

# GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF MULTICULTURALITY AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC RELATIONS: COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES FROM ROMANIA AND MOLDOVA IN AN EU FRAME

**AURORA MARTIN**

Associate Professor, PhD in Philosophy  
Brusov State University, Yerevan  
e-mail: [maurora.osaka@gmail.com](mailto:maurora.osaka@gmail.com)  
ORCID ID: 0009-0005-4211-9581

**VERA LUPU**

Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova  
e-mail: [vera.lupudig8@ase.md](mailto:vera.lupudig8@ase.md)  
ORCID ID: 0009-0001-9785-9174

**Abstract:** This article examines gender-based violence (GBV) through the lens of multiculturalism and international economic relations, emphasizing its dual role as a human rights issue and a determinant of sustainable development. It draws on key international instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, CEDAW, and the Istanbul Convention to analyze how GBV restricts women’s empowerment, limits labor market participation, perpetuates structural inequalities, and undermines social cohesion. The study applies a comparative approach, focusing on Moldova’s recent legal reforms and Romania’s more mature institutional framework. Moldova’s ratification of the Istanbul Convention and pioneering measures against digital violence illustrate its commitment to aligning with European standards. Romania contributes valuable good practices, including legal innovations, integrated services, and multicultural strategies. The findings highlight that multicultural contexts carry both risks, through entrenched patriarchal norms and opportunities, by fostering intercultural dialogue and policy learning. Addressing GBV requires mainstreaming gender equality across policy sectors, strengthening institutions, and leveraging international cooperation. Comparative and global insights show that reducing GBV is not only an ethical imperative but also a driver of inclusive growth and competitiveness.

**Keywords:** gender-based violence, multiculturalism, economic relations, public security, sustainable development

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## 1. Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) is one of the most persistent and complex human rights violations worldwide. It transcends cultural, geographic, and economic boundaries, undermining individual security, public health, and social cohesion. In contemporary societies characterized by cultural diversity and transnational economic flows, GBV takes on additional layers of complexity. Multicultural contexts shaped by migration, minority communities, and intercultural interaction can both exacerbate gender inequalities through entrenched patriarchal norms and offer opportunities for innovation through intercultural dialogue and policy exchange.

From a global governance perspective, GBV is simultaneously a human rights concern and a determinant of sustainable development. International legal instruments, including the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (United Nations, 1948), *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (United Nations, 1979), and the *Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence* (Council of Europe, 2011), establish clear state obligations to prevent and combat violence against women and

girls. Yet, despite the growing normative framework, implementation remains uneven, especially in societies undergoing political and economic transformation.

This article explores GBV within the framework of multiculturalism and international economic relations, adopting a comparative perspective focused on Moldova and Romania. Moldova exemplifies a post-Soviet society in the process of European integration, while Romania offers the experience of an EU member state with more consolidated institutions. This comparison highlights both common structural challenges and divergent policy trajectories.

The article applies a multidisciplinary methodology that combines comparative legal and policy analysis, case studies, and insights from feminist theory and international political economy. By situating national developments within European and global frameworks, it seeks to illuminate how GBV functions as both a barrier and a catalyst in multicultural and economic relations. The ultimate aim is to identify strategies that can strengthen prevention, protection, and cooperation mechanisms across contexts.

## **2. Theoretical and Legal Framework**

Gender-based violence (GBV) is best understood as a structural phenomenon that emerges at the intersection of social norms, power relations, and institutional arrangements. Feminist theory has long emphasized that GBV is not merely a series of isolated acts, but rather a manifestation of systemic gender inequality that operates through both formal institutions and informal cultural practices (MacKinnon, 1989). It reflects historically entrenched patriarchal structures, wherein power is unequally distributed between men and women, often reinforced by legal frameworks and social expectations.

### **2.1. Intersectionality and Multicultural Contexts**

The concept of intersectionality, developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, provides a critical analytical tool for understanding GBV in multicultural societies (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality highlights how gender interacts with other social categories, such as ethnicity, class, migration status, or religion, to produce differentiated experiences of violence and access to protection. For example, a migrant woman from a minority community may face multiple layers of discrimination simultaneously: as a woman, as a migrant, and as a member of an ethnic group. In European multicultural contexts, these intersections often determine both the forms of violence experienced and the effectiveness of institutional responses.

