

# Armenia's path to ratification of the Istanbul Convention

## Progress and challenges

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# Introduction

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**W**ithin the framework of phase 2 of the Council of Europe programme “Ending violence against women and promoting gender equality in Armenia” the Armenian authorities have requested the Council of Europe to review the progress made in aligning laws and policies related to domestic violence in Armenia with the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Council of Europe, 2011) (hereafter ‘the Istanbul Convention’) and make any necessary recommendations for further action.

Armenia has repeatedly asserted that it is preparing to ratify the Istanbul Convention and has taken significant steps to amend law, policy and practice in the field of preventing and combatting violence against women and girls since signing the Istanbul Convention. Several key legislative changes have been adopted in respect of domestic violence and the criminal code to develop the framework for protection, ensure appropriate definitions, condemnation of violence against women and girls and improve prevention, prosecution and protection. These changes with the surrounding legal acts should help ensure the effective implementation of protection measures.

This report assesses the steps taken by the Armenian authorities to align the country’s laws and policies with the Istanbul Convention, identifies areas for improvement and provides examples of promising practices where laws and policies of Parties to the convention have been more closely aligned with the requirements of the convention. It also seeks to address criticism of the Istanbul Convention made by opponents to its ratification. **This is not a formal monitoring report and should not be taken as a report documenting compliance with the convention, or in any way representing the views of Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), or the Council of Europe.** A full evaluation by GREVIO following ratification of the Convention may reach different conclusions.

## Scope and Methodology

The methodology encompasses a combination of desk research, stakeholder consultations, and targeted inquiries based on the initially developed country-specific questionnaire. Specifically, the review:

- ▶ Identifies legislative and policy developments across the four pillars of the Istanbul Convention: **Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and Integrated Policies.**
- ▶ Conducts a **rapid** assessment of the practical implementation of these legal and policy measures, including challenges related to enforcement, access to justice, and institutional coordination.
- ▶ Conducts **initial research into** the levels of awareness and understanding among relevant stakeholders including Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Standing Committee on Labour and Social Affairs and the Standing Committee on Financial-Credit and Budgetary Affairs of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia, as well as CSOs such as the Women’s Support Centre.

The analysis is based on a comprehensive review of existing legal texts, policy documents, and relevant reports, supplemented by input gathered through questionnaires distributed to key stakeholders. Follow-up inquiries were conducted with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Republic of Armenia to clarify specific issues.

Armenia’s legal framework, including the Law of the **Republic of Armenia on "Prevention of Domestic and Household Violence, Protection of Persons Subjected to Domestic and Household Violence"**, the Law on **Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men of the Republic of Armenia**, as well as other relevant national laws that contribute to the prevention and response to domestic violence have been examined. The report also reviews key **Decisions of the Government, policy documents, and regulations issued by the Government, the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, and the Police (Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Armenia)** that influence Armenia’s approach to combating gender-based violence.

To systematically assess the current status, a **Red-Amber-Green rating** will be applied:

<b>Red:</b> Significant legal or policy gaps
<b>Amber:</b> Progress has been made but some areas remain outstanding.
<b>Green:</b> Significant progress has been made

This structured approach will provide an overview of the progress made and highlight priority areas for further action.

The approach to recommended action relates to an attempt to prioritise the actions that Armenia could take to further implement existing promising practices. These suggested actions should not be considered as comprehensive or exhaustive, but as actions and reforms that have been identified as promising in Parties to the convention. (GREVIO, 2022) Many of those actions are already covered by the new Gender Strategy and Action Plan for the Republic of Armenia for 2025-2028 (hereafter Gender Strategy and Action Plan).

A full list of references can be found at the end of this document.

## Chapter 1

# Purposes, definitions, equality and non-discrimination, general obligations

### General principles of the Istanbul Convention

The Istanbul Convention is the first European legally binding instrument, human rights and criminal law treaty, that sets standards designed to protect women against all forms of violence against women and prevent, prosecute and eliminate violence against women and domestic violence, protecting its victims and punishing the perpetrators. The convention entered into force on 1 August 2014 and has been ratified by and signed by 39 states and the European Union.

**Armenia signed the convention on 20 January 2018 but has not yet ratified it.** (*Full List - Treaty Office, n.d.*). While signing, Armenia deposited a reservation relating to its right not to apply the provisions of the Convention laid down in Article 30(2) – compensation, Article 55(1) – Ex parte and ex officio proceedings, in respect of Article 35 regarding minor offences, Article 58 – statute of limitation, in respect of Article 37, and Article 59 – Residence status.

On 25 July 2019, Mr Rustam Badasyan, Minister of Justice of Armenia, requested an opinion of the European Commission for Democracy through Law (the Venice Commission) on the constitutional implications of the ratification of the Istanbul Convention for Armenia. The Venice Commission explicitly considered some key terms which had been of concern, such as gender, gender identity, family, marriage and sexual orientation. The Commission also considered whether legislative changes would be required in respect of same sex marriage, provision of education and reporting by professionals and concluded that none of these areas would require Armenia to legislate in a manner that violated the convention.

The Venice Commission stated ‘In conclusion, while it belongs to the Constitutional Court of Armenia to rule on the compatibility of the Istanbul Convention with the Constitution of Armenia, the Venice Commission is of the view that there are no provisions in that Convention that could be said to “contradict” the Constitution of Armenia. On the contrary, the main obligation of the Istanbul Convention, namely to prevent and combat any form of violence against women and domestic violence, already follows from the Constitution and from other human rights treaties to which Armenia is a State Party.’ (Venice Commission, Anastas et al., 2019)<sup>1</sup>

Per Article 12(3) of the Armenian Law on International Treaties, the Government must apply to the Constitutional Court before submitting a draft law on ratifying an international treaty to the National Assembly. This is done to determine whether the obligations enshrined in the treaty conform to the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, as required under Article 168(3) of the Constitution. To date, the Constitutional Court has not examined the compatibility of the Istanbul Convention with the Constitution, and the Government has submitted no formal application to initiate this process. Consequently, the ratification of the convention remains pending, and its provisions, while relevant as international standards, do not yet have binding legal force within the Armenian legal system.

1. **Venice Commission**, *Opinion on the Constitutional Implications of the Ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention)*, Opinion No. 961 / 2019, CDL-AD(2019)018, Strasbourg, 14 October 2019, adopted at the 120th Plenary Session (Venice, 11–12 October 2019), Conclusion, available at: [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2019\)018-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2019)018-e).

In addition to the Venice Commission opinion, in preparation for ratification there has been a significant programme of legislative and policy reform. The legal framework of Armenia on domestic violence is primarily governed by the **Law of the Republic of Armenia on "Prevention of Domestic and Household Violence, Protection of Persons Subjected to Domestic and Household Violence"** (hereafter referred to as the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence). This was adopted in 2017 and has been through significant amendments, notably in April 2024. This law represents an important step in the development of Armenia's national legal system to address domestic violence as a specific and severe form of human rights violation and to ensure protection and support for those affected.

The Criminal Code of Armenia 2021 (entered into force in 2022) as amended by the April 2024 amendments<sup>2</sup> (hereafter 'the 2024 amendments') provides a broadly effective framework for criminalising violence against women with a few exceptions. These are discussed below.

