

## State security priorities: Perspectives on contemporary approaches to combating women's crime and protecting witnesses' rights

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**Abstract.** This study was conducted to analyse current approaches to combating female crime and protecting the rights of witnesses in the Kyrgyz Republic, focusing on the historical context, legal regulation, and existing support programs. The methodology included conducting a comparative analysis of international experience, in particular the practices of Great Britain and Norway, as well as an analysis of judicial practice in Kyrgyzstan covering the period from 2020 to 2023. The study also highlighted the importance of implementing rehabilitation programs that take into account the socio-economic factors that influence women's criminal behaviour. It was established that the increase in the level of crime among women is associated with a low level of social support, economic vulnerability and the pressure of traditional gender norms. The obtained results indicate the need to improve the existing programs for the protection of witness rights and support for women in criminal justice, as well as the need for changes in legislation to ensure greater gender equality and social support. Additionally, the study underscores the relevance of addressing systemic issues that contribute to gender-based disparities, fostering a more equitable and supportive environment. Changes in the legal

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framework are also important, which may include the adoption of new laws and the modification of existing ones to improve support for women and witnesses in criminal proceedings

**Keywords:** gender-focused programs; legal reforms; risk of reoffending; institutional support; rehabilitation and reparation mechanisms

## Introduction

The necessity to create and put into practice cutting-edge, successful strategies to prevent female criminality and safeguard the rights of witnesses who might be at risk during the legal system makes this topic pertinent. States must offer comprehensive solutions that consider the social, psychological, and economic aspects of women's crime as well as the unique needs of witnesses who frequently face threats or stigmatisation in light of the current rise in crime, the spread of violence, and discrimination, particularly on the basis of gender. State security priorities should be aimed not only at combating crime, but also at preventing recidivism, ensuring rehabilitation and reintegration for women offenders.

Ensuring state security and law and order is a major task for any country. Combating women's crime and protecting the rights of witnesses are important components of this process. Women's crime has specific characteristics that require unique approaches to justice and social support (Kopan & Melnyk, 2024). Furthermore, ensuring the safety of witnesses is vital for effective justice, as fear for the life and health of witnesses can undermine trust in the judicial system and obstruct justice. In this context, the study of the legal framework and actual practices in the Kyrgyz Republic allows not only to examine the specifics of legal regulation, but also to identify gaps and opportunities for improvement.

Improving witness protection in Central Asia has included initiatives like anonymity provisions and resettlement support to enhance safety, as considered by United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2024a). However, research shows that these efforts often face challenges, including insufficient funding and a lack of interagency coordination, both essential for effective witness protection. Despite international and local regulations, particularly UN guidelines, emphasising the importance of these measures, there remains limited data on their actual implementation and acceptance in Kyrgyzstan.

According to D. Ryskaliyev *et al.* (2019), addressing women's crime in Central Asia faces challenges related to gender stereotypes and limited support programs. Penal Reform International (2014) highlights that women face economic and social barriers post-imprisonment, increasing recidivism risk. Existing programs often overlook specific needs, leading to reoffending. Research indicates insufficient legal support and limited access to social and psychological programs, revealing gaps that need further study, especially on cultural factors influencing female crime and support to prevent recidivism.

In Kyrgyzstan, women re-entering society after imprisonment face significant obstacles like discrimination and stigma, complicating reintegration. The Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting (2023) notes that female ex-prisoners are vulnerable due to limited access to employment, health-care, and social support, increasing recidivism risk. Social stereotypes hinder their access to work and basic services. L. Spytska (2023) argues that to address these issues, specialised rehabilitation programmes that offer psychological support and professional development, as well as gender-sensitive witness protection mechanisms are needed to increase safety, especially for women in criminal proceedings.

D.N. Zhuk and V.G. Mazur (2023) emphasise the importance of understanding the causes of female crime linked to women's societal roles but note gaps, including the influence of socio-economic factors, education, employment, and recidivism specifics. The lack of analysis on the effectiveness of current rehabilitation programs suggests a need for additional research to develop comprehensive strategies.

In international criminal justice, the problem of witness protection concerns insufficient attention to witness training and welfare (Protosavitska, 2023). R. Pulvirenti (2024) noted that witness training can be considered a legal obligation under Article 68 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998), which requires the protection of witnesses in court proceedings. The study found that while such measures could reduce witnesses' stress and improve their confidence, there are still gaps in striking a balance between witness preparation and their right to a fair trial.

S.Y. Ang and G.A. Mat Saat (2024) examine sociological drivers of female crime, highlighting factors like childhood trauma, patriarchy, and criminal networks. They note that conditions such as partner violence and financial dependence often lead to criminal behaviour in women. However, the study lacks sufficient focus on reintegration challenges for women post-release.

The purpose of this study was to develop recommendations for improving approaches to combating women's crime and protecting witnesses' rights, taking into account the increased effectiveness of state security. To achieve this goal, the following tasks have been set: to assess the existing legislative and institutional mechanisms aimed at combating women's crime, identifying their strengths and weaknesses, and to study the methods of witness protection in the legal system, focusing on approaches that ensure their safety and support in criminal proceedings.

## Materials and methods

This study was conducted in the period from 2022 to 2023 and consisted of six stages, covering various aspects of modern approaches to combating women's crime and protecting the rights of investigators. At the first stage, the historical aspect of the problem was analysed. For this purpose, a comparative analysis of international experience in combating women's crime was conducted. The examples of the United Kingdom (Female Prisons in..., 2024) and Norway (Life in Norway, 2024) were chosen for the study, as these countries are distinguished by innovative approaches to the rehabilitation of women in the criminal justice system. The United Kingdom implements social support programmes aimed at mental health and adaptation of convicts, while Norway is known for its humane approach to rehabilitation, focused on social integration and skills development, which contributes to successful social adaptation.

For the second stage of the research, which involved an analysis of the current situation with women's crime in the Kyrgyz Republic, the document of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2024b) was used. This paper provided

data on the number of women convicted, the types of crimes for which they were convicted, and the trends observed in this area. Second, several qualitative and quantitative research methods were used to conduct the analysis. Quantitative analysis included statistics on crime among women, such as the number of convictions, the types of crimes for which they were convicted, and changes in these statistics over the past two years. The qualitative analysis was based on an examination of the socio-economic factors that may influence crime among women, as well as on the researched support and rehabilitation programs available in the country.