Intersectional approaches also challenge the universality of legal frameworks, emphasizing that policies designed for majority populations may not fully address the specific vulnerabilities of minority groups (Beijing Declaration, 1995; United Nations, 1979). This is particularly relevant in contexts like Moldova and Romania, where Roma communities and migrant populations face overlapping forms of marginalization (Council of Europe, 2011; EIGE, 2021).

### **2.2. Legal Frameworks: From Human Rights to Implementation**

International law provides a robust normative foundation for combating GBV. The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* affirms the right to security and dignity (United Nations, 1948), while the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* recognizes violence against women as a form of discrimination, obliging states to take proactive measures in legislation, education, and policy (United Nations, 1979). The *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* further integrates GBV into global gender equality objectives, framing it as both a human rights and development issue (Beijing Declaration, 1995).

In Europe, the *Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence* represents the most comprehensive legal instrument to date (Council of Europe, 2011). It requires states to implement a four-pillar approach: prevention, protection, prosecution, and integrated policies. The Convention is significant because it explicitly addresses the cultural and structural dimensions of GBV, urging states to promote gender equality

and challenge cultural norms that perpetuate violence. It also recognizes the role of civil society, education, and media in transforming societal attitudes.

However, ratification alone does not guarantee effective implementation. Legal harmonization must be accompanied by institutional capacity-building, budget allocation, and cultural change. This gap between legal commitments and actual practice remains one of the central challenges in both Moldova and Romania (Moldova, 2021; Romania, 2016).

### ***2.3. Feminist Economics and GBV***

Feminist economics has added a crucial dimension to the understanding of GBV by linking it to economic structures and labor market dynamics (OECD, UN Women, and World Bank, various years). Economic dependency, wage gaps, and unequal access to property and credit often constrain women’s ability to leave violent relationships or seek institutional support. At the macro level, widespread violence has measurable effects on national productivity and economic growth (World Bank, 2018).

In multicultural contexts, these economic factors intersect with migration dynamics and labor market segmentation. For instance, migrant women employed in informal or precarious sectors may experience both workplace exploitation and intimate partner violence, with limited access to legal recourse. Feminist economics thus underscores that addressing GBV requires not only legal reform but also economic empowerment policies that target structural inequalities (EIGE, 2021).

## **3. Gender-Based Violence and Economic Development**

Gender-based violence (GBV) generates profound and measurable economic costs at individual, household, and national levels. It limits women’s economic participation, reinforces structural inequalities, and hinders inclusive growth (World Bank, 2018). Contemporary development frameworks increasingly recognize that gender equality is not only a moral and legal imperative but also an economic necessity (United Nations, 2015; OECD, UN Women, and World Bank, various years).

### ***3.1. Micro-Level Impacts***

At the individual and household levels, GBV affects women’s physical and psychological health, which in turn reduces their capacity to engage in paid work or education (EIGE, 2021). Survivors may face absenteeism, reduced productivity, and limited mobility due to injuries, trauma, or fear of retaliation. Economic dependency on perpetrators, common in contexts with persistent gender wage gaps, can trap women in abusive relationships. Feminist economists highlight the “vicious cycle” in which violence undermines women’s economic independence, while economic dependency increases vulnerability to violence (World Bank, 2018).

Furthermore, violence has intergenerational consequences. Children who witness domestic violence are at higher risk of experiencing or perpetrating violence later in life, and their educational outcomes are often negatively affected (Beijing Declaration, 1995). This perpetuates a cycle of economic marginalization and gender inequality across generations.

### ***3.2. Macroeconomic Implications***

At the macroeconomic level, the economic burden of GBV is substantial. A landmark *World Bank* study estimates that intimate partner violence alone costs between 1.2% and 3.7% of GDP annually, depending on the country (World Bank, 2018). These costs include direct expenditures such as health care, legal services, and shelters, as well as indirect costs like lost productivity, decreased tax revenues, and long-term social welfare expenses. In the European Union, the *European Institute for Gender Equality* (EIGE) estimated the annual cost of GBV at €366 billion, with €45 billion attributed to lost economic output (EIGE, 2021).

These figures demonstrate that violence is not merely a “social problem” but a macroeconomic challenge that affects national competitiveness, labor markets, and fiscal systems. Economies with high levels of gender inequality and weak protection mechanisms experience

lower female labor force participation and slower productivity growth. Conversely, reducing GBV contributes directly to sustainable development by increasing economic resilience and fostering inclusive growth (OECD, UN Women, and World Bank, various years).

