



The Istanbul Convention & trauma-informed practices

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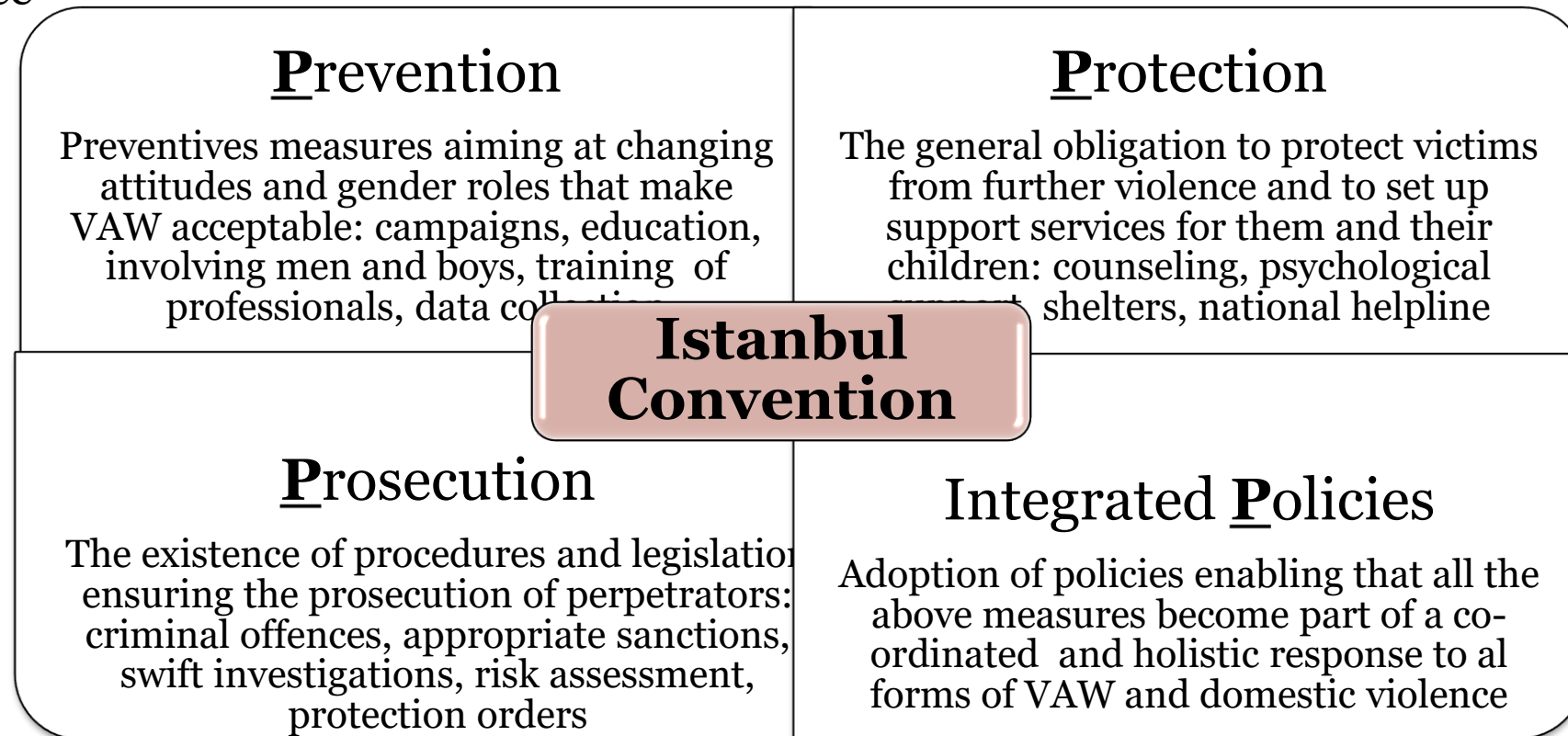
What is the Istanbul Convention?