The third stage of the study focused on the legal regulation of countering women's crime and witness protection in the Kyrgyz Republic. In this context, the key normative documents that form the legal framework for combating female crime and protecting the rights of participants in criminal proceedings were considered, in particular the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic (2010), the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 184 "On State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women" (2008), Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 63 "On Protection and Defence against Family Violence" (2017), Criminal Code of the Kyrgyz Republic (2021), Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 170 "On Protection of the Rights of Participants in Criminal Proceedings" (2006).

At the fourth stage, a decision was made about the influence of religious and customary norms on the realisation of gender equality, as well as the role of social institutions in the attitude to crime among women. The fifth stage of the study was devoted to the analysis of the existing mechanisms for the protection of the rights of consequences in the Kyrgyz Republic, with an emphasis on legal regulation and actual programs implemented in this area. For this, key regulatory documents were formulated, such as the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 170 "On Protection of the Rights of Participants in Criminal Proceedings" (2006), as well as the State Programme to Ensure the Safety of Witnesses, Victims and Other Participants in Criminal Proceedings for 2014-2016 (2014).

The sixth stage of the study was devoted to the development of recommendations for witness protection and crime prevention among women in the Kyrgyz Republic. The methodological approach included the systematisation and analysis of data to locate certain key aspects that need improvement, as well as the formation of proposals for improving witness protection mechanisms.

## Results

During the twentieth century, separate mechanisms and programmes began to emerge in different countries to prevent women's crime and provide support to convicted women for their rehabilitation and return to society. This was a response to the social changes that led to the growth of female crime, and at the same time to the realisation that women in the criminal system face unique challenges that require a special approach. The specifics of women's crime are related to factors such as partner dependence, economic vulnerability, and social and psychological pressure that influence women's criminal behaviour. Therefore, the development of prevention and rehabilitation programmes has become an important step in combating crime among women and reducing recidivism.

For example, the Bangkok Rules, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2010, introduced essential standards to address the unique needs of women prisoners

(Penal Reform International, 2019). These guidelines emphasise a holistic approach to rehabilitation, encompassing mental and physical health care, social reintegration, and vocational skills development to facilitate a successful return to society. The Bangkok Rules recommend healthcare tailored to women's specific needs, including reproductive and mental health services, and acknowledge the impact of trauma and social factors unique to women. Additionally, these rules promote training programs that enable women to acquire practical skills, fostering financial independence and stability post-release. The Bangkok Rules advocate for family-centred support, particularly for mothers, to help maintain family ties and lessen the social stigma often faced by women after incarceration. Countries that implement the Bangkok Rules prioritise reintegration strategies that enhance life skills, build social support, and lower the risk of reoffending. These standards mark a progressive shift in correctional practices, laying a foundation for wider social and legal reforms that address the particular challenges experienced by women in prison.

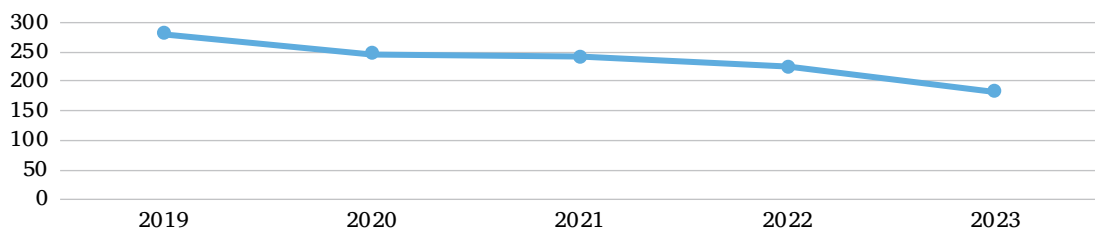
The experience of rehabilitation programmes in different countries has demonstrated that a comprehensive approach focused on the needs of women in the criminal system is one of the most effective ways to reduce recidivism and help women prisoners return to normal life. For example, the United Kingdom-based organisation "Women in Prison" (2017) provides a range of support services specifically designed for women affected by the criminal justice system. Their programs aim to reduce reoffending by addressing the root causes of women's criminal behaviour, such as poverty, trauma, and mental health issues. Key services include one-on-one counselling, mental health support, and practical assistance with housing, employment, and education. Additionally, Women in Prison advocates for systemic change within the justice system, promoting alternatives to incarceration and supporting policies that prioritise rehabilitation and social reintegration for women. This approach has been recognised for its effectiveness in empowering women and fostering long-term positive outcomes, reducing the likelihood of reoffending (Female Prisons in..., 2024).

Norway is recognised for its innovative approach to rehabilitating prisoners, especially women. Facilities like Halden and Bastøy emphasise social adaptation, skill development, and mental health. Halden offers creative activities, such as woodworking and painting, that foster dignity and social integration, while Bastøy provides an open environment where women can work on a farm, engage in physical activity, and attend social integration courses, effectively reducing recidivism (Life in Norway, 2024).

While Norway is known for its rehabilitative prison system, female inmates face unique challenges due to facilities originally designed for men. Reports from the Parliamentary Ombudsman indicate that prisons like Bredtveit and Kragerø lack adequate private sanitary facilities and outdoor areas, which are essential for well-being. Women have limited work opportunities, often restricted to stereotypical tasks with minimal value for future employment. Additionally, mixed-gender prisons pose safety concerns for women, with incidents of harassment highlighting the need for gender-sensitive support and rehabilitation programs. Recommendations urge improved conditions and expanded healthcare and skills training tailored to the specific needs of female inmates (Women in Prison, 2017).

Thus, the historical experience of developing approaches to combating women's crime and rehabilitating women prisoners demonstrates significant progress in this area and shows that women's programmes can play an important role in reducing recidivism and promoting social integration. Different prisons, throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, other measures have been used to combat women's crime, including preventive programmes and educational initiatives. Preventive programmes included social support aimed at improving women's economic situation, psychological assistance to prevent criminal behaviour and rehabilitation programmes focused on adaptation to life after imprisonment (Ozeryanska, 2019). Educational measures included vocational training and retraining to increase women's economic independence, civic education to raise legal awareness, and gender equality programmes to help overcome stereotypes and discrimination. These measures are aimed at addressing the social and economic factors that contribute to female crime and creating conditions for successful socialisation of women, which is an effective alternative to imprisonment.