### **3.3. Migration, Multiculturalism, and Economic Structures**

Migration and multicultural dynamics add further complexity to this economic picture. Migrant women often occupy precarious and informal labor market niches, such as domestic work, agriculture, or caregiving (EIGE, 2021). These sectors are typically underregulated, leaving workers more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Moreover, legal insecurity, such as irregular migration status, can discourage victims from reporting violence, perpetuating cycles of economic and physical vulnerability.

Multicultural settings can either exacerbate vulnerabilities or provide spaces for innovation. In some cases, cultural norms that subordinate women’s roles may persist within migrant or minority communities, leading to higher risks of GBV and economic exclusion. However, multicultural contexts also foster policy diffusion and intercultural dialogue, enabling governments and civil society actors to adopt innovative approaches (Council of Europe, 2011). For example, EU-funded programs have facilitated cross-border cooperation on victim protection and the exchange of good practices between Romania, Moldova, and other EU neighbors (European Union, 2020).

### **3.4. GBV, Sustainable Development, and Global Agendas**

Addressing GBV is central to achieving the *United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*, particularly SDG 5 on Gender Equality and SDG 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth (United Nations, 2015). The OECD, UN Women, and the World Bank emphasize that combating GBV enhances human capital, boosts labor market participation, and improves institutional trust—all crucial for sustainable development (OECD, UN Women, and World Bank, various years).

In this sense, GBV reduction should be understood as both a development strategy and a requirement for equitable globalization. Countries that successfully reduce GBV create environments that are more attractive to foreign investment, foster stable labor markets, and build stronger social cohesion (World Bank, 2018). Moldova and Romania, through different trajectories, provide instructive examples of how addressing GBV intersects with broader economic and integration processes (EIGE, 2021).

## **4. European Union Policies and Multicultural Contexts**

The European Union (EU) has developed one of the most comprehensive normative frameworks for gender equality and combating gender-based violence (GBV) in the world. This framework integrates human rights protection, gender mainstreaming, and multicultural policy instruments, reflecting the EU’s dual commitment to equality and diversity (European Union, 2020).

### **4.1. Normative and Legal Framework**

At the legal level, the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union* affirms the right to dignity, integrity, and equality between women and men (European Union, 2000). A series of directives and regulations establishes minimum standards for the protection of victims of crimes and promotes gender-sensitive governance. Among the most significant are:

*Directive 2012/29/EU* on the rights, support, and protection of victims of crime, which sets out procedural guarantees and specialized services for victims, including GBV survivors (European Union, 2012).

*Directive 2011/36/EU* on trafficking in human beings, which recognizes the gender-specific nature of trafficking and calls for prevention and victim protection measures (European Union, 2011).

The *EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025*, which aims to create a “Union of Equality,” prioritizing GBV prevention, digital violence, and closing gender gaps in the economy (European Union, 2020).

The *Digital Services Act*, which addresses emerging forms of online and digital violence, mandating stronger accountability for platforms and member states (European Union, 2022).

These legal instruments are complemented by soft law measures, funding programs, and strategic frameworks that encourage member states and partner countries to align with EU standards.

#### **4.2. Migration and Multicultural Policy Dynamics**

The EU’s multicultural landscape has been profoundly shaped by migration flows, both from within and outside Europe. Between 2010 and 2020, over 20 million people migrated to the EU, many from regions with patriarchal social structures and weaker gender equality protections (EIGE, 2021). While migration enriches cultural diversity, it also creates new challenges for GBV prevention and response, as legal and institutional systems must adapt to culturally diverse populations.

Migrant women are disproportionately affected by GBV due to intersecting factors such as legal status, language barriers, economic dependency, and cultural isolation (Crenshaw, 1989; Council of Europe, 2011). EU policy frameworks acknowledge these vulnerabilities, encouraging member states to integrate intersectional and culturally sensitive approaches into their GBV strategies. This includes training for police, judicial personnel, and social workers on intercultural communication, as well as funding for NGOs that work with minority and migrant communities (European Union, 2020).

