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The Essential Role of Gender Sensitization Training in Legal Education

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Abstract: *Raising awareness of gender equality among law students is often overlooked by educators, who may consider it unnecessary due to the higher enrollment of female students. However, this perception obscures a critical issue: in the legal profession, the gender ratio is reversed, with men predominating in key roles. This paper qualitatively analyzed the effects of insufficient or inadequate gender sensitization training within law school curricula on the perspectives of future male lawyers, prosecutors, and judges. The findings indicate a correlation between low gender equality awareness and biased decision-making in the justice system, particularly in cases involving sexual or domestic violence. Despite some progress, there is an urgent need for enhanced efforts to promote gender sensitivity among legal professionals to ensure a more equitable justice system.*

Keywords: *Gender Sensitization Training; Gender Equality; Judicial Stereotyping; Unconscious Bias; Sexual Violence; Albania; Decision-Making*

INTRODUCTION

Each of us views the notion of justice through a different lens. Every perspective is shaped by individual experiences and accounts of receiving or administering justice. Ensuring that those empowered with the latter are aware of the personal circumstances and interests of those on the receiving end is paramount for ensuring justice is done. Ideally, this should be achieved through students in law school, followed by in-service training; however, even the most effective curriculum may not be enough to overcome deeply ingrained beliefs, stereotypes, and biases, some of which may be unconscious.

Gender bias toward women victims, in particular, shown by male actors of the justice system, is an ever-present concern in our society that can lead to significant miscarriages of justice and retraumatization, like that initial Italian Supreme Court verdict that sparked the Denim Day campaign.

Worth exploring in this regard is whether this biased decision-making can be prevented or countered through effective gender equality awareness training for law students and legal professionals, thereby promoting fairer and more sensitive legal actions. Real examples of domestic and sexual violence cases show that without it, it is certainly difficult.

Highlighting both the challenges and opportunities in reducing judicial stereotyping through training is the ultimate aim of this article, which also showcases best practices to follow.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODS

The topic of the impact of gender sensitization training in the justice system has not received the necessary attention from researchers, with contributions mostly coming in the form of manuals, handbooks, and toolkits. They, however, are a valuable resource serving as references in academic literature, like the 2017 Training Manual from the European Union and the Council of Europe and the 2019 "Justice and Gender" Tool from DCAF, OSCE/ODHIR, and UN Women, the latter emphasizing the importance of integrating a gender perspective and pursuing gender equality measures in the justice sector in order to prevent gender bias in decision-making (DCAF, OSCE/ODHIR, UN Women 2019, 10).

The issue is notably recognized in South and Southeast Asia, specifically in India, Pakistan, Nepal, and the Philippines (Asian Development Bank 2018a, 3; 2018b). In the latter, for example, regular gender sensitization trainings are conducted for UP law students and staff. The Indian perspective has been presented through the article titled "Role of gender sensitization training in combating gender-based bullying, inequality, and violence," in which the authors also recognize cultural resistance as a challenge to gender sensitization training (Upadhyay, Khandelwal, Panda 2023, 16).

Academic literature on this particular topic seems to be lacking in the Western Balkans, a region with a historically conservative culture, which is why filling the research gaps on the links between gender sensitization training and judicial stereotyping is a necessity. In presenting the Albanian case, this paper draws from the extensive work of Professor Aurela Anastasi and colleagues on the topic, aiming to expand on some areas.

The study employs only qualitative methods, theoretically analyzing secondary data from monographs, journal articles, legislation, and case law, as well as from handbooks and toolkits, adopting a comparative approach throughout. For this reason, additional research is required on the topic, especially quantitative one, in order to fully establish a positive correlation between gender sensitization training and gender bias in the justice system.

GENDER SENSITIZATION TRAINING AT A GLANCE

Women navigating the justice system, whether as legal professionals or ordinary citizens, appear to share a common experience. As they take legal action, they find that some of the pain of discrimination often comes from the very places they address – courts (Babcock 1993, 2145). This all-too-common-unethical behavior can range from belittling to prejudicial stances and even denying access to justice altogether.