- farthest reaching legally binding **human rights instrument on violence against women and domestic violence**
- referred to as the “**gold standard**” of legislation on gender-based violence by the United Nations – it is the first treaty to provide a legally binding definition of violence against women as:
 - a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women
 - a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men - identifying gender inequality as its root cause and consequence
- entered into force in **2014**
- currently in force in **39 parties** (including the EU) - **Open to accession for all states**

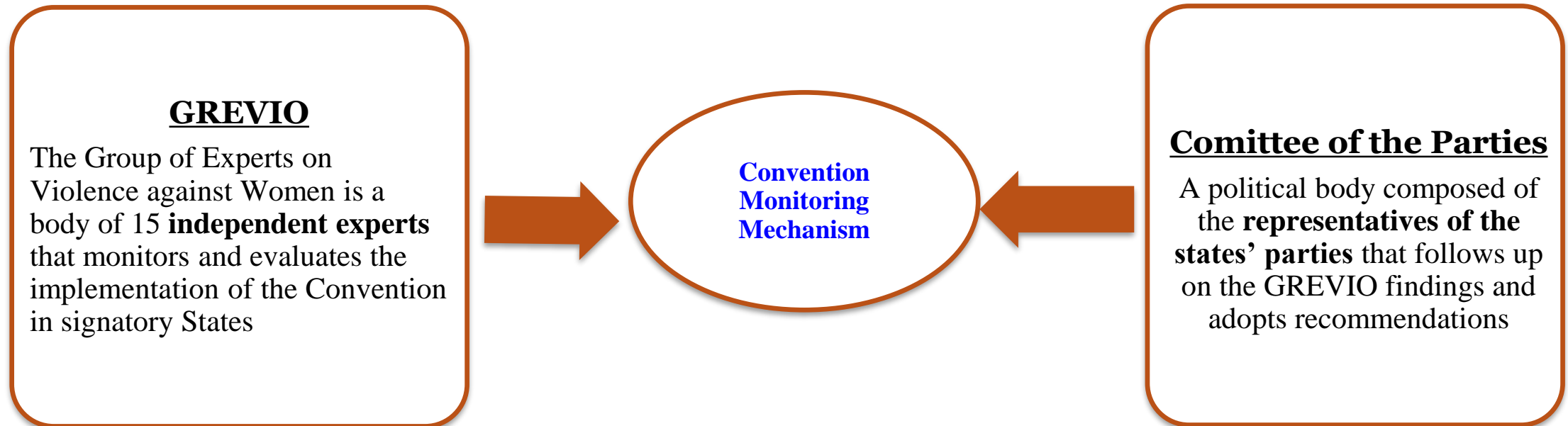


The 4P approach

Detailed and practical, it establishes a comprehensive set of legally binding obligations, aimed at ensuring a comprehensive response to all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence



Monitoring mechanism of the Istanbul Convention: a two-pillar system



Monitoring of the Istanbul Convention

GREVIO

*Group of Experts on Actions
Against Violence Against
Women and Domestic
Violence*

= **an independent expert
body** composed of **15
members**.

- **monitors the implementation** of the Convention **on a country-by-country basis (evaluation procedure)**



- state report and written submissions by civil society
- additional research by GREVIO
- evaluation visit – GREVIO rapporteurs meet with government and civil society representatives
- GREVIO publishes reports, including findings that suggest improvements to be made by parties

How does the Convention apply to children?

- Art 3 – Definitions:
 - (f) “women” includes girls under the age of 18
 - (g) “domestic violence” = physical, sexual, psychological, economic violence that occurs within the family or domestic unit [...]
➡ also covers inter-generational violence and therefore includes children (both boys and girls) as potential victims
- Art 26 – Protection and Support for child witnesses
➡ specifically acknowledges children as potential witnesses of all forms of VaW covered by the IC and sets standards for their support and protection (age-appropriate psychosocial counselling)

Trauma-informed practices in the IC and GREVIO's evaluation reports

- The Istanbul convention and **GREVIO baseline reports** do not refer necessarily to “trauma-informed” practices but expressly to the need to ensure a “victim-centered” approach.
- While a “victim-centred” approach is not synonymous with “trauma-informed” practices there is an overlap between the two and they can pursue the same goal.

Trauma-informed practices in the IC

Of relevance is Article 18 – which lays out the General obligations with respect to the provision of protection and support measures:

- ➔ **parties to the Convention have to ensure that all measures taken **for the protection and support of victims****
 - be based on a gendered understanding of violence against women and domestic violence and shall focus on the human rights and safety of the victim; [...]
 - aim at avoiding secondary victimisation;
 - aim at the empowerment and economic independence of women victims of violence;
 - allow, where appropriate, for a range of protection and support services to be located on the same premises (one stop shop);
 - address the specific needs of vulnerable persons, including child victims.

