigns; training for specialists; shorter timeframe for criminal investigations or trial proceedings; financial support and services for victims (legal and psychological counselling, shelters); sexual and/or legal education, stricter punishments/higher sentences; and improvement of the current legal framework.**

- Information, prevention, and awareness campaigns
- Specialist training
- A shorter period for criminal investigation or trial of the case
- Financial support and services for victims (legal and psycho...
- Sexual and/or legal education
- Harsher penalties/higher sentences
- Improvement of the current legal framework



4. LAWYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON VICTIMS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Naturally, the measures identified and proposed by the respondents are a response to the obstacles identified earlier.

There were, however, a few more specific responses. For example, one respondent answered as follows:

"I believe that in the case of crimes against sexual freedom, reconciliation should not be a reason for discontinuing criminal proceedings. It only places more pressures on the victims without a real investigation."

As a result of analysing the responses to the questionnaire addressed to lawyers, we consider that the obstacles and challenges identified regarding sexual violence victims' access to justice can be addressed by respecting the provisions of the Istanbul Convention, which the Romanian state has committed to. By allocating the necessary resources, training professionals, and developing intervention programs, the goal is not only to protect victims, but also to reduce the phenomenon of violence in the long term. Ensuring access to information, support services and shelters contributes to creating an effective support system. Overall, these measures are essential for promoting a safer and more equitable society.

5. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The monitoring report provides an overview of key data regarding crimes against sexual freedom and integrity (as recorded by the police, as well as cases pending before prosecutors' offices and courts), the services accessed by victims of sexual violence, and an exploratory study on lawyers' perspectives regarding victims' access to justice. The main obstacles we identify are legislative and procedural deficiencies, issues related to the accessibility of material resources (spaces, services), as well as human resources in terms of training on the subject, attitudinal factors, the dynamics of violence-based relationships, which place an additional burden on victims, and, last but not least, access to information, both for victims and for professionals (police officers, prosecutors, judges).

Among the data presented in the report, we mention the following:

- In 2024, **1271 cases of rape were recorded by the police**, compared to 1056 such cases (with adult victims) recorded in 2023.
- In 2024, **3999 cases of rape against minors were recorded by the police**. On average, 11 children per day were victims of rape.
- In 2024, a total of 12985 victims of domestic violence benefited from services nationwide, including 2669 adults (183 men and 2486 women) and 10316 minors (4772 boys and 5544 girls). **Only 534 minors and 43 adults who were victims of sexual violence received services nationwide in 2024.**

5. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3711 cases related to offenses of rape against a minor, sexual assault committed against a minor, and the inducement or facilitation of sexual acts or acts of a sexual nature between minors were pending at the prosecutors' offices. **Of these, 1112 cases were resolved during the previous year, with 718 cases being closed (65%).**
- At the prosecutors' offices, **4884 cases of rape were pending.** Of these, 1678 cases were resolved. 78% of the resolved rape cases at the prosecutors' level were closed.
- **Only 1 in 5 resolved rape cases is sent to court.**
- 37 rape cases and 27 cases of sexual acts with a minor were resolved after the statute of limitations had expired.
- In 2024, 1953 cases of rape were pending in the courts, and 1101 of these cases were resolved during the previous year. **The average resolution time at trial is 325.8 days.**
- In 2023, 1648 cases of rape were pending in the courts at all procedural stages, of which 1022 cases were resolved. **The number of individuals definitively convicted for the crime of rape in 2023 was 231.**

Increase in reports to the police regarding offences against sexual freedom and integrity. This upward trend in reporting sexual violence cases from year to year may indicate a certain level of public awareness regarding the different forms of sexual violence.

5. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Numerous obstacles discouraging victims of sexual violence.

Although there has been an increase in the number of reports of such offences, victims of sexual violence continue to face multiple barriers – lack of geographical coverage and consistent, adequate public funding for support services for sexual violence victims (psychological and legal counselling), insufficient training of human resources for a coordinated, victim-centered intervention, the presence of sexist, racist, or class-based biases and stereotypes about victims, lack of financial resources allocated from local or national budgets for the operation of Sexual Violence Intervention Centers, limited access to free emergency contraception in cases of rape, lack of information on victims' rights and the steps a survivor of sexual violence can take, and excessively long durations for criminal investigations and court proceedings.