Early intervention through targeted education and training may challenge certain traditional stereotypes and attitudes that are often nurtured within the family unit. In particular, it may be beneficial for future legal professionals to adjust their conceptual lenses somewhat (Anastasi et al. 2017, 6).

This broadly refers to the concept of gender sensitization training (GST), which UN Women has defined as a tool, strategy, and means to effect individual and collective transformation toward gender equality through consciousness-raising, empowering learning, knowledge building, and skill development (Upadhyay, Khandelwal, Panda 2023, 3).In simple terms, GST enables police, lawyers, prosecutors, judges, and other legal professionals to take a

gender-sensitive approach to cases, ensuring that their personal biases do not interfere with the impartial application of the law and guaranteeing due process. In a sense, it is like Rawls' Veil of Ignorance, whereby those deciding the fate of society are shrouded in an imaginary veil, unaware of their social status, race, religion, or gender, and while stripped of prejudice and personal interest, they do have an intuitive sense of right and wrong (Ikonomi 2010, 354-355).

GST can be incorporated into law faculty curricula through dedicated gender equality subjects and in the form of mandatory training modules and toolkits in law schools and judicial academies as part of the initial and ongoing training programs for lawyers, public prosecutors, and judges.

In jurisdictions that utilize a jury of peers to effectively pass judgment in legal proceedings, such as the UK, US, and Canada, GST intended for legal professionals may, unfortunately, become moot, with untrained citizens not infrequently allowing emotion and bias to guide their decision-making, despite mixed-gender compositions.

INTERNATIONAL GST STANDARDS

Addressing judicial stereotyping through preventive measures is a matter that has continued to receive the focus of the international community. At the UN level, the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in Article 10 stresses the elimination of stereotyped gender roles at all levels and forms of education. Worth noting from the CEDAW Committee's work is their General Recommendation No. 35, underscoring the requirement from all judicial bodies to ensure that proceedings in gender-based violence (GBV) against women cases are impartial, fair, and unaffected by gender stereotypes. The ILO, recognizing the prevalence of gendered harassment and discrimination in the workplace between colleagues, through Article 11 of the 2019 Violence and Harassment Convention (C190), urges states to ensure that employers and workers are provided with resources, training, and tools on workplace violence and harassment, as well as on gender-based violence.

The European standard is reflected in the Prevention Pillar of the landmark Istanbul Convention, which outlines comprehensive obligations regarding awareness-raising campaigns, education measures, and training of professionals. Equality between women and men, non-stereotyped gender roles, mutual respect, non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships, GBV against women, and the right to personal integrity are the issues that need to be included as teaching material in formal curricula at all levels of education, even starting from kindergarten (Council of Europe 2011; UN Women 2012, 28). Certainly ambitious goals for most, but not anymore for the Convention's host country, Türkiye, which withdrew from it in 2021 in a controversial move.

Importantly, Article 15 of the Istanbul Convention obligates State Parties to provide or strengthen appropriate training for legal professionals dealing with victims or perpetrators of GBV, especially regarding the needs and rights of the victims and to prevent secondary victimization. Building upon the standard of the Istanbul Convention, the EU Directive 2024/1385 on violence against women and domestic violence foresees Article 36 on training and information for professionals, which notably obligates Member States to provide general and specialist training that is human rights-based and victim-centered, as well as gender-,

disability-, and child-sensitive, to officials in contact with GBV victims, including police officers, lawyers, judges, and prosecutors. Worth noting also is Article 35 of Directive 2024/1385, which obligates preventive measures such as the distribution of consent education material and rape prevention information to promote the central role of consent in sexual relationships.

Gender stereotypes in decision-making can be addressed by the ECHR in the context of discrimination (Article 14) and privacy violations (Article 8), as established by the ECtHR's case law, following the same approach as CEDAW and other human rights mechanisms (Renzulli 2023).