Overall, Armenia's legislative framework now reflects a commitment to creating a comprehensive and human rights-based response to violence against women and domestic violence. There remain some challenges in its implementation and societal perception.

Before the convention can be ratified it must be referred by the authorities to the Constitutional Court for confirmation of conformity with the Constitution.

Significant legal or policy gaps	
Action	Priority
Apply to the Constitutional Court to examine the compatibility of the Convention with the Constitution	High According to domestic law, the convention cannot be ratified unless this step is taken

### Scope of application of the convention (Articles 2 and 3)

The Istanbul Convention applies to all forms of violence against women including domestic violence and parties are encouraged to apply the convention to all victims of domestic violence including men and boys. (Article 2) Definitions in respect of 'violence against women', 'domestic violence', 'gender', 'gender-based violence against women' for the purposes of the Convention are found at article 3.

As noted by the Venice Commission:

"The Constitution of Armenia does not refer to gender but guarantees the equality of men and women (Article 30) and provides for "the promotion of factual equality between women and men" (Article 86(4)) as one of the objectives of State policy. The elimination of violence against women, including gender-based violence, and the promotion of measures aimed at achieving this, including measures seeking to change harmful gender stereotypes, is fully in line with this constitutional regulation." (Venice Commission, Anastas et al., 2019)

The fact that Armenian law has been identified as consistent with the definitions and there is no apparent incompatibility with the convention should assist with awareness raising and public support for ratification.

Following the 2024 amendments to the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence, domestic and intimate partner violence is now recognised as a multifaceted phenomenon that includes physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence, as well as neglect and does not require cohabitation. Importantly, in the relevant articles of the Criminal Code (e.g., murder, instigating suicide, causing physical harm, forced abortion, human trafficking and exploitation, kidnapping, illegal deprivation of liberty, physical infliction) crimes committed by partners or former partners are considered as aggravating circumstances. Overall, the law now covers the definitions in the Istanbul Convention.

The 2024 Amendments to the Criminal Code<sup>3</sup> introduced sex as a protected ground under the discriminatory motive clauses which is then considered an aggravating factor in sentencing. This made it possible to qualify some crimes as gender-based, thereby better reflecting the underlying motives and power dynamics often present in cases of violence against women.

2. The new Criminal Code of the Republic of Armenia, adopted on 12 April 2024, at: <http://parliament.am/legislation.php?sel=show&ID=9204&lang=arm> [Armenian].

3. The new Criminal Code of the Republic of Armenia, adopted on 12 April 2024, at: <http://parliament.am/legislation.php?sel=show&ID=9204&lang=arm> [Armenian].

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Consider how best to use these changes in awareness raising materials to ensure that concerns relating to ratifying the Convention are addressed.	Medium

## Fundamental rights, equality and non-discrimination (Article 4)

Article 4(1) affirms the principle that every person has the right to live free from violence in the public and private sphere and parties should condemn all forms of discrimination against women and to abolish discriminatory legislation and practices (article 4(2)). Where women are not protected by the law on an equal footing with men this can lead to a discriminatory breach of the operational requirements to protect under Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) in conjunction with article 14.<sup>4</sup> Article 4, paragraph 3, of the Istanbul Convention requires the implementation of the convention’s measures without any discrimination.

Equality and non-discrimination are foundational principles embedded in both the Constitution and the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence. Gender inequality is further addressed through The Law on Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men of the Republic of Armenia. The newly adopted Gender Strategy includes measures to address structural inequality including women’s political participation, economic empowerment and education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics )subjects.<sup>5</sup>

An important pending legal initiative relates to adopting the Law on “On Ensuring Equality and Protection from Discrimination” and related bills. The draft law is expected to introduce clear definitions of direct and indirect discrimination, incitement to discrimination, harassment, segregation, and victimisation—concepts that are essential in identifying and addressing discriminatory dynamics within domestic settings. Moreover, by empowering the Human Rights Defender and creating a Council on Discrimination Issues, the law aims to strengthen institutional oversight, which is critical for monitoring and responding to patterns of abuse, including within the private sphere of the family. However, there has been a delay and lack of clarity regarding the adoption of this draft package.

As with many European countries there is no direct reference to intersectional discrimination<sup>6</sup> (Istanbul Convention, 2011, Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 2010) in legislation. The broad non-discrimination framework outlined above provides a statutory basis for recognising multiple grounds of vulnerability. Multiple grounds of discrimination and specific groups made vulnerable by circumstances are also referenced in the Strategy for Gender Policy Implementation<sup>7</sup> (the Gender Strategy).

**Adopting the Law on Equality and Protection from Discrimination would be a significant improvement and provide a unified framework to address all forms of discrimination including intersectional and multiple discrimination.**

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Adopt the draft Law on Equality and Protection from Discrimination.	Medium

4. In *Opuz v Turkey* [GC] (2009) the ECtHR discussed the interconnection between discrimination and violence against women finding that gender-based violence against women constitutes a form of discrimination because it mainly affects women and women were not protected by the law on an equal footing with men. Furthermore, the Court found that the judicial decisions had had no noticeable preventive or deterrent effect and had even disclosed a degree of tolerance with the husband receiving a short prison sentence (commuted to a fine) for the running down incident and, even more strikingly, a small fine, payable in instalments, for stabbing the applicant seven times.
5. Government of Armenia, Decision of the Government of Armenia N 482-L of 23 April 2025, Gender Strategy of the Republic of Armenia 2025-2028, paras 41, 77 and 114, at: <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=206364>.
6. As defined under international standards such as CEDAW General Recommendation No. 28 or the Istanbul Convention.
7. Government of Armenia, Decision of the Government of Armenia N 482-L of 23 April 2025, Gender Strategy of the Republic of Armenia 2025-2028, at: <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=206364>.

## State obligations and due diligence (Article 5)

Aspects of the implementation of Article 5 of the convention are covered in Chapters 5 and 6 of this report.

## Gender-sensitive policies (Article 6)

Article 6 requires parties to ensure a gender perspective is applied when both designing and implementing measures under the Istanbul Convention and when evaluating their impact. It requires a gender impact assessment to be carried out in the planning stage of any measure which a party takes in the implementation of the convention and an assessment during the evaluation phase of any gender differential in the impact of provisions. (*Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, 2011*)

Armenia has made gradual but tangible progress in developing a national policy framework to promote gender equality and prevent gender-based violence. These developments have occurred in the context of increased engagement with international human rights mechanisms. The Strategy for Gender Policy Implementation<sup>8</sup> (the Gender Strategy) was developed in co-operation with CSOs and specialist women's organisations and is a good example of coordinated working.

The Gender Strategy 2025-2028 seeks to build on the previous policy (2019-2023<sup>9</sup>) and recognises the 'double vulnerability' of women and girls throughout. It outlines a comprehensive framework to promote gender equality across various sectors, recognising where appropriate, areas for improvement in the representation of men such as the teaching profession. Among its six strategic priorities, two are specifically directed to addressing violence against women and girls:

- 1. Preventing Gender-Based Violence:** This priority focuses on establishing a safer environment for women and girls by preventing all forms of gender-based violence and providing support to survivors.
- 2. Preventing Domestic Violence:** This priority aims to prevent domestic violence and offer protection and assistance to those affected.