Limited access to services for victims of sexual violence. The extremely low number of sexual violence victims (534 minors and 43 adults) who received services compared to the high number of complaints registered with the police highlights the urgent need for state intervention and the allocation of human and financial resources to develop and improve accessibility to sexual violence support systems. The 10 Sexual Violence Intervention Centres continue to operate without allocated public funding and without specialised staff dedicated to the operation of these centers.

5. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to be able to develop coherent public policies that address the needs of survivors of sexual violence, **it is essential that detailed and disaggregated data on sexual violence be collected**, with comparable indicators, by all institutions responsible for combating sexual violence, in accordance with the provisions of the Istanbul Convention and GREVIO recommendations. We still cannot know how many women and girls are victims of offences against sexual freedom and integrity committed outside of family relationships.

High rate of case dismissals in sexual violence offences. Regarding the work of prosecutors' offices, **a thorough analysis of the various criteria for dismissing cases of sexual violence is absolutely necessary** to better support victims. In 2024, 78% of rape cases resolved by prosecutors' offices were dismissed. Survivors of sexual violence can have greater trust in the justice system when the prosecution of sexual offenders occurs within a reasonable timeframe and when the number of individuals convicted with a final and binding decision for such crimes increases.

Following these findings, we recommend to national and local authorities that they adopt immediate measures for:

- ① **The allocation of public funds, both from the national and local budgets, in a sufficient and continuous manner for services dedicated to victims of sexual violence.** The state has assumed responsibility to ensure adequate and continuous funding for support services for victims of sexual violence, in accordance with the provisions of the Istanbul Convention.

5. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- ② **The development of awareness-raising and training programs for professionals** (police officers, prosecutors, judges, lawyers, psychologists, social workers, doctors) regarding gender-sensitive approaches and the understanding of the victim-perpetrator dynamics specific to sexual violence, as well as the impact of sexual trauma, for a more efficient management of these cases and to prevent sexist, racist, classist, homophobic attitudes and victim-blaming.
- ③ **The development and strengthening of a coordinated intervention by professionals in cases of sexual violence, centered on the needs of the victims**, to avoid re-traumatization and to ensure immediate protection.
- ④ **Increasing the capacity of state institutions through investments in human resources** to ensure a fair workload and a reasonable timeframe for resolving cases of sexual violence.
- ⑤ **Improving the current legislative framework** by harmonizing the legislation with the provisions of Directive 1385/2024 on combating violence against women and domestic violence.
- ⑥ **Including an in-depth course on gender-based violence, with an emphasis on sexual violence**, in the curricula of Law Faculties, to increase the knowledge and sensitivity of future professionals.

5. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- ⑦ **The development of regular monitoring reports by the Judicial Inspection and the detailed analysis of case law in the field of sexual violence** to identify existing issues in judicial practice and potential solutions for strengthening support measures regarding victims; access to justice and the criminal accountability of perpetrators.
- ⑧ **Better awareness of the different forms of sexual violence.** Implementing public awareness and information campaigns about sexual violence, victims' rights, the legal steps they can take, and the available services.
- ⑨ **Establishing a detailed data collection system** to more effectively monitor the phenomenon of sexual violence and to adapt public policies based on the real needs of victims.
- ⑩ **Strengthening dialogue between public authorities and women's rights organisations,** organisations working to prevent and combat gender-based violence, for a better understanding of victims' needs.

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FINAL NOTE

The statistical data included in this report was obtained following information requests submitted by FILIA Center under Law No. 544/2001 on free access to public information, addressed to the following institutions:

- General Inspectorate of the Romanian Police
- Prosecutor's Office attached to the High Court of Cassation and Justice
- Ministry of Justice
- National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Men and Women
- Bucharest University Emergency Hospital and the County Emergency Hospitals în Bacău, Constanța, Craiova, Piatra Neamț, Sibiu, Târgu Mureș, Timișoara, Slobozia, and Satu Mare.

For additional information regarding the collected data and submitted requests, please feel free to contact us at the email address office@centrulfilia.ro.