

A photograph of two women with long, wavy blonde hair embracing each other from behind in a grassy field. The woman in the foreground is wearing a brown leather jacket, and the woman behind her is wearing a red top. The background is a soft-focus landscape with trees and a bright sky, suggesting a sunny day.

**COUNCIL OF EUROPE  
CONVENTION ON  
PREVENTING AND  
COMBATING VIOLENCE  
AGAINST WOMEN  
AND DOMESTIC  
VIOLENCE**

**Istanbul  
Convention**

**SAFE** FROM FEAR  
**SAFE FROM**  
**VIOLENCE**

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



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## WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE CONVENTION?

■ The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence is 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 safer.

■ Preventing violence, protecting victims and prosecuting the perpetrators are the cornerstones of the convention. It also seeks to change the hearts and minds of individuals by calling on all members of society, in particular men and boys, to change their attitudes. In essence, it is a renewed call for greater equality between women and men, because violence against women is deeply rooted in the inequality between women and men in society and is perpetuated by a culture of intolerance and denial.

## GROUNDBREAKING FEATURES OF THE CONVENTION

■ It recognises violence against women as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination. This means that states are held responsible if they do not respond adequately to such violence.

■ It is the first international treaty to contain a definition of gender. This means that it is now recognised that women and men are not only biologically female or male, but that there is also a socially constructed category of gender that assigns women and men their particular roles and behaviours. Research has shown that certain roles and behaviours can contribute to make violence against women acceptable.

■ It criminalises offences, such as female genital mutilation, forced marriage, stalking, forced abortion and forced sterilisation. This means that states will, for the first time, be obliged to introduce these serious offences into their legal systems.

■ It calls for the involvement of all relevant state agencies and services so that violence against women and domestic violence are tackled in a co-ordinated way. This means that agencies and NGOs should not act alone, but work out protocols for co-operation.

# WHAT DOES THE CONVENTION REQUIRE STATES TO DO?

## PREVENTION

- ▶ change attitudes, gender roles and stereotypes that make violence against women acceptable;
- ▶ train professionals working with victims;
- ▶ raise awareness of the different forms of violence and their traumatising nature;
- ▶ include teaching material on equality issues in the curricula at all levels of education;
- ▶ co-operate with NGOs, the media and the private sector to reach out to the public.

## PROTECTION

- ▶ ensure that the needs and safety of victims are placed at the heart of all measures;
- ▶ set up specialised support services that provide medical assistance as well as psychological and legal counselling to victims and their children;
- ▶ set up shelters in sufficient numbers and introduce free, round-the-clock telephone helplines.

## PROSECUTION

- ▶ ensure that violence against women is criminalised and appropriately punished;
- ▶ ensure that excuses on the grounds of culture, custom, religion or so-called “honour” are unacceptable for any act of violence;
- ▶ ensure that victims have access to special protection measures during investigation and judicial proceedings;
- ▶ ensure that law enforcement agencies respond immediately to calls for assistance and manage dangerous situations adequately.

## INTEGRATED POLICIES

- ▶ ensure that all of the above measures form part of a comprehensive and co-ordinated set of policies and offer a holistic response to violence against women and domestic violence.





## WHO IS COVERED BY THE CONVENTION?

■ The convention covers all women and girls, from any background, regardless of their age, race, religion, social origin, migrant status or sexual orientation. The convention recognises that there are groups of women and girls that are often at greater risk of experiencing violence, and states need to ensure that their specific needs are taken into account. States are also encouraged to apply the convention to other victims of domestic violence, such as men, children and the elderly.

## WHAT DOES THE CONVENTION CRIMINALISE?

■ The convention requires states parties to criminalise or otherwise sanction the following behaviours:

- ▶ domestic violence (physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence);
- ▶ stalking;
- ▶ sexual violence, including rape;
- ▶ sexual harassment;
- ▶ forced marriage;
- ▶ female genital mutilation;
- ▶ forced abortion and forced sterilisation.

■ This sends a clear message that violence against women and domestic violence are not private matters. On the contrary: to emphasise the particularly traumatising effect of crimes within the family, a heavier sentence can be imposed on the perpetrator when the victim is a spouse, partner or a member of the family.



## HOW IS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION MONITORED?

■ The convention sets up a monitoring mechanism to assess how well its provisions are put into practice. This monitoring mechanism consists of two pillars: the *Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence* (GREVIO), an independent expert body, and the *Committee of the Parties*, a political body composed of official representatives of the States Parties to the Convention. Their findings and recommendations will help to ensure states' compliance with the convention and guarantee its long-term effectiveness.

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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It includes 47 member states, 28 of which are members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

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