THE IMPORTANCE OF GST FOR DECISION-MAKING IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

In 1999, the Italian Supreme Court of Cassation overturned a 1992 rape conviction, arguing that, since the victim was wearing skintight jeans, she must have assisted her rapist in removing them, thereby implying sexual consent. This is an appalling example of the victim-blaming mentality in sexual violence cases, which prompted women in the Italian Parliament to come to work the following day wearing jeans in solidarity with the victim, triggering the Denim Day awareness campaign (Peace Over Violence 2018). Reflection came nearly a decade later in a similar case, where the same court overturned its 1999 verdict. Nevertheless, the judges had set a dangerous precedent. They applied a gender stereotype in their decision-making and substituted this stereotype for law and facts in evidence (Cusack 2014, 19). In a more recent case, an Ordinary Court of Rome verdict sparked public outrage by acquitting a 66-year-old high school caretaker of sexual assault for groping a female student's buttocks. The court argued that, albeit an inappropriate act, the accused had done it as a joke and was not driven by lust, and the touching lasted less than ten seconds (Giurisprudenza Penale 2023).

Similarly, in 2014, the Basic Court of Gjilan in the Republic of Kosovo, on an appeal-ordered retrial, acquitted all four defendants previously convicted of rape. Among the concerning arguments in the decision, the judges felt that the fact of having stayed in a living space with young people inherently meant that the 19-year-old female victim was also amenable to "setting off on sexual adventures" with them, including the defendant, who was older than the victim (Radio Free Europe 2021). Such blatantly prejudicial and insensitive language from a judge may as well be influenced by similar language in seemingly authoritative texts, like a passage from the commentary of the 2012 Kosovan penal code, where the co-author, a former chief prosecutor, states that no crime exists when the victim, after initially expressing nonconsent for the sexual act, later "lets go and submits to the sexual pleasure," in other words, accepts the sexual act. The same problematic remark on sexual violence victims resurfaced in 2023 from a senior Albanian lawyer and public figure, S.N., at a national television talk show. However, it was followed by the intervention of the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, who classified the language as discriminatory hate speech based on gender and ordered the lawyer to issue a public statement distancing himself from such hate speech.

Apart from members of the public, these unacceptable attitudes also target legal professionals at work, especially female defense attorneys. A male prosecutor in the Albanian city of Pogradec, Sh.K., with a career spanning nearly thirty years, was removed from office in 2023 following a disciplinary proceeding that found numerous professional and ethical violations. Chief among them, during a court hearing, he had berated and bullied the female

defense attorney unprovoked, calling her incompetent and claiming that others prepared briefs for her so that she could read them, that she came from the streets, and asking the court to substitute her (Special Appeal Chamber 2023, AL). This example of courtroom misogyny underscores the importance of adopting a gender-inclusive approach to communication (European Institute for Gender Equality 2024, 10), particularly in institutional settings within the justice system.

The phenomenon is also present in civil and administrative cases. In the ECtHR judgment of *Carvalho Pinto de Sousa Morais v. Portugal,* the court found a violation of Article 14 in connection with Article 8 regarding a Portugal apex court verdict that had reduced the amount of compensation initially awarded to the plaintiff, a female medical negligence victim, that had resulted in her sexual impotence. The basis for this ruling was the fact that the plaintiff was 50 years old. Since she already had two children, for the national court, sexuality was not as important as in the younger years, its significance diminishing with age. Additionally, the plaintiff did not need to hire a maid, as she only had to care for her husband, considering the age of her children. Presented with these facts, the ECtHR notably held that (*Carvalho Pinto de Sousa Morais v. Portugal* 2017, § 52):

> The question at issue here is not considerations of age or sex as such, but rather the assumption that sexuality is not as important for a fifty-year-old woman and mother of two children as for someone of a younger age. That assumption reflects a traditional idea of female sexuality as being essentially linked to childbearing purposes and thus ignores its physical and psychological relevance for the self-fulfillment of women as people.