At the same time, multicultural settings provide unique opportunities for innovation. Many EU countries have developed community-based programs that leverage intercultural dialogue to prevent GBV, foster trust, and promote reporting. For example, intercultural mediators—often recruited from minority communities—play a crucial role in bridging cultural gaps between institutions and vulnerable populations (EIGE, 2021). These programs are especially relevant for countries like Romania and Moldova, where Roma and migrant communities experience overlapping vulnerabilities.

#### **4.3. EU Enlargement, Neighborhood Policy, and Conditionality**

The EU’s approach to GBV is not limited to its member states; it extends to candidate and neighboring countries through the *European Neighborhood Policy (ENP)* and enlargement conditionality (European Union, 2020). Countries aspiring to closer integration with the EU are encouraged or required to harmonize their legal frameworks with EU standards, including ratification and implementation of the *Istanbul Convention* (Council of Europe, 2011).

Moldova’s ratification of the Convention in 2021 was influenced by both domestic advocacy and EU integration incentives (Moldova, 2021). Through instruments such as *Twinning projects*, *TACIS*, and *CERV* funding, the EU supports legislative reforms, capacity building, and cross-border cooperation on GBV issues in neighboring countries.

This conditionality mechanism has proven particularly effective in accelerating legal and institutional change. Romania’s accession process (2000–2007) stimulated major reforms in gender equality legislation, institutional development, and cooperation with civil society (Romania, 2016). Similarly, Moldova’s gradual alignment with EU standards has led to measurable progress in victim protection services and legal frameworks, although implementation gaps remain (Moldova, 2023).

#### **4.4. Digital Transformation and Emerging Challenges**

A particularly dynamic area of EU policy development concerns digital transformation and online violence. The increasing prevalence of cyberviolence—including online harassment, non-

consensual sharing of images, and cyberstalking—has prompted the EU to update its legal frameworks (European Union, 2022).

The *Digital Services Act (DSA)* represents a major innovation by regulating platforms and imposing responsibilities on service providers to address harmful content (European Union, 2022). This is especially important for young women and girls, who are disproportionately targeted online. Moldova’s adoption of digital violence legislation in 2023 demonstrates the influence of EU standards in neighboring countries (Moldova, 2023).

As GBV increasingly takes digital forms, EU policies must adapt to new technologies, cross-border jurisdictional challenges, and the role of private companies in shaping online spaces. This evolution illustrates the EU’s broader approach—combining legal harmonization, cultural sensitivity, and technological governance (EIGE, 2021).

### **5. Case Study: Republic of Moldova**

The Republic of Moldova provides a particularly instructive example of how a post-Soviet, multicultural society engages with the challenge of gender-based violence (GBV) while navigating processes of European integration and internal transformation. Moldova’s GBV policies reflect both international pressures—mainly from the Council of Europe and the European Union—and domestic dynamics, including civil society activism and cultural diversity (Council of Europe, 2011; European Union, 2022).

#### **5.1. Legal and Institutional Reforms**

Moldova’s legal framework on GBV has undergone a significant transformation since the early 2000s. The adoption of the *Law on Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence* established a legal basis for protective measures, victim services, and sanctions against perpetrators (Moldova, 2008). However, implementation remained weak for over a decade, with insufficient institutional coordination and limited resources.

A major turning point came in 2021, when Moldova ratified the *Istanbul Convention*, signaling a strong political commitment to align its legislation with European standards (Moldova, 2021; Council of Europe, 2011). This led to a series of legal amendments, including the introduction of emergency protection orders, the criminalization of various forms of psychological and economic violence, and the formal recognition of digital violence as a punishable offense.

In 2023, Moldova became one of the first Eastern European countries to adopt a comprehensive legal framework against cyberviolence, influenced by the EU’s *Digital Services Act* and supported by civil society advocacy (Moldova, 2023; European Union, 2022). Institutionally, Moldova established specialized units within police departments and created inter-institutional coordination councils to oversee GBV policy implementation. However, institutional capacity remains uneven, particularly in rural and multicultural areas. Many local authorities lack trained personnel, and inter-agency cooperation is often ad hoc rather than systematic (Moldova, 2023).

#### **5.2. Multicultural Realities and Vulnerabilities**

Moldova’s population is ethnically diverse, including significant Ukrainian, Russian, Gagauz, Roma, and other minority communities (EIGE, 2021). This multicultural context creates both opportunities and vulnerabilities in addressing GBV. Some communities retain patriarchal social norms that discourage reporting violence or seeking institutional support. For example, early marriages and extended family hierarchies can limit women’s autonomy, particularly in rural Roma communities.