## Significant progress has been made

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8. Government of Armenia, Decision of the Government of Armenia N 482-L of 23 April 2025, Gender Strategy of the Republic of Armenia 2025-2028, at: <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=206364>.

9. Government of Armenia, Decision of the Government of Armenia N 1334-L of 19 September 2025, Gender Strategy of the Republic of Armenia 2019-2023, at: <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=134904>.

## Chapter 2

# Integrated policies and data collection

### Comprehensive and co-ordinated policies (Article 7)

Article 7 requires the development of legislative and other State-wide effective, comprehensive and co-ordinated policies covering all relevant measures to prevent and combat all forms of violence covered by the convention. The aim is to provide a holistic response placing the rights of the victim at the centre and ensuring multi-agency co-operation. All relevant actors should be involved including, but not limited to, government agencies, national, regional and local parliaments and authorities, national human rights institutions and CSOs.

Armenia has taken important steps toward establishing a more coordinated approach to combating domestic and gender-based violence. The Gender Strategy outlines measures including the development of inter-agency protocols, expansion of specialised support services (including shelters, crisis centres, and psychological assistance), capacity-building for law enforcement, social and healthcare workers, awareness-raising efforts, and the mainstreaming of domestic violence issues into education and professional training. The Action Plan also includes improving data collection systems and reviewing the legislative framework, notably the 2017 Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence, to align with international standards.

In addition, the 2023 Government Decree No. 1674-L, “On Approving the Human Rights Protection Strategy and the Action Plan for 2023–2025”, outlines national priorities for strengthening the protection of human rights, including concrete actions related to domestic and gender-based violence. This Strategy recognises domestic violence as a serious human rights violation. It includes commitments to legislative improvements, enhancement of coordination mechanisms, and development of protection and support services for victims. It also prioritises awareness raising and professional training and explicitly supports the ratification of the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention.

Government Decree No. 1803-L<sup>10</sup>, “On Approving the Strategy for the Implementation of Police Reforms and the 2024–2026 Action Plan Deriving Therefrom”, introduced a roadmap for improving the performance and accountability of the Police system. While the strategy covers broad reform priorities, it includes specific objectives related to domestic violence. These include strengthening the institutional capacity of law enforcement to respond effectively to such cases, introducing risk assessment procedures, standardising victim referral mechanisms, and fostering stronger partnerships with support services and shelters. The strategy also envisions increasing public trust in the Police through human rights-based and survivor-centred approaches.

Although comprehensive in scope, these strategies often do not allocate specific funding within the text. Instead, relevant government bodies are required to integrate domestic violence-related measures into their annual budget submissions. The strategies are often heavily dependent on international organisations for funding and support. The absence of dedicated and protected budget lines raises concerns about the sustainability and reliability of funding, especially for critical services like shelters, support centres, and prevention programmes. The implementation of these commitments thus remains dependent on future financial and political decisions and should be carefully monitored (see below).

10. Government Decree No. 1803-L, “Approving the Strategy for the Implementation of Police Reforms and the 2024–2026 Action Plan Deriving Therefrom”, <https://www.arlis.am/hy/acts/199923>.

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Continue to develop and improve national and regional policy and coordination	Medium
Build on existing work and ensure protocols are developed and integrated for full interagency co-operation including police, social services, health providers and CSOs especially at local level	Medium
Monitor and evaluate the implementation of the Gender Strategy and Action Plan	Medium

### Financial resources (Article 8)

Parties are required to provide appropriate financial and human resources for the adequate implementation of integrated policies and measures referred to in Article 7. This includes those activities carried out by non-governmental organisations and civil society. In view of the different economic circumstances of member states the drafters of the convention limited the scope of this obligation to ‘appropriate resources’, which means that the resources allocated need to be suitable for the target set or measure to be implemented.<sup>11</sup>

The Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence establishes a legal framework for financing services aimed at the protection of victims and the prevention of domestic violence. According to Article 21 the funding of support centres and shelters is ensured through a combination of sources, including the founders’ funds, allocations from the state budget, and other lawful sources such as donations from individuals and legal entities. Its operational procedures were later clarified in Government Decree No. 51-N (16 January 2025).

Furthermore, Article 14(1)(11) introduces a special state account for temporary assistance to victims, funded by state allocations and donations. The Law also requires the Government to approve operational standards for services and enables the allocation of support through competitive processes. Its operational procedures were later clarified in Government Decree No. 51-N (16 January 2025). This decision regulates the opening and management of the account, confirming that funds may be sourced from the state budget, private and legal entity donations, and other sources not prohibited by law. The account is managed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, which is also responsible for administering disbursements aimed at temporary support—such as emergency assistance, shelter needs, or reintegration support.

These instruments represent essential progress toward meeting the requirements of Article 8 of the Istanbul Convention. However, as noted above, the actual volume and predictability of state funding remain a concern, and many service providers continue to rely on external donor support. Strengthening budgetary allocations and expanding the reach of the state-funded support system—especially in rural areas—will be essential to ensure comprehensive protection and support for all victims. Armenia should seek to provide stable, adequate, and transparent state funding, particularly for specialist services and interventions that address the root causes of domestic violence.

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Monitor the financial requirements of the Gender Strategy and Action Plan and other areas of intervention to identify any shortfall	
See also recommendation on changing funding for specialist organisations from one-year renewable contracts to 3-5 year contracts to ensure stability and reduce the financial costs to CSOs of bidding on an annual basis to free up this funding for service provision.	

11. Explanatory Report to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence Istanbul (2011), para 67.

## Non-governmental organisations and civil society (Article 9)

Women's organisations and other specialist non-governmental or CSOs often provide the overwhelming majority of services for victims of domestic violence and for victims of other forms of violence against women. In recognition of this role and their contribution, the Istanbul Convention requires Parties to recognise, encourage and support, this work and establish effective co-operation with these organisations. Although this Article refers explicitly to violence against women this should not prevent Parties from going further and supporting the work carried out focusing on domestic violence in its wider scope including men and boys.

There is currently a good level of co-operation reported between CSOs and government at all levels in Armenia. This is promoted by means of Article 14 of the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence and practice and includes through participation in national coordination mechanisms, such as the Council on the Prevention of Domestic Violence.

This is recognised by CSOs who identify particularly good co-operation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the police, state that formalised protocols are working well, funding is stable and currently predictable (but insufficient).

## Co-ordinating body (Article 10)

The convention requires a co-ordinating body to be established responsible for coordination, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and measures to prevent and combat all forms of violence covered by the convention. The co-ordinating body is responsible for the co-ordination of data collection (see Article 11) and the analysis and dissemination of the results. The evaluation of policies should be entrusted to an entity or entities that can carry out this task independently, and ideally an institution separate from the one responsible for co-ordinating violence against women.<sup>12</sup> The coordinating body should also be able to communicate and foster relations with coordinating bodies in other Parties.

Under the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence Article 14, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of Armenia is tasked with developing and implementing national strategies, overseeing prevention programmes, coordinating data collection, and organising professional training.