Women's crime in the Kyrgyz Republic is currently showing both a rise in the number of women convicted and a fall in the number of women incarcerated in some facilities. The number of women convicted of various offenses is continuously increasing, according to an examination of the Kyrgyz Republic's first instance courts' case law. The number of women convicted rose from 577 in 2022 to 655 in 2023. Socioeconomic variables and other elements that impact the rise in crime among women may be the cause of such dynamics (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2024b).



**Figure 1.** The number of imprisoned women in correctional colony

**Source:** compiled by the authors based on United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2022; 2024a; 2024b)

According to the data, women are typically prosecuted for less serious crimes, with larceny, drug-related offenses, and minor economic offenses accounting for the majority of prosecutions. The need to improve social support for vulnerable groups is indicated by the consistent rise in lawsuits filed against women. Programs that help women avoid criminal action in the face of socioeconomic pressure may fall under this category. These programs may involve psychological support, social adaptation, and aid.

Thus, the current situation with women's crime in the Kyrgyz Republic indicates a steady increase in the number of convicted women, which requires further study of the causes and the search for ways to reduce the crime rate. Additionally, data trends reveal an increase in pre-trial detention, suggesting that more women are being detained earlier in the criminal process, which may point to heightened prosecutorial vigilance or procedural changes. Another notable trend is the decline in women's colony populations, reflecting a shift toward alternative sentencing practices and potentially

more effective rehabilitation methods. Together, these trends illustrate a dual movement: while overall convictions rise, there is a cautious yet gradual shift towards non-custodial sentences, hinting at evolving approaches in the justice system towards addressing female crime.

According to data from the previous two years, 577 out of 5,882 convicted individuals in 2022 were women, accounting for 9.8% of the total number of convicts, while men comprised 90.2%. In 2023, there were 6,202 condemned individuals overall, 655 of whom were women, or 10.6%, with men making up 89.4%. This suggests that while the proportion of women incarcerated has slightly increased, the overall number of convictions keeps rising, which could be a sign of certain societal patterns and financial strain on the female population.

When examining the number of women in correctional facilities, it can be observed that the number of women in the women's colony decreased from 280 in 2019 to 182 in 2023. This could demonstrate the efficacy of certain rehabilitation initiatives and the application of alternative sentencing guidelines, such as probation or suspended sentences. The settlement colony's female population likewise declined throughout this period, going from 55 in 2019 to 25 in 2023. Men, however, were predominantly assigned to general-regime colonies, where the number of inmates also decreased from 8,818 in 2019 to 7,278 in 2023 (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2022; 2024a; 2024b).

It should be mentioned, though, that there are now more women in pre-trial detention facilities. In pre-trial detention facilities, there were 97 women in 2019, 100 in 2022, and 113 in 2023, while men were held in pre-trial detention facilities in significantly higher numbers – from 1694 in 2019 to 1293 in 2023. This could be a sign of more detentions or more aggressive attempts by law enforcement to fight crime. Figure 1 shows the dynamics of the number of female prisoners in the correctional colony.

In the Kyrgyz Republic, fighting women's crime is a significant part of official policy, governed by a number of laws meant to promote gender equality, provide social support for women, and aid in their rehabilitation. The Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic (2010) is the primary text that lays out the essential values of equality and non-discrimination. Article 16 outlines the principle of non-discrimination, which includes equality before the law for all people of the nation. It also ensures equality of rights and freedoms regardless of gender.

Another important act in this area is the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 184 "On State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women" (2008). This law establishes the legal framework for creating conditions for equal participation of women in all spheres of life,

including political, economic, social and cultural activities. The law is aimed at preventing gender-based discrimination and creating mechanisms to protect women's rights, especially in terms of their participation in the justice system. The law also provides for the development of special programs to support and rehabilitate women who have committed offenses or become victims of them. Thus, the law not only creates a legal basis for gender equality, but also stimulates social integration and support for women in difficult life circumstances, which can have an impact on reducing the level of female crime.

Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 63 "On Protection and Defence against Family Violence" (2017) was passed with the express purpose of shielding women from violence, especially domestic abuse. This paper lays forth the organisational and legal foundation for safeguarding people from violence, governing actions to stop violence, aid victims, and prosecute offenders. Determining the duties of governmental agencies that must coordinate their efforts to effectively safeguard victims of abuse is a crucial part of this law. The establishment of support groups and specialised organisations to offer short-term shelter, legal aid, and psychiatric support is governed by law. This is particularly crucial for women who have experienced violence and may commit other crimes.

Another key legislative act in the area of combating women's crime is the Criminal Code of the Kyrgyz Republic (2021), which contains articles aimed at strengthening responsibility for crimes against women and their rights. In particular, Article 154 provides for liability for rape, Article 155 – violent acts of a sexual nature, Article 156 – coercion to perform acts of a sexual nature, Article 157 – acts of a sexual nature with a child under the age of sixteen, Article 158 – lewd acts. The law provides for more severe penalties for crimes related to violence, sexual crimes, human trafficking and other offenses that often affect women. The establishment of specific penalties for these offenses is aimed at reducing crime and ensuring the protection of the most vulnerable groups of the population. It is important to note that the law also provides for penalties for the involvement of women in criminal activities, taking into account the socio-economic reasons that may influence women's criminal behaviour. This creates a comprehensive approach to reducing female crime.

Witness protection in the Kyrgyz Republic is a key component of ensuring the fairness and efficiency of the judicial process, as justice is largely dependent on the safety and protection of participants who may be at risk due to their participation in criminal proceedings. Participation in a crime investigation or testimony in court often puts witnesses and victims at risk from persons with an interest in the outcome of the case. To protect such participants, a number of regulations have been developed and adopted, among which the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 170 "On Protection of the Rights of Participants in Criminal Proceedings" (2006) is an important one. This law provides clear guidelines for ensuring the safety of witnesses, victims, experts and other persons involved in criminal proceedings. In particular, Article 6 entitled "Security Measures" defines the main methods of protection of participants in criminal proceedings. Security measures include personal protection, protection of housing and property, as well as the provision of special personal protective equipment, such as communication and alerting devices for quick response in case of a threat. In addition,

this Article provides for the confidentiality of participants' personal data to limit access to their personal information and reduce the risk of data leakage that could put them at risk. If necessary, it provides for the relocation of participants to another place of residence for additional protection. Special protection includes the possibility of replacing documents with changes in personal data, which may even include a change of name or surname. In extreme cases, when the usual measures are insufficient, it is possible to change the appearance of the witness or to temporarily isolate him/her for the period of participation in court hearings.

