

Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention)

Violence against Women and Domestic Violence

Introduction

- Violence against women is a serious violation of human rights and both a cause and a consequence of the inequality of women and men. This violence is widespread in all Council of Europe member states and beyond. The Council of Europe has been addressing this phenomenon through various co-operation projects, action plans and recommendations. These activities culminated in the adoption of the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) which opened for signature in May 2011.

The Council of Europe and Violence against Women

- As Europe's leading human rights organisation, the Council of Europe has undertaken a series of initiatives to promote the protection of women against violence. Council of Europe Recommendation Rec(2002)5 was the first step towards a Europe-wide action resulting in significant progress in preventing and combating violence against women.

To trigger activities and debates at national level, a major Campaign on the topic was run in all Council of Europe member states (2006-2008). The Campaign helped to obtain an in-depth picture of the situation and showed the need to develop a comprehensive set of international legally-binding standards likely to boost the much needed action at national level to prevent violence, protect the victims and prosecute the perpetrators.

The Campaign consisted of three dimensions: intergovernmental, parliamentary and local and regional, and was carried out by the Council of Europe in partnership with intergovernmental organisations and NGOs involved in the protection of women against violence. It aimed at raising awareness, gathering political support and promoting the implementation of effective measures for preventing and combating violence against women, through legislation and national action plans.

26 member states launched this Campaign at national level and an additional 13 member states that had previously started long-term campaigns, reported on their results. The feedback from member states demonstrated that the Council of Europe Campaign was instrumental to the creation of a framework in which to pursue changes in policies and practices for preventing and combating violence against women. It also revealed that a wide range of substantial improvements in national policies (including legislation) took place during the Campaign.

The Istanbul Convention is the first legally-binding instrument in Europe in the field of violence against women and domestic violence, and in terms of scope, the most far reaching international treaty to tackle this serious violation of human rights. It aims at zero tolerance for such violence and is a major step forward in making Europe and beyond a safer place.

The Istanbul Convention places a great importance on the role of national human rights institutions and civil society organisations: states are obliged to offer a holistic response to violence against women by involving all relevant actors, including national and regional parliaments, national human rights institutions, NGOs and civil society organisations, when implementing for instance comprehensive policies and running awareness-raising campaigns.

By accepting the Istanbul Convention, governments are obliged to change their laws, introduce practical measures and allocate resources to effectively prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence. For the first time in history, the Istanbul Convention makes it clear that violence against women and domestic violence can no longer be considered as a private matter, but that states have an obligation to prevent violence, protect victims and punish the perpetrators.

The Istanbul Convention is currently being signed and ratified by Council of Europe member states and is also open to accession by non-member states. Activities to support this process are being carried out in member states and in international fora. The Convention will enter into force once ten countries have ratified it – eight of which must be Council of Europe member states.

More information about the Convention may be found in our information leaflet.

For further information on Council of Europe activities and events relating to violence against women, please consult our website: <http://www.coe.int/conventionviolence> or send an e-mail to the Secretariat of the Gender Equality and Violence against Women, Division, Gender Equality and Human Dignity Department, DGI, at: conventionviolence@coe.int.