Language barriers and mistrust of state institutions also pose obstacles. Minority women may have limited access to information about their rights or available services, especially if they live in isolated regions. These factors contribute to underreporting, which remains one of the central challenges for Moldovan authorities (La Strada Moldova, various years).

At the same time, multiculturalism has spurred innovative community-based approaches. For instance, some local NGOs and municipalities have introduced intercultural mediators—often recruited from minority communities—who act as cultural brokers between victims and institutions. This strategy has shown promising results in Roma communities and in areas with significant migrant populations, improving trust and increasing referrals to support services (La Strada Moldova, various years; Moldova, 2023).

### **5.3. Role of Civil Society and International Actors**

Civil society organizations have been instrumental in advancing Moldova’s GBV agenda. The NGO *La Strada Moldova*, for example, has played a central role in promoting digital violence legislation, providing victim assistance, and conducting awareness campaigns (La Strada Moldova, various years). The *Women’s Law Center* and other local NGOs offer legal aid, shelters, and training for professionals.

These NGOs often function as bridges between international norms and local realities, translating EU and Council of Europe standards into practical tools and advocating for institutional change (Council of Europe, 2011). Their efforts have been supported by international donors such as *UN Women*, *OSCE*, and the *EU Delegation*, which have funded projects on capacity building, victim protection, and data collection (UN Women, various years).

Moldova’s alignment with EU standards has also been encouraged through *European Neighborhood Policy (ENP)* instruments and cross-border cooperation programs (European Union, 2020). These have facilitated knowledge transfer and joint training initiatives with Romania and other EU member states, particularly in areas such as protection orders, data harmonization, and digital violence response (Romania, 2016; Moldova, 2023).

### **5.4. Remaining Challenges**

Despite notable progress, Moldova continues to face significant implementation challenges. Underreporting remains pervasive, driven by social stigma, patriarchal norms, and distrust in law enforcement (EIGE, 2021). Institutional capacity gaps persist, especially at the local level, where services are unevenly distributed and often dependent on donor funding rather than sustainable state budgets (Moldova, 2023).

Additionally, cultural resistance to gender equality reforms remains strong in certain regions, particularly the autonomous territory of Gagauzia, where conservative attitudes limit the uptake of GBV policies (La Strada Moldova, various years). Digital violence legislation, while progressive, is still in its infancy in terms of enforcement and public awareness (Moldova, 2023; European Union, 2022).

Overall, Moldova’s experience demonstrates the potential of legal harmonization and international cooperation, but also the limits of top-down reforms in the absence of sustained institutional development and cultural change (Council of Europe, 2011; Moldova, 2023).

## **6. Comparative Perspective: Romania – Good Practices and Case Studies**

Romania represents a more consolidated legal and institutional framework for addressing gender-based violence (GBV) compared to Moldova. Its trajectory reflects both internal legal developments and the transformative impact of European Union accession between 2000 and 2007 (European Union, 2020). Romania’s experience is particularly valuable because it demonstrates how sustained legal reform, civil society engagement, and multicultural strategies can reinforce each other to produce more effective GBV responses.

### **6.1. Legal Evolution and Institutional Consolidation**

Romania began developing its legal framework on domestic violence in the early 2000s. The first *Law No. 217/2003 on Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence* marked a starting point, but implementation remained weak due to limited funding and institutional fragmentation (Romania, 2003). Over the next decade, pressure from civil society and the EU accession process drove significant legislative improvements.

Key milestones included:

The introduction of emergency protection orders in 2012, which enabled police to remove aggressors from households within 72 hours without requiring the victim to file a formal complaint (Romania, 2012).

Ratification of the *Istanbul Convention* in 2016, which strengthened Romania’s obligations to adopt comprehensive GBV policies (Romania, 2016; Council of Europe, 2011).

The *National Strategy for Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence 2021–2027*, focusing on prevention, digital violence, and interinstitutional coordination (Romania, 2021–2027).

The launch of electronic monitoring systems for aggressors in 2022, designed to ensure enforcement of protection orders (Romania, 2021–2027).

Romania has also progressively expanded its network of specialized services, including shelters, counseling centers, and legal aid. By 2023, the country had over 100 shelters and a national helpline accessible 24/7. These developments reflect a steady institutionalization of GBV responses, supported by EU structural funds and increased national budget allocations (European Union, 2020).