Trauma-informed practices in GREVIO's baseline evaluation reports

GREVIO baseline evaluation reports contain many findings aimed at implementing a trauma-informed approach when responding to violence against women and domestic violence – reports look at:

- ✓ how medical staff/ police/ prosecutors/ social workers receive victims in a facility, whether there are protocols to ensure that interviews are conducted respectfully, there is no victim-blaming etc.
- ✓ whether such protocols are respected in practice
- ✓ how physical spaces such as police interview rooms, medical examinations rooms are designed and whether they ensure the needed privacy;
- ✓ Whether victims can testify in court without the perpetrator present (via video link, or in a separate room, or through a screen);
- ✓ the setting in which victims testify at court are designed
- ✓ how transparent and accountable services are to victims
- ✓ Looks at Barnahus models that provide holistic support to children victims of sexual violence bringing together criminal justice, social welfare, medical professionals in a child friendly and safe environment and under one roof.

First thematic evaluation procedure

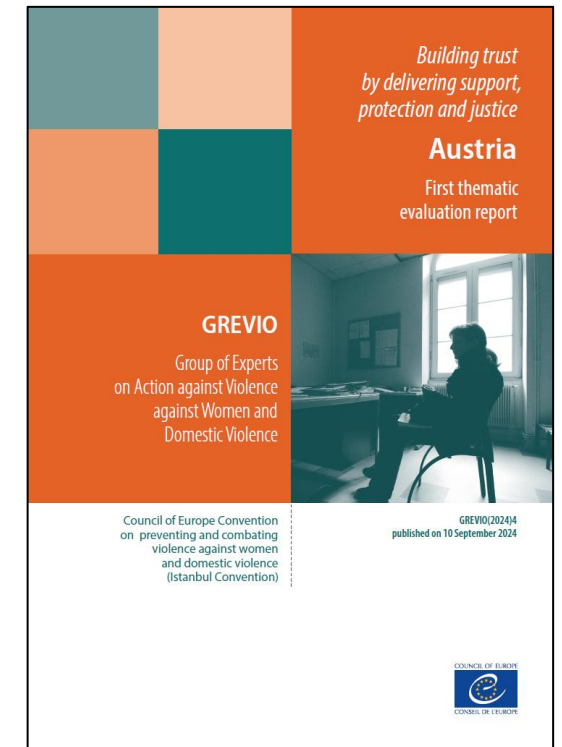
First thematic evaluation procedure (started in 2023) - even stronger focus on aspects of the Convention that are related to trauma-informed practices

“Building trust by delivering protection and justice”

support,

- ✓ It looks more into whether interventions are designed in a way that builds victims’ trust in institutions
- ✓ Whether all relevant stakeholders prioritize the psychological and physical safety of victims and prevents re-traumatization

= trauma-informed approach



First thematic evaluation procedure - training

The term “trauma-informed” is used more often, in particular in connection with **Article 15 on Training of professionals**

- ✓ asking state parties to develop and implement trainings for judges and police officers to:
 - increase their understanding of the effects of trauma (e.g. on memory, on possible contradictory statements, focus on details which could seem irrelevant but that could prove useful)
 - develop their capacity to interact with victims in a way that is trauma-sensitive.

First thematic evaluation procedure - training

- ✓ For law enforcement, prosecutors and the judiciary to respond effectively to rape and other forms of vaw – it is necessary for their training to explain the effects of trauma on a victim and the statements that she makes.
- ✓ GREVIO has found that in many states law enforcement authorities adopt interview techniques that presume the untruthfulness of the statement if it is not detailed/if there are gaps or inconsistencies
- ✓ In reality some responses to trauma can change what people pay attention to – memory is often not linear and focus on sensory perceptions.
- ✓ A traumatised victim might talk about details that prosecutors/courts may find irrelevant – it is important to give space and consideration to these details and possibly find ways to corroborate them.

First thematic evaluation procedure ex of a good practice - Denmark

- Example from report on Denmark, where GREVIO welcomes the use of **civilian “key persons”** in the Danish police:
- They possess professional backgrounds in psychology, sociology, anthropology, criminology, or other related fields, along with specialised expertise in trauma-informed responses to violence against women.
- In addition to providing training for investigating officers responsible for handling cases of violence against women, key persons actively participate in the management of individual cases. This involvement includes tasks such as screening cases, proposing protective measures, and referring both victims and perpetrators to relevant support services.

Thank you for your attention!

Questions?

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<https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention>