The above precedents exceed judicial discretion and reflect outdated stereotypes and mindsets, often resulting in incorrect decision-making. Eliminating all these prejudices and behaviors is precisely the aim of GST for legal professionals. Not by teaching the law because most professionals are familiar with the law, but rather by preventing the discriminatory application of the law (DCAF, OSCE/ODHIR, UN Women 2019, 38).

The effectiveness of GST depends on the method of application and the program content. It is worth noting that hour-long online presentations conducted from the comfort of one's home or office are not particularly engaging and do not effectively convey the importance of the topic. Rather, more effort is required to deliver comprehensive face-to-face training sessions for legal professionals, incorporating both theoretical and practical approaches. Additionally, experts recommend peer-to-peer training over that from external trainers (DCAF, OSCE/ODHIR, UN Women 2019, 39), as it may be easier for participants to receive the awareness-raising message when it comes from a colleague they know, trust, and respect. The trainers' gender, I believe, holds no less importance, as a male trainer or facilitator may play a unique role in inspiring reflection on masculinity in ways that a traditionally female gender equality expert may not be able to achieve. This transformative education can also be achieved through study visits, where survivors share their firsthand experiences and accounts of GBV, as well as through cost-effective tools such as social media, films, plays, and workshops (DCAF, OSCE/ODHIR, UN Women 2019, 39; Upadhyay, Khandelwal & Panda 2023, 16).

That being said, apart from cultural resistance, another challenge GST faces, as well as in-service training in general, is that it is often treated as merely a legal requirement by both

trainers and participants, who merely show up to sign their attendance (Upadhyay, Khandelwal, & Panda 2023, 16). To effect real behavior change, GST content must be extensive, engaging, and tailored to the specific country's culture.

On the other hand, it is not unrealistic to expect some initiative from modern legal professionals to independently study contemporary standards of adjudication and best practices, such as the ECtHR case law, rather than relying solely on the next scheduled mandatory training. To illustrate, in three rape convictions from 2016, 2019, and 2021, respectively, by the first instance courts of the Albanian city of Shkodra and the capital, Tirana, the judges had aptly reasoned that the absence of or the claim that no physical violence was present, implying that the victim had consented to the sexual relations, did not exculpate the defendant, even acknowledging in the verdict the fact that under the circumstances the victim "had lost the ability to express dissent" (High Court of the Republic of Albania 2022, 2-4; Tirana First Instance Court of General Jurisdiction 2019, 2021), with clear inspiration from ECtHR case law (*M.C. v. Bulgaria* 2003). In the same vein, the Italian Supreme Court of Cassation seems to have redeemed itself with a May 2023 verdict by duly relieving the sexual violence victim of the burden of resisting the sexual acts imposed on her and outright rejecting the concept of "implicit consent" as outdated cultural stereotypes (Supreme Court of Cassation 2023, IT).

A recent positive example is the outcome of the case of 71-year-old Gisèle Pelicot, which shocked the world. Despite France's initial reluctance to update its sexual violence provisions, even blocking EU proposals, the Avignon court judicial panel, facing 51 defendants out of 73 total suspects, including Gisèle's ex-husband as the organizer, charged with mass raping her for nearly a decade while drugged unconscious by him, rose above the controversy with a 106-page reasoned verdict convicting all defendants with individualized sentences. The court notably acknowledged Gisèle as a victim of sexual abuse, ruling out any possibility of willing participation, and also rejected claims of surrogate consent via the ex-husband by some defendants. A similar stance was taken by the public prosecutor in court, referring to statements like "since she did not react, she gave consent" as belonging to a bygone era (BBC 2024).

THE ALBANIAN CASE

While the European journey of the Republic of Albania's justice system in embracing the gender dimension is ongoing, it does not remain without challenges. The Albanian Constitution, in Article 18, prohibits unjustified discrimination on several grounds, beginning with gender, and this is further elaborated upon by the 2010 Law on the Protection from Discrimination, as amended. In 2008, a new Law on Gender Equality in Society was adopted. Although more comprehensive than the 2004 version, it has not been amended since, as noted by the EU (European Commission 2023, 60), and its application is therefore questionable. However, in March 2025, a promising new draft law on gender equality was introduced for public consultation, which includes harmonized aspects of GST, such as gender-sensitive language and the elimination of stereotypes. The adoption and implementation of the final text will need to be closely monitored.