### **6.2. Civil Society’s Catalytic Role**

Civil society organizations have played a pivotal role in driving legislative reform, providing services, and shaping public discourse. NGOs such as *Centrul FILIA*, *Asociația ANAIS*, and *A.L.E.G.* have consistently advocated for survivor-centered policies, strategic litigation, and public awareness campaigns.

*Centrul FILIA* has been at the forefront of pushing for better protection for Roma women and survivors in rural communities, while *ANAIS* has provided legal aid and strategic litigation to challenge gaps in the justice system. *A.L.E.G.* pioneered educational programs on gender equality and early prevention, targeting schools and universities.

These organizations have also fostered cross-border cooperation with NGOs in Moldova and other EU countries, sharing best practices on protection mechanisms and advocacy strategies. Civil society’s involvement has been critical in monitoring government commitments, especially regarding *Istanbul Convention* implementation and the use of EU funds (Council of Europe, 2011; European Union, 2020).

### **6.3. Multicultural Strategies and Roma Communities**

Romania’s multicultural landscape includes Hungarian, Roma, Ukrainian, and other minority groups (EIGE, 2021). Roma women, in particular, face intersectional vulnerabilities related to poverty, discrimination, and patriarchal traditions (Crenshaw, 1989). Historically, state institutions have struggled to reach Roma communities effectively. However, over the past decade, Romania has developed several innovative strategies:

Deployment of intercultural mediators in Roma communities to facilitate communication between survivors and institutions.

Targeted awareness campaigns in minority languages, often in partnership with local NGOs.

Inclusion of Roma women’s organizations in national GBV policy consultations (Romania, 2021–2027).

These strategies have helped increase reporting rates and improve access to services, although significant gaps remain, particularly in rural areas. Importantly, Romania’s experience demonstrates that multicultural contexts can generate adaptive, community-centered solutions when policy frameworks are inclusive and participatory (EIGE, 2021).

### **6.4. Digital Violence and Policy Innovation**

Romania has also taken steps to address emerging forms of GBV in the digital sphere. Following public debates and NGO advocacy, the *Criminal Code* was amended in 2021 to include provisions on digital harassment, cyberstalking, and non-consensual sharing of intimate images

(Romania, 2021). The government, in collaboration with *Vodafone Romania Foundation*, launched the *Bright Sky App*, a mobile application offering legal information, emergency contacts, and risk assessment tools for survivors (Bright Sky Romania App, 2025).

While enforcement is still evolving, Romania’s early attention to digital violence aligns with broader EU trends and provides a valuable model for neighboring countries like Moldova, which is in the early stages of implementing similar legislation (European Union, 2022).

### **6.5. Lessons from Romania’s EU Accession**

Romania’s EU accession process was a key catalyst for reform. Conditionality mechanisms required the adoption of gender equality legislation, the strengthening of institutional frameworks, and the establishment of monitoring mechanisms (European Union, 2020). EU structural funds enabled the expansion of service infrastructure, including shelters and training programs for professionals.

Moreover, EU integration provided access to transnational networks, facilitating policy learning and the exchange of best practices. Romania’s progress illustrates how EU membership can function as both a normative and material accelerator for GBV policy advancement, provided that domestic actors are willing to engage constructively (Council of Europe, 2011; European Union, 2020).

## **7. New Comparative Insights and Global Lessons**

The comparative analysis between Moldova and Romania offers valuable insights that transcend national contexts and can inform broader global strategies for combating gender-based violence (GBV) in multicultural societies. These insights highlight both transferable good practices and the structural challenges that persist across different political, economic, and cultural settings (EIGE, 2021; OECD, UN Women, and World Bank, various years).

### **7.1. Gradual Legal Harmonization vs. Accelerated Institutional Reform**

Romania’s EU accession process created a gradual, structured pathway for legal and institutional reforms over nearly a decade (2000–2007). This incremental process allowed for the steady consolidation of specialized services, legal frameworks, and administrative capacities (Romania, 2016). Moldova, by contrast, is undergoing a compressed reform timeline, particularly after its ratification of the *Istanbul Convention* in 2021 (Moldova, 2021; Council of Europe, 2011).

