

From silent witness to vocal advocate. The role of civil society organisations in promoting gender equality and combatting violence against women in post-2010 Romania

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Abstract: The present exploratory study analyses the role of women's nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) in preventing and combating violence against women (VAW) in Romania after 2010 and in promoting the implementation of the protection order, in particular. The study includes quantitative research (official statistics on VAW, domestic violence, protection orders, national and European surveys on VAW and civil society's role in tackling gender inequality), as well as qualitative research in the form of interviews with two practitioners, prominent Romanian feminist activists on the topic of VAW. The paper begins with an overview of VAW and domestic violence in Romania, indicating its gendered dimension, and proceeds to presenting the legal framework with regard to VAW and the protection order, providing a timeline and a presentation of its strengths and weaknesses. Subsequently, the authors explore the role played by civil society – through grassroots activism, coalition building, and advocacy – and international institutions (particularly the EU and the Council of Europe) in promoting women's rights and specific legislation tackling VAW. Thus, women's NGOs – advocacy organisations, service providers, feminist and human rights organisations – emerge as key players in the creation of a legal framework for domestic violence and the protection order in Romania. In its conclusion, the paper identifies the success and limitations of bottom-up change in legislation and public policies, brought about by civil society organisations, which may serve as reference points for NGOs when setting the public agenda.

Points for practitioners: The study constitutes a good starting point for practitioners interesting in assessing the practical aspects of the protection order and the provisional protection order in Romania, information which may be used in the formulation of public policy and legislation. The paper indicates a clear need for mechanisms for the monitoring of domestic aggressors, as well as the need for specialised training for professionals dealing with victims of domestic violence: police officers, judges, prosecutors, and lawyers.

Key words: violence against women (VAW), domestic violence, nongovernmental organisations, the protection order, advocacy and lobby.