Domestic violence case law at the time demonstrated a severe lack of understanding of the basic concepts, as illustrated by a later overturned 2003 Tirana first instance court decision that convicted an individual for murdering his daughter with a handgun to only a year and four

months in prison, deeming as mitigating circumstances the fact that the girl had returned home late and that the father had to take care of the other children at home (Anastasi 2012, 165). Similar problematic reasoning can be found in a very recent double femicide case in Modena, Italy, where its Assize Court sentenced the defendant to thirty years imprisonment instead of a life sentence for shooting dead his wife and stepdaughter due to "humanly understandable reasons" referring to, *inter alia*, "habitual spitefulness inflicted by the two women," and deeming that the defendant, being 70 and with no criminal record, would never have perpetrated crimes of such gravity if not driven by the nefarious family dynamics (Giurisprudenza Penale 2025).

To address the prevalence of domestic violence, Albania adopted the 2006 Law on Measures against Violence in Family Relations, last amended in 2020, providing for the application of restraining and protection orders, albeit ineffectively, in cases where the courts have allowed the parties to remain under the same roof.

In 2011, Albania was among the first countries to sign the Istanbul Convention and subsequently ratified it in the Assembly on 4 February 2013 without reservations, which prompted significant reforms to its legislation. Notably, Article 42 of the Convention prohibits the justification of gender-based violence in criminal proceedings based on culture, custom, religion, tradition, or the so-called "honor" principle, none of which are currently recognized by the 1995 Albanian Penal Code. Albania has also been a party to CEDAW since May 1994 and to the C190 ILO Convention since February 2022.

The amended Article 6(ç) of the 2006 Domestic Violence Law, similar to the Gender Equality Law, now mandates the Ministry of Health and Social Protection to co-organize and provide training on topics related to domestic violence for administrative, law enforcement, and judicial authorities. Recently, a dedicated Sector for Combating Domestic Violence was established within the Gender Equality Directorate at the ministry.

According to the National Strategy on Gender Equality 2021-2030 and the accompanying action plan, among the specific measures and activities, five training sessions a year are foreseen for both male and female judges on the topic of workplace harassment and violence based on C190 Convention obligations, from the first half of 2022 to the second half of 2025. Notably, for the duration of the strategy, training sessions are foreseen for male and female legal professionals (judges, prosecutors, lawyers, bailiffs, and police officers) on the application of the 2020 amendments to the Domestic Violence Law, on the immediate removal of the abuser from the domicile, the appropriate protection of GBV and domestic violence survivors, as well as other aspects of the legal framework (Council of Ministers 2021, AL).

Procedural guarantees are in place after the 2016 justice reform, whereby Article 58/b concerning the additional rights of sexual abuse and human trafficking victims was added to the 1995 Code of Criminal Procedure. Victims under this article have the right to be questioned by a judicial police officer or prosecutor of the same gender (gender-sensitive questioning), to refuse to answer irrelevant questions about their private life, usually referring to their sexual history, and to request to be heard via audiovisual tools.

Regarding education, since 2006, the Faculty of Law at the public University of Tirana has included the subject "Gender Equality and Law" (Anastasi et al. 2017, 5) in its curriculum, albeit as an elective rather than a mandatory subject. According to information obtained through a recent Freedom of Information request by the author, the academic plan has been amended since 2023. Now, gender equality matters are covered in the broad subject "Legal Protection

Against Discrimination," which, unfortunately, is also an elective subject in the five-year integrated study program in Law offered by the university.