While accelerated reforms can generate quick legal alignment, they often outpace institutional capacity and cultural adaptation. This is evident in Moldova’s uneven implementation of digital violence legislation and rural service provision (Moldova, 2023). The lesson for other transitional societies is that legal change must be synchronized with resource allocation, training, and cultural engagement to ensure sustainability (OECD, UN Women, and World Bank, various years).

### **7.2. EU Integration as a Catalyst for Gender Equality**

Romania’s experience demonstrates the powerful role of EU conditionality as both a normative and material catalyst for reform (European Union, 2020). Accession negotiations required the adoption of gender equality legislation, institutional strengthening, and cooperation with civil society. Moreover, access to EU structural funds enabled Romania to expand service infrastructure and professional training.

Moldova’s status as an EU candidate and *European Neighborhood Policy (ENP)* partner offers similar opportunities, but without the same binding conditionality mechanisms (Moldova, 2023). The lesson here is that regional organizations can play a transformative role if legal harmonization is accompanied by funding, monitoring, and political commitment. This insight is relevant beyond Europe, for example, in Latin America, where regional treaties exist but implementation often falters without sustained incentives (OECD, UN Women, and World Bank, various years).

### **7.3. Multicultural Mediation and Intercultural Strategies**

Both countries show that multicultural contexts do not inherently hinder GBV prevention but require tailored, intercultural strategies (EIGE, 2021). In Moldova, intercultural mediators in Roma and minority communities have improved trust and access to services (La Strada Moldova, various years). Romania institutionalized similar programs more systematically, integrating them into public health and education systems (Romania, 2021–2027).

The global lesson is that multicultural mediation should not be treated as an “add-on” but as a core component of GBV policy. In societies with significant migration or minority populations, such as Canada, South Africa, or EU member states, intercultural strategies can bridge legal frameworks and community realities effectively (Council of Europe, 2011; European Union, 2020).

### **7.4. Digital Violence as a Policy Frontier**

The rapid evolution of digital violence presents a shared challenge for both Moldova and Romania. Romania’s earlier legal amendments and initiatives such as *Bright Sky App* demonstrate the value of early policy innovation (Bright Sky Romania App, 2025). Moldova’s quick legislative adoption shows strong alignment with EU standards but underscores the gap between legislation and implementation capacity (Moldova, 2023; European Union, 2022).

Globally, digital violence has become a transnational phenomenon, often exceeding the jurisdictional reach of national authorities. The lesson is that regional and international cooperation through legal harmonization, joint investigations, and platform regulation is essential (European Union, 2022). The EU’s *Digital Services Act* provides a model that could be adapted in other regions (Council of Europe, 2011; European Union, 2022).

### **7.5. Civil Society as a Structural Actor, Not a Substitute**

Finally, the comparative analysis underscores the critical role of civil society in both countries. In Romania, NGOs have acted as long-term policy drivers, strategic litigators, and service providers (Romania, 2016). In Moldova, civil society has filled gaps left by weak institutions, especially in rural and multicultural contexts (La Strada Moldova, various years).

The global lesson is that civil society must be recognized as a structural partner in GBV governance, not merely a substitute for state services. Sustainable progress depends on institutionalized partnerships, legal recognition, and stable funding mechanisms (OECD, UN Women, and World Bank, various years). This principle is relevant across contexts, from Eastern Europe to Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa (Council of Europe, 2011; European Union, 2020).

## **8. Policy Recommendations and Conclusion**

The comparative analysis of gender-based violence (GBV) in multicultural and international economic contexts reveals the centrality of gender equality not only as a human rights imperative but also as a driver of sustainable development, social cohesion, and European integration (OECD, UN Women, and World Bank, various years). Both Moldova and Romania offer instructive examples: Moldova illustrates the challenges of legal harmonization and institutional development in a transitional, multicultural society, while Romania demonstrates the transformative potential of EU accession, sustained civil society engagement, and gradual institutional consolidation (Moldova, 2021; Romania, 2016; European Union, 2020).

Based on the findings presented in this study, the following **policy recommendations** are proposed at the **international, national, and community levels**.

### **8.1. International and European Level**

**Strengthen implementation mechanisms of international conventions.** Instruments such as the *Istanbul Convention* should be accompanied by enhanced monitoring and support mechanisms to ensure that legal commitments translate into tangible institutional and cultural changes (Council of Europe, 2011). EU institutions and the Council of Europe should increase

technical assistance and targeted funding for countries with implementation gaps, particularly in Eastern Europe (European Union, 2020).