Article 17, "Grounds for the Application of Security Measures" Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 170 "On Protection of the Rights of Participants in Criminal Proceedings" (2006), specifies the conditions under which these measures may be applied. The grounds include real threats to the life or health of the witness, as well as possible damage to his or her property related to participation in criminal proceedings. According to this article, the application of such measures may be initiated on the basis of a written application of a witness who feels threatened or with the consent of a minor witness provided by his or her legal representatives. If new threat circumstances arise during the proceedings, security measures may be reviewed and adapted to the current situation. Such measures are important to ensure that witnesses and other participants can provide their testimony without fear or influence, which is essential for the objective and impartial administration of justice.

The legal framework of the Kyrgyz Republic regulating witness protection also provides for the obligation of state institutions to respond promptly to requests for protection. Law enforcement agencies, in particular, are obliged to provide resources to fulfil these tasks and ensure an adequate level of witness protection at all stages of the judicial process. In cooperation with the judiciary, they develop programs to provide long-term support to witnesses in criminal proceedings to prevent revictimisation and ensure their safety from the initial stages of investigation to the point of sentencing. Through this approach, the Kyrgyz Republic ensures the proper conditions for effective justice, protecting the rights of participants in the process, and promotes public confidence in the law enforcement system.

Combating women's crime in the Kyrgyz Republic is significantly complicated by numerous socio-cultural barriers. In a society with deep traditions and religious influence, women fulfil certain social roles, and this creates strong stereotypes and prejudice against women who break the law or even become victims of crime. These barriers affect not only the promotion of gender equality, but also the rehabilitation process of women prisoners.

Religious and traditional norms in Kyrgyzstan define society's expectations of women, assigning them the role of mother, wife and housewife. Kyrgyz legislation, such as the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 170 "On Protection of the Rights of Participants in Criminal Proceedings" (2006), aims to provide protection for participants in criminal proceedings, but in practice, the implementation of this law may be limited due to social attitudes and customs. Although the law provides for protection measures such as witness protection and confidentiality, ensuring effective protection of women in the context of public stigma and pressure remains a challenge. Society traditionally expects women to perform certain functions in the family. If she deviates from these

roles, she may be subject to social stigma, especially if she breaks the law. Studies show that women involved in criminal proceedings face difficulties in finding a job, integrating into society, and restoring family ties due to prejudice from the public. The Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 170 “On Protection of the Rights of Participants in Criminal Proceedings” defines the main measures to protect witnesses and victims. It provides for the confidentiality of personal data, physical protection and, if necessary, a change of residence to ensure the safety of the witness. Despite this, in practice, women involved in criminal proceedings continue to face pressure due to socio-cultural norms, which makes protection less effective. For a deeper understanding of the impact of socio-cultural barriers, the Table 1 summarises the main obstacles.

Social and cultural barriers impacting women’s rehabilitation in Kyrgyzstan include public condemnation due to traditional norms, the dominance of religious values restricting gender equality, employment discrimination against women with criminal records, and family pressure enforcing traditional roles, all of which limit opportunities for independence and social reintegration. The reintegration and rehabilitation of women involved in criminal processes in Kyrgyzstan is complicated by a number of social and cultural barriers, including traditional and religious norms. Stigmatisation of women who have been in trouble with the law limits their opportunities for professional and personal development after release from prison. This makes it difficult to access resources for independent living, higher education and employment.

After serving their sentence, women face additional barriers, such as prejudice from employers who may have stereotypes about hiring them (Khamzina *et al.*, 2020). These barriers make it difficult to achieve financial independence and reduce the likelihood of relapse. A 2023 UN study found that one-third of women in Tajikistan experience domestic violence, indicating deep-seated gender stereotypes in the region. In Kyrgyzstan, according to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 9,959 cases of domestic violence were registered in 2022, where 92% of victims were women (Bekmurzaev, 2024). These data highlight the scale of the problem and the need to implement effective rehabilitation and reintegration programs for women in conflict with the law.

In addition, a study conducted by UN Women (2022) and United Nations Fund for Population Activities found that in Eastern Partnership countries, including Ukraine, harmful stereotypes about the roles of women and men in society persist, affecting women’s access to employment and leadership (Komircha, 2023). These stereotypes can increase the stigmatisation of women who have served their sentences and make it difficult for them to reintegrate into society.

Witness protection, confidentiality, and physical security are all outlined in the legal framework, which includes the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 170 “On Protection of the Rights of Participants in Criminal Proceedings” (2006). Nevertheless, these legal safeguards are frequently insufficient to offset the strong influence of societal attitudes. The effectiveness of the law is limited by society’s emphasis on traditional gender roles since women who are involved in criminal proceedings – whether as witnesses, defendants, or victims – frequently face social scrutiny. A comprehensive strategy to improve the rehabilitation of women in Kyrgyzstan’s criminal justice system should include educational programmes, legislative reform and public

awareness-raising activities. Given the specific challenges faced by women in the criminal justice system, legislators should prioritise amending existing legislation to align it with international standards of gender equality. For example, the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 170 “On Protection of the Rights of Participants in Criminal Proceedings” should clarify the confidentiality provisions for female witnesses in domestic violence cases and strengthen physical protection measures, especially for women witnesses or victims.

Additionally, it is advisable to create a legal framework for alternative sentences, such as probation or community service, for women convicted of minor offences. A similar approach has been successfully implemented in the United Kingdom, which has shown to be effective in reducing recidivism by providing social support and developing life skills necessary for reintegration (Women in Prison, 2017). In practice, it is important to launch a state programme that will help change cultural perceptions of women returning to society after serving their sentence. This can be achieved through information campaigns that refute outdated stereotypes and support gender equality. An example is the initiatives of UN Women (2022) and United Nations Fund for Population Activities in the Eastern Partnership countries, which, through cooperation with local leaders and activists, strengthen positive social norms on equality.