Importantly, the Ministry also manages a multi-stakeholder Council on the Prevention of Domestic and Gender-based Violence<sup>13</sup>, which acts pro bono and serves as a consultative body to align inter-agency actions, support strategic planning and reform proposals and facilitate the involvement of civil society. The *Decision of Prime Minister No. 1685-A of December 28, 2018*, approved the individual composition of the Council on the Prevention of Domestic Violence, which operates adjunct to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.<sup>14</sup> This Council includes a diverse representation of governmental bodies and CSOs, such as the Women's Resource Centre,<sup>15</sup> Sexual Assault Crisis Centre,<sup>16</sup> and others working in child and family support. According to interviews with stakeholders, the Council's composition is expected to expand further to include more CSOs, ensuring broader participation and diversity of voices, particularly from regions and groups working with vulnerable populations.

12. GREVIO baseline evaluation reports on Belgium, paragraph 42, North Macedonia, paragraph 59, Serbia, paragraph 42, For further information on co-ordinating bodies see: 'Setting up a co-ordinating bodies responsible for policies on violence against women: Article 10 of the Istanbul Convention'.(Andrasek,2023).

13. Government of Armenia, Decision of the Government of Armenia N 786-L of 10 July 2018, at: <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=202687>.

14. The Council's composition is approved by the Prime Minister and includes up to 29 members. These include representatives from relevant ministries and agencies (such as the Ministries of Labor and Social Affairs, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure), law enforcement bodies, the Human Rights Defender's Office, and crucially, civil society. Notably, it reserves 8 seats for CSOs with at least three years of relevant experience and 11 seats for support centres and shelters that provide statutory services to survivors of domestic violence.

15. **The Women's Resource Centre (WRC)**, established in 2003, is a specialised CSO in Armenia working to empower women and girls, combat gender-based discrimination and violence, and promote systemic and cultural change through advocacy, education, and support services.

16. **The Sexual Assault Crisis Centre (SACC)**, founded in 2008, is a specialised CSO working to support and protect the rights of victims of sexual violence in Armenia. SACC provides comprehensive services including psychological, legal, and social assistance, and operates a 24/7 helpline. The organisation also engages in public awareness, professional training, and advocacy aimed at developing gender-sensitive policies and fostering a victim-centred justice system. SACC has contributed to legislative reforms on sexual violence and workplace harassment.

Annual reports on the Council's work are published on the Ministry's official website, supporting transparency and accountability.

In addition to the coordinating body other mechanisms have been set up including the Gender Thematic Group, the Gender Based Violence Sub-Working Group and a newly formed Interagency Working Group (see under Article 18 for further details).

#### *Monitoring and evaluation*

The Gender Equality Strategy foresees that the state bodies responsible for each of the activities in the action plan will submit a report to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs who will coordinate the monitoring exercise and may submit the draft final report to an independent expert assessor. Continuous monitoring and evaluation will be carried out within the framework of the activities of the Women's Affairs Council or its working group. Evaluation of the strategy may alternatively be carried out through – monitoring indicators and analysis developed on the basis of official national statistics gender indicators, research and reports carried out by civil society.<sup>17</sup>

The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has sought assistance from the Council of Europe on the development of an evaluation process and begun implementing the recommendations of the report 'The regional specialist domestic violence service network in Armenia: building capacity, quality and continuous improvement' (James & Hovakimyan, 2024).

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Fully implement the recommendations in the James & Hovakimyan report in respect of developing protocols for inter-agency co-operation.	Medium
Ensure that evaluation is carried out independently from monitoring.	Medium

### Data collection and research (Article 11)

Article 11 requires parties to collect disaggregated statistical data on all forms of violence covered by the convention, support research in the field of violence against women, and conduct population-based surveys to assess both prevalence of violence against women and trends.<sup>18</sup>

#### i. Administrative Data Collection

Article 14 of the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence, which mandates the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs to ensure centralised registration of domestic violence cases. The relevant procedures are further defined by Government Decree No. 1381-N<sup>19</sup>, adopted in 2019, which regulates how data will be gathered, anonymised, systematised, and statistically processed.

In 2024, following legislative amendments, a centralised database was created for registering and monitoring domestic violence cases. According to the Armenian government, the purpose of the system implementation is to have a single database and streamline the activities of the bodies responsible for protecting persons subjected to domestic violence. Quantitative and qualitative data obtained with the help of the system will serve as a basis for developing further strategic plans and activities. The centralised registry covers a wide range of indicators, including the profiles of both victims and perpetrators, the types and frequency of violence, protection measures, and the outcomes of legal proceedings and integrates data from several key institutions, including the Police, the Investigative Committee, and the Judicial Department. Notably, the data system also incorporates information from support centres and shelters that may not be directly affiliated with these state bodies. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs must semi-annually publish this data on its official website, thereby promoting transparency and accountability in state responses to domestic violence. This is a welcome development however gaps and limitations remain in particular in respect of other forms of gender-based

17. Government of Armenia, Decision of the Government of Armenia N 482-L of 23 April 2025, Gender Strategy of the Republic of Armenia 2025-2028, paras 221-224, at: <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=206364>.

18. Further details in 'Ensuring data collection and research on violence against women and domestic violence: Article 11 of the Istanbul Convention' (Walby, 2016).

19. Government Decree No. 1381-N on "Establishing a Centralised Procedure for Recording Cases of Domestic Violence" <https://www.arlis.am/hy/acts/135273>.

violence against women that may take place in public spaces, workplaces, or other social contexts. This restricts the scope of national data and leaves other serious manifestations of violence unrecorded and unaddressed.

## ii. Population based surveys

This includes national surveys, legal analyses, needs assessments, and monitoring reports. While the Statistical Committee of Armenia has conducted some thematic surveys—such as the 2021 national survey on violence against women—these are not undertaken on a systematic basis. The absence of regular population-based research limits the ability to identify trends and evaluate the long-term impact of legal and policy measures. Survey data is important as many victims do not seek assistance from agencies and are therefore not included in administrative data.

## iii. Research

In recent years, Armenia has seen a notable growth in research related to violence against women and domestic violence. Various qualitative and quantitative studies have been conducted to shed light on the prevalence, forms, risk factors, and consequences of such violence. In addition to the national surveys discussed above, numerous studies by CSO such as the Women’s Support Centre, Women’s Resource Centre, and the Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women. Academic institutions have also contributed through gender-focused theses, dissertations, and research publications.

The state has not institutionalised a mechanism for regularly financing or commissioning research on violence against women and domestic violence. As a result, research agendas are often shaped by donor priorities rather than long-term national strategies. The absence of state-funded research also limits the integration of findings into policymaking and service provision and raises concerns about the sustainability and continuity of evidence generation. Establishing public funding lines for targeted research in this field would represent a significant step toward meeting international standards and ensuring that policies are grounded in locally generated data and analysis.