**Integrate GBV more explicitly into economic policy frameworks.** International organizations such as the *OECD*, *World Bank*, and *European Commission* should further develop tools that link GBV reduction with economic competitiveness, labor market participation, and sustainable growth (OECD, UN Women, and World Bank, various years). This approach reinforces the economic rationale for allocating development funding to gender-sensitive policies (EIGE, 2021).

**Promote cross-border and regional cooperation.** Given the multicultural and migratory dynamics of GBV, the EU should support regional protection networks, cross-border data sharing, and joint training programs between member states and neighboring countries (European Union, 2020). Programs such as *CERV* and the *European Neighborhood Policy (ENP)* could be expanded to foster Moldova–Romania partnerships, particularly on digital violence and minority protection (Moldova, 2023; Romania, 2021–2027).

### **8.2. National Policy Level**

**Ensure sustainable funding and institutional capacity.** Both Moldova and Romania face challenges in ensuring stable, long-term funding for shelters, legal aid, and prevention programs (Moldova, 2023; Romania, 2021–2027). Reliance on short-term donor projects undermines institutional continuity. National budgets should allocate predictable resources, and multi-annual funding schemes should be institutionalized (OECD, UN Women, and World Bank, various years).

**Enhance rural and multicultural outreach.** In both countries, rural communities and minority groups remain underserved (EIGE, 2021). Culturally sensitive strategies such as intercultural mediators, minority language campaigns, and partnerships with local NGOs should be scaled up nationally. Roma women and migrant communities require targeted legal awareness and access to services (La Strada Moldova, various years; Romania, 2021–2027).

**Invest in training and professionalization.** Effective GBV response depends on well-trained professionals across the police, judiciary, health, and education sectors (Romania, 2016; Moldova, 2023). Regular training modules, gender-sensitivity curricula, and interdisciplinary cooperation protocols should become mandatory within national strategies.

**Develop digital governance and cyberviolence frameworks.** As digital violence evolves, states must adapt legal frameworks, law enforcement practices, and public awareness campaigns (European Union, 2022). Romania’s experience with *Bright Sky App* and Criminal Code amendments can serve as a model for Moldova and other Eastern European countries (Bright Sky Romania App, 2025; Moldova, 2023).

### **8.3. Community and Civil Society Level**

**Support grassroots NGOs as key intermediaries.** Civil society organizations often act as bridges between international norms and local realities, translating abstract policies into community-based interventions (La Strada Moldova, various years; Council of Europe, 2011). Funding mechanisms should support both large national NGOs and smaller community-based initiatives, particularly in multicultural areas.

**Promote gender-transformative education and cultural dialogue.** Long-term reduction of GBV requires challenging patriarchal norms through education, public debate, and cultural dialogue (OECD, UN Women, and World Bank, various years). Intercultural programs in schools, community centers, and media campaigns can foster new models of gender relations, especially in multicultural contexts (EIGE, 2021).

**Encourage survivor participation in policy development.** Survivors should not be passive recipients of policy but active contributors. Involving survivors in designing services, legal frameworks, and awareness strategies increases effectiveness and legitimacy (Romania, 2016;

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Moldova, 2023). Romania’s emerging survivor networks provide models for participatory policymaking and empowerment.

#### **8.4. Concluding Reflections**

Gender-based violence remains one of the most persistent barriers to gender equality, sustainable development, and multicultural integration (Council of Europe, 2011; OECD, UN Women, and World Bank, various years). In the context of globalization and increasing population mobility, addressing GBV requires multilevel governance that combines legal harmonization, institutional investment, and cultural transformation (European Union, 2020; 2022).

Moldova’s progress in ratifying the *Istanbul Convention*, adopting digital violence legislation, and engaging multicultural mediators represents a significant step forward, though challenges remain in enforcement and cultural change (Moldova, 2021; 2023). Romania’s experience demonstrates the long-term benefits of sustained legal reform and EU integration, particularly in building institutional capacity and civil society networks (Romania, 2016; European Union, 2020).

Ultimately, combating GBV in multicultural contexts is not only about legal compliance but about transforming power relations and building inclusive societies where diversity and gender equality reinforce one another (EIGE, 2021; OECD, UN Women, and World Bank, various years).

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