It is also necessary to engage non-governmental organisations and international agencies to create local support networks to help women adapt to life after release. These organisations can provide financial and expert support to facilitate the reintegration process and reduce recidivism. A comprehensive approach will allow Kyrgyzstan to maintain a balance between cultural values and the protection of women’s rights, contributing to their rehabilitation and the development of an inclusive society.

In order to ensure the safety of those involved in criminal proceedings and to facilitate justice, witness protection is a crucial component of the legal system. A number of institutional procedures and programs are in place in the Kyrgyz Republic to support witnesses, particularly those who might be threatened as a result of their involvement in criminal proceedings. The State Programme’s to Ensure the Safety of Witnesses, Victims and Other Participants in Criminal Proceedings for 2014-2016 (2014) execution was a crucial step in developing a thorough witness protection system, even if it is no longer in effect. The program’s goal was to shield witnesses from psychological and bodily harm. Its primary measures included: safeguarding witnesses, their residences, and their belongings; offering specialised personal protective equipment; altering witness contact information and license plates; replacing personal documents and, if required, changing one’s appearance; and offering financial assistance in the event that a witness is killed or suffers physical harm. Non-governmental groups, in addition to official actions, are crucial in safeguarding the rights of witnesses by offering them legal, psychological, and counselling help, such as the Legal Clinic Adilet, which provides free legal consultations, and the Civil Society Support Centre, which offers counselling sessions to help witnesses manage stress and trauma related to their involvement in criminal proceedings (Tkachenko, 2023).

To ensure more effective protection and support for women in the Kyrgyz criminal justice system, legislative and social changes are needed. In particular, it is recommended

to adapt laws to international standards such as the Bangkok Rules (Penal Reform International, 2019). It is important to supplement the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 170 “On Protection of the Rights of Participants in Criminal Proceedings” (2006) with provisions guaranteeing confidentiality and physical security for female witnesses, especially in cases of gender-based violence. This will help protect witnesses from psychological and physical pressure.

Practical measures should include state rehabilitation programmes for women returning to society after serving their sentence. For example, in Norway, women are offered training programmes to acquire vocational skills, which significantly reduces recidivism and facilitates their social integration. It is also important to conduct information campaigns to combat stereotypes about women who have broken the law and to raise awareness of gender issues among law enforcement officials. In Ukraine, such initiatives, supported by UN Women (2022) and United Nations Fund for Population Activities, help to change cultural

attitudes and promote tolerance and respect for women’s rights. To ensure the proper implementation of these measures, it is important to expand financial support through the involvement of international donors, such as the World Bank or the United Nations Development Programme, which will help improve witness protection infrastructure and rehabilitation programmes. To ensure effective cooperation between governmental and non-governmental organisations, it is proposed to establish an inter-agency coordination council to ensure communication between law enforcement agencies, social services and non-governmental organisations. Such a council could become a key link in coordinating efforts to create a comprehensive system of support for women in the criminal process, which would help reduce recidivism and increase public confidence in the legal system of Kyrgyzstan. Table 1 summarises the main measures to improve approaches to combating women’s crime and protecting witnesses’ rights, including key areas of improvement, objectives and expected results.

**Table 1.** Key measures for enhancing approaches to combating women’s crime and protecting witness rights

Key area of improvement	Goal of enhancement	Expected outcomes
Legislative adaptation	Alignment with international standards	Improved legal protection for women and witnesses
Rehabilitation programs for women	Psychological support and social reintegration	Reduced recidivism rates among women
Personnel training	Professional training on gender sensitivity	Improved quality of support and protection
Increased funding	Additional resources for protective programs	Sustainable funding for witness protection
Coordination between state and non-governmental organisations	Enhanced effectiveness through collaboration	Strengthened protective mechanisms
Increased transparency	Open reports and public consultations	Increased public trust

**Source:** compiled by the authors

To ensure the effective protection and support of women in the criminal justice system in Kyrgyzstan, legislative and social changes are needed, supported by international and national experience. The main recommendation is to bring legislation in line with the Bangkok Rules, in particular to expand the provisions of the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 170 “On Protection of the Rights of Participants in Criminal Proceedings” (2006) in terms of protection of women witnesses. The articles regulating witness protection should include measures to ensure their confidentiality and physical safety, especially in cases involving gender-based violence. Similar legal provisions have been effective in the United Kingdom, where measures to protect female witnesses have reduced the level of witness intimidation in such cases.

In addition, it is recommended to introduce specialised rehabilitation programmes for women convicted of minor offences. Women in Prison (2017) programme in the United Kingdom is highly effective in providing psychological support and developing social skills necessary for women’s further integration into society. The programme’s statistics show that after rehabilitation, the recidivism rate decreases as women gain the skills to return to normal life. Training for law enforcement and judicial officials with a focus on gender sensitivity is also critical to improving support and protection of women in the criminal justice process. In EU countries where gender-sensitivity training is regularly provided; law enforcement officers provide more comprehensive and tailored support to women witnesses and victims.

For the successful implementation of these measures, it is important to increase funding for witness protection and rehabilitation programmes, in particular through the involvement of international donors such as the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme. The experience of Eastern Europe shows that financial support for rehabilitation programmes for women increases their effectiveness and contributes to witness safety. Establishing an inter-agency coordination council that brings together government agencies and non-governmental organisations would help to coordinate witness protection efforts more effectively. Such a council, based on the experience of European countries, would help to strengthen witness protection mechanisms through better cooperation between different organisations. A final critical step is to increase the transparency of state institutions through regular public reports and public consultations. This approach, which has been successful in Scandinavian countries, increases public trust in the legal system. The proposed measures will contribute to improving the justice system in Kyrgyzstan, strengthening gender equality and creating a safe, just society that takes into account the special needs of women in the criminal process.