From the fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Albania in 2024, the country has maintained a formal position of support regarding the recommendations of Cyprus, Costa Rica, Romania, and Slovenia, respectively, on implementing comprehensive programs to promote gender sensitivity in educational institutions; programs for combating the prevalence of stereotypical gender norms in men and boys based on traditional and patriarchal customs; enhancing the application of the National Strategy on Gender Equality 2021-2030; and notably, strengthening further efforts to address harmful gender stereotypes in the justice system.

The Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), the main monitoring mechanism of the Istanbul Convention, in its first thematic evaluation report on Albania for 2024, noted the country's progress in implementing the Convention. As regards education, GREVIO finds that despite recent efforts to mainstream gender equality and address gender-based violence at all levels of formal education, teaching in practice remains largely dependent on the willingness of different schools and teachers (GREVIO 2024a, 19), indicating cultural resistance.

The GST for law enforcement at the Police (Security) Academy for the period 2017-2020 included mandatory initial training on investigating domestic violence cases. Training on sexual violence is available as continuous training only, and it is voluntary, as noted by GREVIO (GREVIO 2024a, 21). Commenting on the GREVIO final report, the Albanian authorities have provided additional information in this regard, adding that the Academy's Bachelor program 2021-2024 included an "Equality and Law" subject taught over one semester, with topics such as gender discrimination, gender stereotypes and prejudices, gender issues in the legal field, international law and standards in this field, as well as hate crimes and workplace sexual harassment, the latter for a total of 75 hours (GREVIO 2024b, 7). Albanian authorities further note that attending the course "Legal Issues – Gender Equality" is a requirement for promotion to the rank of commissioner (*Komisar*) in the police.

Some GST is also available in the initial training program at the Albanian School of Advocacy organized by the Albanian Chamber of Advocacy, where during the academic year 2023-2024, attended by the author, only one session was dedicated to the topic of gender equality, despite repeated calls for its expansion, which would ultimately serve lawyers to improve the quality of services (Anastasi 2015, 97). As regards the continuous training program, part of the professional education of lawyers, Article 119 of the 2019 Statute of the Albanian Chamber of Advocacy mentions criminal law training topics focusing on domestic violence offenses, sexual abuse, human trafficking, and child-friendly justice in particular, being a legal requirement to be able to specialize in and represent these cases. According to internal records, from May to October 2023, national training sessions for lawyers were organized on the topics of the prohibition of discrimination, procedural guarantees for victims, the ethics of legal professionals, violence against women and domestic violence, based primarily on HELP courses from the Council of Europe. On 5 March 2024, 29 lawyers attended a regional training session on violence against women and domestic violence based on the corresponding HELP course. A group of senior Albanian lawyers also attended an EU-funded course on EU gender equality law for legal practitioners, organized by the European Research Academy (ERA) in Trier, Germany, on 10-11 March 2025, as part of ERA's 2025 program.

The impartiality of judges and prosecutors (magistrates) regarding gender equality and minority matters is measured through indicators such as their use of discriminatory language (Law No. 96/2016 on the status of judges and prosecutors in the Republic of Albania, as amended in 2016). The Albanian School of Magistrates, tasked with training judge, prosecutor, and legal advisor candidates, as well as other legal professionals, has included the topics of domestic violence, children, and victims in its mandatory curricula for the three-year initial training program of magistrate candidates, and sexual violence is covered in the criminal law subject (GREVIO 2024a, 21). In the academic year 2009-2010, the "Gender Equality and Law" subject was finally included in its curricula (Anastasi et al. 2017, 5). Regarding continuous or in-service training, according to Law No. 96/2016, only five days of training per year are mandatory for sitting judges and prosecutors, and they have the freedom to select and attend courses other than those on gender equality and GBV. In this regard, GREVIO and UN Women have aptly urged the Albanian authorities to ensure the provision of mandatory in-service training on GBV and the prevention of secondary victimization by justice system actors (GREVIO 2024a, 22; Nini-Pavli et al. 2023, 27). The group of experts notes another challenge to GST effectiveness: staff turnover, which prevents an effective transfer of knowledge between legal professionals. Therefore, they encourage the Albanian authorities to take the appropriate measures to address this issue.