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Expand the use of the database to include data collection on all forms of violence against women. It is recognised that the database is in its infancy. It would be better to ensure that it works for the current purpose intended before expanding to include additional areas. Data can still be collected on all forms of violence against women through other means. The consistency and completeness of data contributions to the new database should be monitored to ensure that the database is correctly used. Where there are gaps training and/or further instructions should be provided.	Medium to Low.
Ensure regular population-based surveys take place to assess the prevalence of gender-based violence and domestic violence.	Medium



## Chapter 3

# Prevention

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This chapter contains a number of general and more specific obligations in the area of prevention. These include early preventive measures such as changing social and cultural patterns of behaviour of women and men, eradicating prejudices and gender stereotypes, and measures to involve all of society, including men and boys, in achieving gender equality and the prevention of violence against women. It also includes more specific preventive measures such as awareness raising and campaigning, ensuring the adequate training of all professionals, education in schools and other settings and, last but not least, measures such as perpetrator programmes to prevent further victimisation.

### General Obligations (Article 12)

Article 12 includes a requirement to take measures to promote changes in the social and cultural patterns of behaviour of women and men with a view to eradicating prejudices, customs, traditions and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority of women or on stereotyped roles for women and men. Flowing from the understanding that violence against women is a cause as much as a consequence of gender inequality, parties are also required to take measures to promote programmes and activities for the empowerment of women.

The Gender Strategy and Action plan includes sections dedicated to these general obligations in terms of developing women's position in society, involvement in politics and employment and education. For example, there are specific lines of action to ensure greater equality between men and women in education recognising that there is a shortage of male teachers.

### Awareness raising (Article 13) (particularly in the context of ratification)

Parties are required to promote or conduct awareness raising campaigns and programmes covering all forms of violence in the scope of the convention. (GREVIO, 2022).

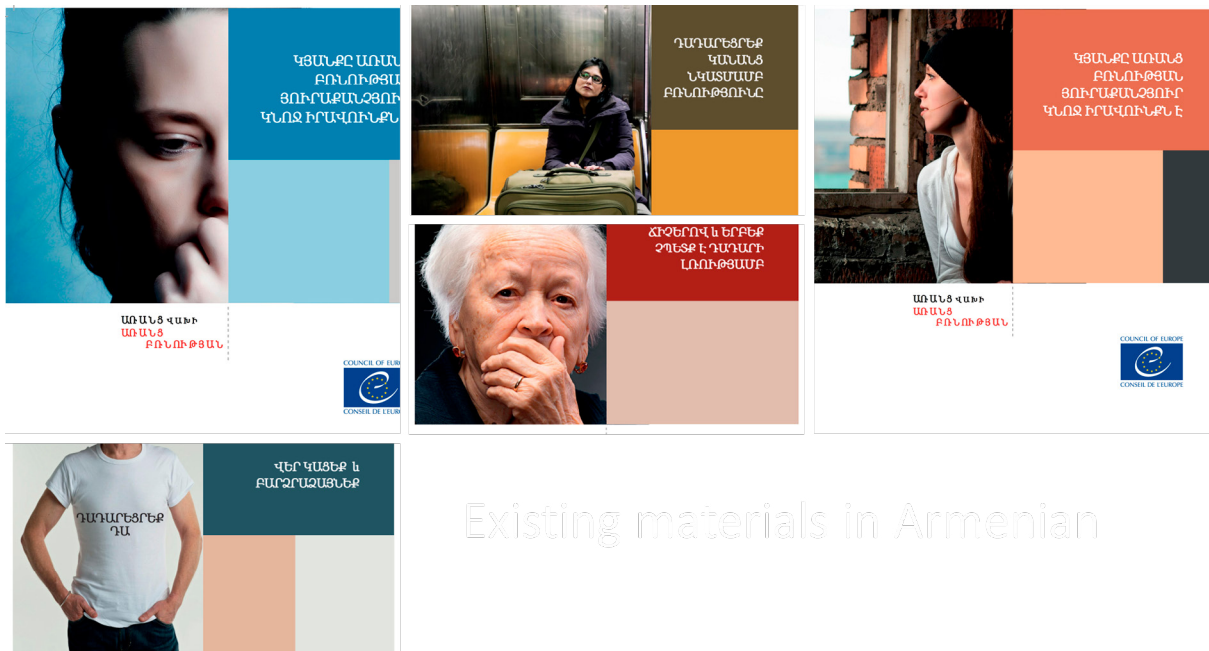
In Armenia, one of the strongest Progress made is likely to be mis- and disinformation campaigns impacting public perception of the convention. To counteract this, it is important to ensure that common myths and misconceptions about the Istanbul Convention, its content and requirements, are addressed. In particular, as noted by the Venice Commission (Venice Commission, Anastas et al., 2019, see above at section 5) concerns have been raised in the past about whether the convention is consistent with the Armenian constitution and society. These concerns relate to terminology, the requirement that states take measures to address historical patterns of inequality, whether the convention undermines the traditional forms of family or requires recognition of same sex marriage, whether it interferes with a parent's right to take care of the education of their children and concerns in respect of mandatory reporting. All of these issues have previously been considered in detail by the Venice Commission opinion however it is worth noting that it is important that these concerns are addressed, and misconceptions cleared by the society as a whole through awareness raising measures.

Awareness raising is now integrated into the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence (e.g. Art 13(2) requires both state and local government authorities, alone or in collaboration with civil society and others, to participate in public awareness efforts and Art 14(1) requires the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs to publish details of helplines, shelters and support centres). There are a significant number of awareness raising activities provided for in the Gender Strategy and Action Plan including activities aimed at informing the population about domestic violence, available support services, and mechanisms for protection.

Dedicated Armenian-language web pages provide accessible overviews of [shelter services, support centre services and the temporary financial assistance programme](#).

In parallel, public awareness has also been supported by independent media and international organisations. Articles such as “The Istanbul Convention Digested” by EVN Report, and “The Istanbul Convention: A Peril or Prospect for Armenia?” published in *The Armenian Weekly* have played an important role in clarifying the content and objectives of the Istanbul Convention and addressing misconceptions within public discourse. Investigative reports like Hetq’s “A Hidden Epidemic: Domestic Violence in Armenia” have further exposed systemic shortcomings and societal taboos around domestic violence.

A number of awareness campaigns have been run by the Armenian authorities over a range of media. The Council of Europe has produced a number of **brochures, guides and other publications** designed to raise awareness of violence against women and the Istanbul Convention:



Existing materials in Armenian

A **handbook for parliamentarians** which is available in Armenian (Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 2019). The Council of Europe in conjunction with **Women Against Violence Europe (WAVE)** Network and United Nations (UN) agency – UN Women has produced a **complete package for civil society and governments** to run communications/advocacy campaigns to promote the convention and to address myths and misconceptions about the convention.

Other organisations have funded and run awareness raising programmes such as “EU 4 Gender Equality: Together against gender stereotypes and gender-based violence” programme (phase 2), funded by the European Union, implemented jointly by UN Women and UN Population Fund (UNFPA) . A handbook for engaging men and boys for gender equality was prepared in December 2023. (Welsh, 2023)

It is important that the impact of awareness raising measures is monitored to ensure that they are effective.

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Ensure awareness raising of the convention and its purposes to dispel myths and misconceptions and prevent unwarranted barriers to adoption.	High This is envisaged in the Action Plan
Internet intermediaries as well as technology companies should be incentivised to co-operate with CSOs working on violence against women in their awareness-raising and other efforts.	Medium to low

## Education (Article 14)

Parties shall take, where appropriate, the necessary steps to include teaching material on issues such as equality between women and men, non-stereotyped gender roles, mutual respect, non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships, gender-based violence against women and the right to personal integrity, adapted to the evolving capacity of learners, in formal curricula and at all levels of education. Article 14(2) requires parties to take steps to promote these principles in informal educational facilities, sports, cultural and leisure facilities and the media.