## Discussion

There are similarities and variations between the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2022) material and this study’s approaches to gender-related issues of crime among

women and witness protection. Both highlight how socioeconomic issues contribute to women's unique roles in criminal activity and how crucial it is to take gender needs into account in rehabilitation programs in order to lower recidivism rates. In addition, the UN study concentrates on how to include a gender perspective into the criminal justice system, especially when it comes to international collaboration and the battle against organised crime. In order to examine the roles of women in criminal organisations, the UN also highlights the necessity of gender data, which are absent from this study. Thus, the UN considers the issue through a global lens, and this study focuses on the rehabilitation of women criminals and witness protection in a national context.

The information in the report of the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2005) and this study share many similarities, but they also differ greatly. The focus on creating efficient procedures to prevent crimes against women and protect women's rights in the legal system is one of the main parallels. The significance of establishing a legislative framework that considers women's unique needs in terms of social and legal support, as well as guaranteeing appropriate access to justice, is emphasised in both agreements. At the same time, the "Good practices" report primarily addresses issues of inter-agency coordination of efforts to achieve results in the fight against violence, access to support for women who are victims of violence, and protecting women's rights in the context of gender-based violence. The peculiarities of crimes committed by women and the characteristics of their social rehabilitation are the main topics of this study. Gender-based violence is also examined in the "Good practices" report within the larger framework of human rights, including international commitments like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979). These studies focus on local aspects of crime among women, paying attention to specific socio-economic and cultural factors that affect women in the legal system.

N. Campaniello (2019) conducted study on the rise in female criminal activity and the gender disparity in crime rates. She pointed out that although men have historically made up the majority of the criminal population, more women are now involved in crime as a result of broader socioeconomic shifts including women's increased employment and shifting social mores. The impact of social and economic elements on women's criminal behaviour was acknowledged in both researches, especially when it came to economic vulnerability. However, although N. Campaniello (2019) carried out a broad analysis concentrating on economic issues across countries, this study concentrated on particular socio-cultural hurdles in the Kyrgyz Republic, such as traditional and religious norms impacting attitudes towards women who breach the law. This study also looked at local crime statistics in Kyrgyzstan to analyse the main types of crime among women, while N. Campaniello (2019) used a comparative analysis of international trends, highlighting the dominance of property crimes among women. In terms of recommendations, this study proposed concrete solutions to improve the Kyrgyz legal system and overcome cultural stereotypes. Instead, N. Campaniello (2019) focused on economic interventions such as education and working conditions as ways to reduce female crime, but did not propose specific legal measures. Thus, both studies emphasised the rise of female crime under the influence of socio-economic

factors, but this study focused on the Kyrgyz context, while author provided a more general international perspective.

M.J. Leote de Carvalho *et al.* (2023) focused on the impact of age and gender in the development of criminal behaviour while examining crime among women and girls. In order to determine the traits of female criminality at various life stages and the evolution of femininity in various social and cultural situations, they examined interviews with members of three distinct age groups: children, teenagers, and adult women. The emphasis was on these women's perceptions of their actions and the ways in which social context shaped their decisions. This study also examines crime among women, but focuses on other aspects, namely the impact of socioeconomic factors and the need for rehabilitation and resocialisation to reduce recidivism. Both studies point to the importance of understanding the social and cultural context, but the study by M.J. Leote de Carvalho *et al.* (2023) focuses more on gender roles and cultural expectations in women's criminal practices, while this study emphasises the need to develop comprehensive rehabilitation programs that take into account the specifics of female crime and its social determinants. Both studies are similar in that they emphasise the importance of women's integration after serving their sentence and the need for tailored approaches to women's crime that take into account their social and psychological needs. At the same time, the difference is that the study of authors more analyses the gender identity and self-determination processes of women in the context of criminal activity, while this study focuses on social reintegration and the creation of programs aimed at reducing recidivism among women facing socio-economic difficulties.

In his historical analysis of the problem of female crime, M. van der Heijden (2021) focused on the social factors and gender stereotypes that shaped women's criminal behaviour, especially in urban and rural areas. This study likewise examines gender issues, but it does so in a contemporary setting, emphasising social assistance and rehabilitation initiatives for women. Both studies look at how socioeconomic factors affect female criminality. M. van der Heijden (2021) examines how social isolation and migration raise migrant women's likelihood of committing crimes. However, contemporary rehabilitation and social integration strategies receive more focus in this study. M. van der Heijden (2021) emphasised the importance of research on migration and the gender context in the criminal system, while this study focuses on adapting legislation to international norms, such as the Bangkok Rules, to support women after serving their sentences.

F. Estrada *et al.* (2019) looked at how female criminality has changed over time, specifically in terms of media coverage and crime statistics. The authors examined how the media responded to shifts in the proportion of women convicted of different offenses. Although it concentrated primarily on the impact of social and cultural factors, this study also examined the gender dimensions of crime. The focus on gender disparities in crime and the impact of societal preconceptions is where the research is similar. Both studies demonstrate how society and the media respond differently to crimes committed by men and women. The difference is that the study by F. Estrada *et al.* (2019) and colleagues takes a historical perspective with an emphasis on Swedish statistics, while this study focuses on the contemporary realities and rehabilitation of women in the criminal system.

This study and the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe discuss the importance of witness protection for ensuring the effectiveness of the judicial system and combating crime (Recommendation of the..., 2005). Both documents emphasise the need for special measures to reduce the risks of intimidation and violence against witnesses, especially in cases of organised crime and terrorism. This study focuses on the specific needs of witnesses in the Kyrgyz Republic, proposing specific measures for the coordination of public authorities and the rehabilitation of witnesses. The Council of Europe Recommendation is a general document aimed at member states and provides universal protection standards that can be adapted to national conditions. The main difference is the level of detail: this study is focused on the specifics of the Kyrgyz Republic and additionally takes into account gender aspects, while the Council of Europe Recommendation offers general principles for international application.

A.F. Siddiq and M.I. Barus (2024) study focused on protecting witnesses in international criminal trials, especially those involving transnational crimes. It underlined how important it is to safeguard witnesses from dangers associated with their involvement in court cases, especially given how frequently criminal networks intimidate them. The significance of international cooperation in establishing a secure environment for witnesses was also emphasised. The focus on protecting witnesses and the dangers of intimidation and threats that can keep witnesses from providing truthful testimony are similarities with this study. Both research stress how important it is to have efficient defences. The difference is that A.F. Siddiq and M.I. Barus (2024) focus on the problems of international crimes and witness protection in Indonesia, while this study examines the issue of female crime and witness protection in the national context of the Kyrgyz Republic.