Nevertheless, worth noting is the fact that in the School of Magistrates 2024-2027 thematic program for the continuous training program, comprehensive modules are offered, including daily training sessions on the protection of GBV survivors; a dedicated GBV module on women's access to justice, gender equality, avoiding gender stereotypes, gender-sensitive questioning, domestic violence, cyber violence, and others; a module on discrimination, in particular on the gender perspective and discrimination; as well as training on matters of ethics, integrity, deontology, and communication.

According to its website, the School of Magistrates academic staff and experts conducted five training sessions from 8-10 October and 10-11 December 2024 on the topic of prejudice and unconscious bias in decision-making leading to discrimination, incorporating practical exercises and case studies, with the participation of final-year magistrate candidates as well as sitting judges and prosecutors. The institutional communication of magistrates was the topic of two mid-October trainings, and from November to December 2024, three other training sessions were conducted on the important topic of judicial impartiality. Also worth mentioning is the 18 December 2024 training activity on the topic of the gender perspective and compensation for discrimination, which incorporated presentations, case studies, Q&As, and quizzes, with the attendance of sitting judges, prosecutors, judicial police officers, and state advocates. The GBV module commenced on 3 February 2025 with a training activity on international standards related to women's access to justice, women's rights, gender equality, avoiding gender stereotyping, and methods of gender-sensitive questioning, attended by five judges, prosecutors, and judicial police officers. Additionally, records show that four more training sessions from the GBV module were held during February 2025 on the topics of GBV against women and the efficacy of criminal proceedings; the criminal offense of domestic violence; digital violence; gender equality in ECtHR case law, as well as femicide, although unfortunately with noticeably fewer attendees.

CONCLUSION

To recap, this paper presented both negative and positive examples of case law to underscore the impact that GST, or the lack thereof, has on the biased attitudes of legal professionals and how it may serve to alter their conceptual lenses, ultimately promoting fairer decision-making in the justice system. Applying stereotypes in sexual and domestic violence is especially harmful, potentially leading to erroneous verdicts and certainly retraumatizing the victims. From the analysis, possible links can be identified between GST and stereotyped decision-making in the justice system.

The binding standards of the Istanbul Convention have served as a benchmark for national law reform, a trend also observed in Albania. However, the saying "the problem is not how good a law is, but how well it is implemented" holds in this regard. GREVIO, while acknowledging the progress Albania has made in implementing gender equality and GBV teaching materials at all levels of formal education, also notes the voluntary nature of most of them and aptly recommends making them mandatory. Among the positive legal developments over the years and following the ongoing national strategy, the focus must now shift to monitoring the adoption and implementation of the recently proposed law on gender equality, with particular attention to GST standards.

Quality assurance of GST modules is imperative if the goal is to effect behavioral change in legal professionals. This includes selecting appropriate staff and incorporating innovative methods tailored to the specific country. However, both foreign and domestic experiences have shown that overcoming judicial stereotypes through GST, especially in-service training may face significant challenges, such as cultural resistance, low attendance, and staff turnover. On the other hand, these standards become altogether inapplicable when the decision-making is entrusted to juries made of ordinary people instead of legal professionals.

The Albanian School of Magistrates' initial and continuous GST training program modules serve as an example to be followed by all in advancing efforts, offering both aspiring and serving magistrates comprehensive and contemporary training standards that have begun to influence their decision-making process positively.

While acknowledging the global progress made, efforts to mainstream the use of GST should continue. To ensure complete effectiveness, the gender perspective must accompany individuals throughout their legal education and into office, instilling an equitable approach to what would otherwise be complex decision-making.

This study has provided indicators for assessing the essential role of GST in addressing harmful and stereotyped decision-making. Moving forward, a more comprehensive comparative study incorporating data from both pre- and post-GST decision-making may be necessary to fully establish a positive correlation between GST and gender bias in decision-making.

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