In respect of concerns that this article may be contrary to the Armenian Constitution, the Venice Commission reported:

*'110. The Istanbul Convention does not interfere with the right of parents to educate their children according to their own preferences. This matter, in fact, remains outside the scope of the Istanbul Convention, which merely encourages States to include teaching materials on issues mentioned in the provision in school curricula. In this respect, the Istanbul Convention gives States Parties a large discretion in deciding how (to what extent and in which manner) they will educate their population about the matters covered by the Istanbul Convention. Therefore, there seems to be no contradiction between Article 14 of the Istanbul Convention and the Constitution of Armenia.'* (Venice Commission, Anastas et al., 2019)

Under Article 16 of the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports is responsible for integrating domestic violence prevention into the education system. This includes organising regular training for teachers and caregivers on detecting and responding to domestic violence and revising curricula and textbooks to eliminate content that may normalise abuse. The Ministry is also tasked with ensuring that educational materials promote healthy family relationships, non-violence, and mutual respect. This provision is key to fostering early prevention through formal education, particularly among children and adolescents. Provision has been made for a review of gender standards and development of programmes and curricula in the Gender Strategy at Priority 3: Overcoming gender discrimination in education and science and further includes actions in respect of inclusion of the media. It is stated that additional funding is not required for these activities.

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Review the development of standards, programmes and curricula as foreseen by the Gender Strategy.	Medium

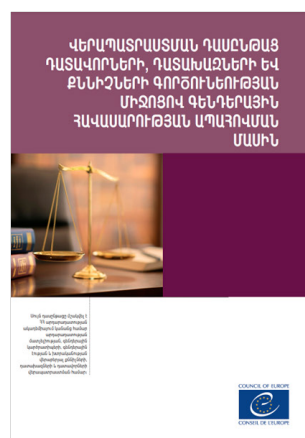
## Training of Professionals (Article 15)

Article 15 mandates comprehensive training for professionals dealing with victims and perpetrators of violence, covering prevention, detection, gender equality, victim rights, and preventing secondary victimisation, while also encouraging multi-agency co-operation training. The Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence establishes mandatory, ongoing training for relevant professionals. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is tasked with regularly training staff in support centres and shelters and organising the training and requalification of social sector professionals, with procedures defined by Ministerial Order N 171-N (6 December 2024) which outlines goals, target groups, frequency, and implementation mechanisms. A new training module based on this is also envisaged in the Gender Strategy and Action Plan.

Several ministries are involved in specialised training. The Ministry of Health is required by Article 17 of the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence to train medical professionals in identifying and responding to violence. Article 15 of the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence directs the Ministry of Internal Affairs to provide specialised training for police officers, including on emergency protection orders and risk assessment; between 2022 and 2024, 1,911 officers were trained. The Ministry of Justice's 2025 Justice Academy programme includes courses for judges and prosecutors on combating violence against women and domestic violence, alongside an online course on related criminal law issues. The Investigative Committee's 2025 training programme also features courses on these topics and on investigating violence against children. In 2024, 130 judges, 16 candidates for judges, 34 prosecutors, 133 investigators, and 594 police officers (including 530 from the new Criminal Police Service and 29 supported by UN Financial Disclosure Programme (UNDP)) received training on equality, non-discrimination, and related topics, meeting performance targets.

The domestic violence support services network participates in regular joint training, utilising resources like the “Social Workers Practice Guidelines: Domestic Violence Awareness raising,” which is based on Istanbul Convention principles. However, a gap was identified in the unified social services’ understanding of domestic violence and appropriate victim response. The current Gender Strategy and Action Plan commits to continued training. Recommendations include ensuring trainings are progressive, not repetitive, and implementing effective monitoring and evaluation systems to assess their impact, acknowledging that while recent training shows initial positive effects like increased case recording, its full impact is yet to be realised, and further training is necessary.

<p><b>Training materials available in Armenian</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Training manual for police officers on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence</li> <li>▶ Training manual on preventing violence against women</li> <li>▶ Training course on ensuing gender equality through the practice of judges, prosecutors and investigators</li> </ul>
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<p>Support the domestic violence support services network in developing their own specialist training for the staff and volunteers and explore the possibility of formal qualifications. This could be achieved through engagement of colleges and universities.</p>	<p>Low</p>
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**Preventive intervention and treatment**

**HELP Courses available in Armenian**



<https://www.coe.int/en/web/yerevan/help-courses-available-in-armenian>

<p><b>Significant progress has been made</b></p>	
<p><b>Action</b></p>	<p><b>Priority</b></p>
<p>Monitor and evaluate the impact of training and change of practice as well as identify any remaining gaps</p>	<p>Low</p>

## programmes (Article 16)

Article 16 requires parties to take legislative or other measures to set up or support preventive intervention and treatment programmes aimed at teaching perpetrators of domestic violence to adopt non-violent behaviour and to prevent reoffending (particularly by sex offenders). These programmes should centre victims' rights and be set up and implemented in close coordination with specialist victim support services.<sup>20</sup>

### i. Perpetrator programme for domestic violence

The Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence (as amended) introduces the concept of rehabilitation programmes for perpetrators through Article 4(8) and Article 14(1)(14). These "rehabilitation programmes" are designed to prevent reoffending by offering psychological and social support to perpetrators. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is responsible for developing these programmes and coordinating their implementation with support centres and other stakeholders. Participation in rehabilitation is also explicitly mentioned as a potential obligation under court-issued protection orders, according to Article 8(5)(8). This integration reinforces the rehabilitative rather than purely punitive approach to reducing repeat violence.

Originally, Order N 119-N on approving the "Rehabilitation programme and organisation of the rehabilitation work with offenders" (2018) placed perpetrator programmes as an additional service of survivor support centres without providing additional resources and was criticised for focusing on the reconciliation of survivors and perpetrator. (Beloti et al., 2022). However, a major development in this area is the adoption of the Government Decree No. 35-N<sup>21</sup> of 16 January 2025, which approved the "Rehabilitation Programme for Persons who Committed Domestic and Household Violence". The programme is designed as a structured, multi-phase intervention aimed at preventing recidivism, addressing the root causes of violent behaviour, and supporting behavioural change among perpetrators. It includes psychological counselling, anger and impulse management, awareness-raising on gender equality, and improving interpersonal skills. The programme is applicable to individuals subject to warning, urgent intervention, or protection orders under the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence.

In parallel, the Centre for Implementation of Legal Education and Rehabilitation Programmes (CILERP) of the Ministry of Justice, in collaboration with UNICEF, is developing a new programme on domestic violence against children. To avoid duplication and ensure consistency, it is crucial to synchronise programme design and implementation between CILERP, the Probation Service, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and the Penitentiary Service. Establishing a formal inter-agency working group dedicated to the development and oversight of rehabilitation programmes would enhance coherence, effectiveness, and accountability. Importantly, such programmes must also incorporate mechanisms for co-operation with victims to ensure their perspectives are integrated, risk is properly assessed, and rehabilitation does not undermine victim safety or well-being.