G.D. Makanje (2020) study focused on the challenges of protecting vulnerable witnesses in Malawi's criminal justice system, particularly under limited resources. She highlighted the role of judges in implementing protective measures such as screens, restrictions on cross-examination, and preventing personal cross-examination by defendants, especially in cases of sexual assault. The study underscored the impact of Malawi's resource constraints, lack of legal representation, and cultural barriers. In comparison, the current research also addresses vulnerable witness protection but within a potentially broader legal framework. Both studies emphasise special protective measures to prevent further victimisation of witnesses. However, G.D. Makanje's (2020) work is specific to Malawi's limitations, focusing on judicial efforts to compensate for resource shortages, while the present research could encompass structured institutional support and regulatory reforms.

R. Pulvirenti (2024) examined the need for witness preparation in international criminal trials, particularly within the International Criminal Court framework. R. Pulvirenti (2024) focused on balancing witness protection with the defendant's right to a fair trial, analysing case law and the International Criminal Court's obligations under Article 68. She argued that witness preparation was essential not only for effective testimony but as a duty to safeguard witness well-being, especially in cases involving vulnerable individuals. In comparison, the current study also addressed witness protection but differed in scope, focusing more on national frameworks or particular types of crime, such as transnational or gender-based offenses. While both studies

highlighted the importance of witness rights and psychological support, authors' work concentrated on institutional reforms within the International Criminal Court, aiming to formalise witness preparation as a procedural requirement. The studies shared a common concern for witness well-being, recognising the impact of judicial processes on witnesses' mental health. However, R. Pulvirenti's (2024) work proposed systemic changes at an international level, while the current study emphasised practical protection measures relevant to specific national contexts and types of crime.

The International Criminal Court Sixth Judicial Seminar examined several approaches and best practices with an emphasis on victim and witness protection (Securing meaningful justice..., 2024). The significance of protecting witnesses and victims during legal proceedings is emphasised in both the lecture and the ongoing study. The current study's emphasis on witness safety and secrecy is consistent with the International Criminal Court's emphasis on victims' rights, procedural participation, and reparations. Although victim protection and reparations are given top priority in both the seminar and the research, the International Criminal Court takes a more comprehensive approach, tackling global crimes with a reparative framework that includes restitution and rehabilitation. However, the majority of the current study focuses on particular national initiatives for crime prevention and witness safety inside its legal system. In summary, while both focus on victim and witness support, the International Criminal Court's seminar covers a global, wide-ranging perspective, whereas the current research is more narrowly centred on national witness protection mechanisms.

Compared to this study, the work of J. Metson and D. Willmott (2024) focused on the attitude of the British public to special measures to protect vulnerable witnesses during trials. The authors examined public views on the balance between the protection of the rights of victims and the accused within the criminal system in England and Wales, particularly in the light of special measures for vulnerable witnesses. A distinctive feature of this study is the investigation of public attitudes through the new Attitudes Towards Vulnerable Victims Scale, which measures respondents' preference for witness care versus the rights of the accused. Both studies drew attention to the need to ensure a balance between the protection of victims and the rights of the accused. However, J. Metson and D. Willmott (2024) study focused on demographic and psychological factors influencing public attitudes toward special measures for vulnerable witnesses, such as age, educational attainment, and fairness of procedural justice.

Comparison of this study with the work of I.M. Tkachenko (2023) shows common features and differences. Both studies point to socio-economic factors as the causes of women's crime and emphasise the need for post-incarceration rehabilitation programs for women to reduce recidivism. However, this study also covers the issue of witness rights protection, which is not key in the study of I.M. Tkachenko (2023), and emphasises the harmonisation of legislation with international standards. Researcher focuses more on internal socio-economic aspects, and this study reveals the need for additional research to assess the effectiveness of witness protection and reintegration.

The study by O.L. Dulsky (2024) and this one has some common aspects and differences. Both studies focus on ensuring an effective criminal process, emphasising the

importance of equality of arms in the collection of evidence. Author explores the technical, forensic and tactical aspects of the defence's collection of evidence through the initiation of witness interviews. His research is aimed at enhancing the role of the defence counsel in the collection of evidence, justifying the importance of technical means and techniques for the effective interrogation of witnesses. This study, on the other hand, has a broader context, focusing not only on forensic support, but also on the issues of women's crime and witness protection, especially from an international perspective. It analyses the experience of other countries, such as the United Kingdom and Norway, and provides recommendations for the Kyrgyz Republic. Unlike O.L. Dulsky (2024) study, the current one covers gender aspects and approaches to the rehabilitation of women in the criminal justice system, while researcher's study focused on technical and tactical elements and practical aspects of interrogation within Ukraine.

S.I. Puhach (2024) study and the present study have certain points of contact and differences. Both analyse the factors that influence women's criminal behaviour. S.I. Puhach's (2024) study focuses on theories of crime determination (e.g., social disorganisation, cultural conflict, subcultures), while this study focuses on socio-economic, cultural and psychological factors that influence female offenders in Kyrgyzstan. Both acknowledge the importance of socio-economic factors, as author notes the impact of crises and inequality on female crime, while this study focuses on economic vulnerability as a factor in criminal behaviour. Both studies also emphasise the importance of social support for women. The main differences lie in their approaches: S.I. Puhach (2024) provides a general theoretical overview focused on the Ukrainian context, while this study focuses on applied measures of rehabilitation and witness protection in Kyrgyzstan, taking into account the specifics of local socio-cultural norms and legal frameworks.

Research by M.O. Evdokimova (2020) and this study have common features and differences. M.O. Evdokimova analyses female criminality in the field of economics, focusing on the legal and criminological aspects of economic offenses, as well as on measures of prevention and social adaptation of women after serving their sentence. This study, in turn, examines female criminality in Kyrgyzstan with an emphasis on socio-economic, cultural and psychological factors, including issues of witness protection and reforms in the legal system. Thus, although both studies focus on women's crime, they have a different focus. M.O. Evdokimova (2020) studies economic crimes, while this study covers a broader socio-legal context.