### ii. Perpetrator programmes for sex offenders

While the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence primarily focuses on domestic violence, it does include sexual violence as one of the defined forms of domestic and gender-based violence (Article 3). However, there are no specific regulations, intervention strategies or dedicated programmes for sex offenders outside of a domestic setting. The absence of such targeted interventions is a critical gap in the country's response to sexual violence and limits the potential for effective prevention and reintegration.

The Gender Strategy and Action plan includes the development of a targeted programme for the reduction of violence with perpetrators and the development of a rehabilitation programme for victims of domestic violence and a sum of 56, 000.00 USD has been made available in the state budget for implementation. Although this is an area where there is room for improvement and development, Armenia has enacted and amended the relevant legislation, ensured finance is available for the development of the programmes and is actively seeking to implement them by 2026.

20. Further guidance in 'Guidance for safe and effective perpetrator programmes: Article 16 of the Istanbul Convention' (Council of Europe et al., 2024).

21. The Government Decree No. 35-N of 16 January 2025, on approving a "Rehabilitation Programme for Persons who Committed Domestic and Household Violence" <https://www.irtek.am/views/act.aspx?aid=128153>.

Progress has been made but some areas remain outstanding	
Action	Priority
Develop and implement rehabilitation programmes for the prevention of domestic violence	High
Develop and implement distinct intervention strategies for sex offenders.	High

### Participation of the private sector and the media (Article 17)

This requires parties to encourage participation of the private sector to elaborate and implement policies and set guidelines and self-regulatory standards to prevent violence against women and respect for dignity and to develop and promote media literacy among children, parents and educators. This is supplemented by the recommendations in GREVIO Recommendation No. 1 on the digital dimension of violence against women which require specific engagement with the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sector and internet intermediaries in efforts to hold perpetrators of violence against women in the digital sphere to account. This includes through providing complaint mechanisms for reporting harmful content, robust content moderation policies and collaborative working arrangements with law enforcement agencies.

In respect of the media, on the one hand, there are positive examples of journalistic initiatives that aim to raise awareness, challenge harmful stereotypes, and promote zero tolerance toward violence. For instance, public television and independent media platforms have featured educational segments and interviews with professionals and survivors, particularly around the 16 Days of Activism campaign. CSOs such as the Women's Support Centre have also partnered with media outlets to disseminate preventive messages and helpline information. The Council of Europe has developed the [Guideline on gender equality and violence against women for Armenian journalists and media workers](#). (Council of Europe et al., 2020)

On the other hand, challenges persist. Certain outlets continue to engage in sensationalist or victim-blaming reporting, which can further traumatise victims or discourage them from seeking help. There is no binding code of conduct specific to reporting domestic violence, although general media ethics apply. Initiatives by civil society to train journalists on ethical coverage of gender-based violence remain limited and donor-dependent. Work in respect of tackling the digital dimension of violence against women and domestic violence is embryonic and more work will be required to ensure internet intermediaries play their role.

The private sector's involvement in tackling violence against women and domestic violence generally is still in a formative stage. In some cases, companies have supported CSOs and shelters through corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, such as in-kind donations of hygiene items, food, or IT equipment. For example, private telecom companies have occasionally provided free messaging services for helpline campaigns, and certain supermarkets have hosted awareness-raising booths during international campaigns.

However, systemic engagement remains limited. There are no state-endorsed mechanisms or incentives (such as tax breaks or public-private partnership schemes) to promote meaningful and ongoing private sector participation in preventing or responding to domestic violence. Employers also lack clear guidance on how to support employees experiencing domestic violence, although a few progressive companies have developed internal HR protocols to that effect.

In sum, while promising practices exist, more structured co-operation and strategic involvement of both the media and private sector are needed.

**Significant progress has been made**

<b>Action</b>	<b>Priority</b>
<p>Work with the ICT sector and internet intermediaries to implement the recommendations in GREVIO's General Recommendation No. 1 in particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Encourage media organisations and journalists' unions to take concrete steps to eradicate gender-based discrimination, victim-blaming attitudes and violations of the privacy of victims of gender-based violence against women and their children in all their journalistic activities.</li><li>▶ incentivise internet intermediaries including ISPs, search engines and social media platforms to ensure robust moderation of content that falls within the scope of the Istanbul Convention through removal of account or content, in multiple languages on the basis of transparent principles that protect the human rights of all, including women's right to live free from violence and</li><li>▶ to provide easily accessible user guidance to flag abusive content and request its removal.</li></ul>	Low
Prevent commercial entities from making profit out of sexual abuse of women and girls constituting sexual violence, such as filmed rape, including by criminalising the production and distribution of such content	Medium



## Chapter 4

# Protection and Support

### Protection and Support

While the ultimate aim of the convention is the prevention of all forms of violence covered by its scope, victims require adequate protection from further violence, support and assistance to overcome the multiple consequences of such violence and to rebuild their lives. This chapter contains a range of obligations to set up specialised as well as more general support services to meet the needs of those exposed to violence.

### General Obligations (Article 18)

The general obligations require legislative or other measures to protect victims from further violence and the establishment of appropriate mechanisms for effective co-operation between all relevant state agencies. Multisectoral and multi-agency interventions across the national, regional and local levels are key to ensuring an effective and cohesive response to all forms of violence. Effective coordination at local levels is particularly important in terms of ensuring that responses fit the community needs and of providing “one-stop-shop” services to victims (see below under General Support Services). Service provision should not be dependent on the willingness of the victim to press charges or testify. Consular or other protections should be provided in accordance with international law obligations (*Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, 2011*). The [guide for mapping support services](#) developed for CSOs may be useful in assessing existing services and identifying any gaps.

Armenia has established an Interagency Working Group to promote the operational response to domestic and family violence cases. (Order No. 247-A of the Minister of Internal Affairs dated 17 January 2025) The Working Group is intended to act as a consultative body and ensures continuous communication between state authorities and non-governmental organisations engaged in the prevention of domestic and family violence. It also formulates recommendations aimed at addressing sectoral challenges more effectively and presents them to the competent state bodies.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs also actively participates in the Gender Thematic Group (GTG) and the Gender-Based Violence Sub-Working Group (GBV), bringing together representatives of UN agencies, international organisations, government bodies, and civil society to enhance policy coherence and improve sectoral responses.<sup>22</sup> Local self-government bodies are engaged primarily through co-operation frameworks, while CSOs play an important role both in service provision and in monitoring, contributing to policy and practice development.

#### Significant progress has been made

Action	Priority
Develop multi agency working protocols to continually address risk	Medium
Monitor the work of the interagency committee to ensure all relevant stakeholders are included and the protocols are effective in achieving the aim of better interagency working	Medium

22. Response to the questionnaire.

## Information (Article 19)

Article 19 requires the provision of adequate and timely information on support services and legal measures in a language and manner the victim can understand. This is vital to empowering victims to make informed decisions about their safety, protection, and recovery.<sup>23</sup>

The Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence incorporates this principle through several legal requirements directed at both state institutions and support structures. In addition to the general awareness raising requirements under Article 14 (see above), Article 19 places a responsibility on *support centres* to inform individuals who approach them – whether presumed or confirmed victims of domestic and family violence - about:

- ▶ their rights under Armenian law;
- ▶ the services available, including psychological, legal, social, and shelter support;
- ▶ the protective measures that may be applied, including warning notices, emergency intervention orders, and protection orders;
- ▶ the procedures for accessing those services and measures.