Look into this study differs from I. Serkevich and O. Bronevyska (2020) in several parts of the examination of female crime, but shares some characteristics with them. Both studies raise the problem of the increase in the level of female crime and study the causes and conditions that influence women's criminal behaviour. I. Serkevich and O. Bronevyska (2020) research focuses on the psychological aspects of female crime, examining factors that influence women's criminal behaviour, such as emotional instability, environmental dependence, and social disorganisation. This study, in contrast, focuses on the legal and social mechanisms aimed at the rehabilitation of women and the protection of witnesses in criminal trials in Kyrgyzstan, including the analysis of legal provisions and the influence of socio-cultural norms. A common theme is the importance of social support and

rehabilitation in reducing the risk of recidivism among women returning to society after a sentence. However, while I. Serkevich and O. Bronevyska (2020) focus on the individual psychological characteristics of female criminals, this study emphasises the need for legal reforms and support to create a safe environment for women involved in justice.

Research by T. Prodan (2020) and this study have common features. In order to prevent violent crime among women, T. Prodan (2020) proposes national, legal and individual measures, including the advancement of women's social status, the influence of religion and gender equality. She emphasises the role of spirituality as a preventive factor. On the other hand, this study focuses on witness protection and rehabilitation of women in Kyrgyzstan who have already been victims of crime. Its goal is to make laws better and to empower women to work in the legal system to reduce recidivism. Thus, T. Prodan (2020) focuses on nationwide crime prevention measures, while this study focuses on the socio-legal mechanisms that assist women in the criminal process.

V. Khashev and A. Chorna (2021) analysed in detail the criminological characteristics of female crime in Ukraine, focusing on specific types of crimes such as theft, fraud and drug crimes, which are the most common among women. They noted that these crimes are mostly driven by socio-economic factors such as low income, economic instability and difficult life circumstances. V. Khashev and A. Chorna (2021) also highlighted the peculiarity of female crime, particularly its dependence on gender roles in society, which often drives women to commit crimes due to social and economic challenges. This study, unlike authors analysis, covers a wider range of issues related not only to the specifics of female crime, but also to the need for legal protection and socio-legal support mechanisms. The study focuses on the specifics of the protection of witness rights in criminal trials in Kyrgyzstan, in particular on the development of rehabilitation and social integration programs for women returning to society after serving their sentence.

Although various studies address the topics of female criminality, witness protection, and gender-sensitive approaches in the criminal justice system, each focuses on unique aspects depending on the context and objectives. Studies agree on the importance of addressing the socio-economic and cultural factors that influence women's involvement in crime and ensuring their protection within the legal system. Both international and national frameworks emphasise the need for tailored rehabilitation programs that reduce recidivism, protect vulnerable witnesses and support reintegration. However, the scope and recommendations differ: international studies often focus on global best practices and joint interventions, while national studies such as this offer context-specific solutions aimed at addressing specific legislative and cultural challenges. This highlights the need to adapt policies to specific socio-cultural environments, including the universal principles of effective crime prevention and witness protection.

## Conclusions

This Article analysed modern approaches to countering women's crime and protecting the rights of witnesses in Kyrgyzstan. In the course of the study, a comparative analysis of international experience (in particular, Great Britain and Norway) was carried out, and the legal framework and practices of witness protection and support for women

in the criminal system of Kyrgyzstan were investigated, which allowed to identify key gaps and opportunities for improvement.

The main stages of the research included the analysis of the historical context of the problem, the specifics of women's crime, existing programs of rehabilitation and support, as well as legal regulation. The results showed that the increase in female crime in Kyrgyzstan is associated with low levels of social support, economic vulnerability and the influence of traditional gender norms. The study also found limited effectiveness of existing witness protection programs and support for women in the legal system, which highlights the need to improve the legal framework to ensure greater gender equality and social support.

The obtained results indicate the importance of harmonising local laws with international standards, such as the Bangkok Rules, as well as the need to expand social support and rehabilitation programs for women, which will contribute to reducing the rate of recidivism and effective social integration. This study is important for the further

development of theoretical and practical approaches to understanding the specifics of female crime and ensuring the protection of witness rights, taking into account the peculiarities of the socio-cultural context of Kyrgyzstan.

The limitations of this study were insufficient access to data on the specifics of crime among women, as well as insufficient funding of support programs. Future research could focus on analysing the impact of cultural change on the rehabilitation processes of female offenders and the role of social services in this area. Further research can focus on the analysis of the impact of cultural changes on the rehabilitation processes of female offenders, as well as on the role of social services in providing support to this category of persons.

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### Conflict of interest

None.

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## Пріоритети державної безпеки: погляди на сучасні підходи до протидії жіночій злочинності та захисту прав свідків

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**Анотація.** Це дослідження було проведено з метою аналізу сучасних підходів до боротьби з жіночою злочинністю та захисту прав свідків у Киргизькій Республіці з акцентом на історичному контексті, правовому регулюванні та наявних програмах підтримки. Методологія дослідження включала проведення порівняльного аналізу міжнародного досвіду, зокрема практики Великої Британії та Норвегії, а також аналіз судової практики в Киргизстані за період з 2020 по 2023 роки. Дослідження також підкреслило важливість впровадження реабілітаційних програм, які враховують соціально-економічні фактори, що впливають на злочинну поведінку жінок. Встановлено, що зростання рівня злочинності серед жінок пов'язане з низьким рівнем соціальної підтримки, економічною вразливістю та тиском традиційних гендерних норм. Отримані результати свідчать про необхідність удосконалення існуючих програм захисту прав свідків та підтримки жінок у кримінальному судочинстві, а також про необхідність змін у законодавстві для забезпечення більшої гендерної рівності та соціальної підтримки. Крім того, дослідження підкреслює актуальність вирішення системних проблем, які сприяють гендерній нерівності, сприяючи створенню більш справедливого та сприятливого середовища. Важливими є також зміни в законодавчій базі, які можуть включати прийняття нових законів та внесення змін до існуючих з метою покращення підтримки жінок та свідків у кримінальних провадженнях.

**Ключові слова:** гендерно-орієнтовані програми; правові реформи; ризик рецидиву; інституційна підтримка; механізми реабілітації та відшкодування