This information must be provided in a language and format accessible to the individual. For persons with disabilities, this includes the use of accessible communication methods to ensure full understanding. For linguistic minorities, steps must be taken to provide information in their preferred language whenever possible.

Furthermore, when victims report incidents to the Police, officers are legally obliged to inform them about their rights and the legal and social support available. This includes an explanation of protective mechanisms and referral to relevant support centres. Police must also document the incident and forward information to the competent bodies to enable follow-up support.

The effectiveness of this obligation in practice hinges on the consistent training of frontline professionals, effective co-operation between institutions, and ensuring that support services are geographically and linguistically accessible across Armenia. There are also some limitations in the provision of telephone helplines which are discussed below.

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Monitor the provision of information and its effectiveness	Low

## General Support Services (Article 20)

Article 20 requires parties to take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that victims have access to services facilitating their recovery from violence. These services should include legal and psychological counselling, financial assistance, housing, education, training, and assistance in finding employment. They also include access to healthcare and social services that are responsive to the specific needs of victims. Services should be adequately resourced and personnel trained to assist victims and refer to appropriate services.

The Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence recognises the importance of both social and health-care services in the support system for victims of domestic and family violence. The Law assigns concrete responsibilities to the relevant ministries and agencies to seek to ensure such services are not only formally in place but are also effective, accessible, and victim centred. In particular, the Government Decree No. 51-N of 16 January 2025, adopted pursuant to Article 14(1)(11) of the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence, establishes a procedure for providing temporary financial assistance to victims of domestic violence. This assistance aims to cover basic living expenses and emergency housing needs, and the amount is calculated using a formula that includes a fixed base payment, housing support, and supplements for dependents.

According to the Decree, financial support is granted based on an application from the victim, their representative, a guardianship body, or a support centre. It is managed by a dedicated inter-agency working group, which reviews eligibility and ensures that the aid is targeted and timely. However, this mechanism is framed as a form of temporary social assistance rather than a legal entitlement to redress. It does not replace the

23. Explanatory Report to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence Istanbul (2011), para 124.

obligation of the state to compensate victims in accordance with human rights standards where offenders are unable or unwilling to do so.

## i. Social Services

Since the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence was first passed in 2017 the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs have undertaken a significant amount of work in a relatively short period of time to develop comprehensive services. Social services play a central role in the Armenian response to domestic and family violence. The institutional responsibility is further reinforced by Article 14 (1) (15), which requires the LSA to cooperate with state and local self-government institutions, as well as international and domestic organisations, to ensure victims benefit from a wide range of social services. Moreover, under Article 14, (1) (1), the Ministry is tasked with the development and implementation of state-level strategic actions to secure such access.

The Law provides a comprehensive mandate to support centres to deliver a range of social services. Article 19 (1) (2) stipulates that support centres are responsible for organising the provision of free psychological and legal assistance, along with any other necessary social services required by the victim. There are now 11 such centres operating across the country funded by the Government within the budget of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. (James & Hovakimyan, 2024, see their report on 'The regional specialist domestic violence service network in Armenia: building capacity, quality and continuous improvement' for full details and recommendations). In general these specialist support centres provide good services and are effective one-stop solutions. It will be important to ensure that they are properly funded and not relied on to replace state responsibility in all areas unless sufficiently compensated.

In addition, Article 19(1)(8) tasks the support centres with facilitating victims' access to employment opportunities and to relevant state or non-state social assistance.

Despite the strong legal framework, practical challenges remain, particularly regarding the regional availability of services, ensuring continuity and individualisation of support, and addressing the specific needs of groups facing intersecting vulnerabilities, such as persons with disabilities, and single parents with multiple dependents.

In their December 2024 report (prior to the creation of the Inter Agency Working Group referred to above) James & Hovakimyan state that the domestic violence support services, in comments echoed by police, expressed the view that there was a lack of useful partnership working with some unified social services being unaware of the existence of the local domestic violence support services. This may in part be explained by the fact that the domestic violence support services in some areas is relatively new and the structures for interagency working have not yet been developed. It was suggested that unified social services make very few referrals to the domestic violence support services, and that where this agency was involved, they approached victims with a lack of understanding of the profound and traumatic impacts of domestic violence, and the time needed to rebuild their lives. They cited a lack of understanding of the levels of risk for women and children, often demonstrating an approach which relied on gender stereotypes which implicitly blame the victim for her situation. Some mentioned a lack of respect in caseworkers' attitude to victims, which can lead to secondary victimisation or institutional victimisation/abuse. Domestic violence support services representatives did not generally feel they understood the processes of case management undertaken by unified social services, and there was some confusion about the responsibilities for case management. Some of these concerns were echoed from the point of view of the police. At the same time, representatives of social services themselves expressed concern about the relationships between the domestic violence support services network and both General and unified social services. At stakeholder meetings some social workers have stated that they were unaware of the existence of a local domestic violence support services. Concern has also been expressed about a perceived lack of information sharing regarding the safeguarding children (James & Hovakimyan, 2024).

The Gender Strategy and Action Plan show that the Government of Armenia is aware of these issues and working to remedy them. In particular it is envisaged that further action will be taken in the sphere of strengthening the multidisciplinary response and co-operation and increasing efficiency (Gender Strategy at 190 and see articles 15 -training of professionals, and article 18 general obligations above). Armenia should continue to develop capacity to address these practical challenges. It is also important to remember that when developing partnerships both between agencies and with CSOs and civil society to deliver services it is important to remember that not all agencies are equal and regard should be had to the difference in resources (James & Hovakimyan, 2024). It will be important to implement the training and social work handbook developed by the Women's Support Centre to ensure the continued improvement of services.

The institutional support framework is further being strengthened through financial assistance mechanisms introduced by the Government of Armenia. In line with Article 14(1)(11) of the Law, Government Decree

No. 51-N (adopted on January 16, 2025)<sup>24</sup> sets out detailed procedures for opening and managing a dedicated temporary support account for victims of domestic and family violence. The account is administered by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and its purpose is to provide emergency financial support covering basic subsistence needs, housing costs, and care-related expenses for dependents. The decree defines a clear formula for calculating support, including a base emergency payment (65,000 AMD), rental assistance (50,000 AMD), and an additional 30,000 AMD per dependent (e.g., children, elderly, or persons with disabilities). The assistance is provided based on a multidisciplinary review by a working group composed of representatives from the Ministry, law enforcement, and the relevant support centre. This funding mechanism acknowledges the economic vulnerability many victims face, particularly when fleeing an abusive environment, and aims to provide rapid, short-term relief. However, its effective implementation still depends on prompt inter-agency coordination, outreach capacity of support centres, and the availability of follow-up services to ensure victims' sustained recovery and reintegration.

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Implementation of continuous training is envisaged in the action plan with a small budget line available. Consider increasing the availability of training perhaps through using freely available online courses such as the Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals Programme (HELP).	Medium
Train unified social services in respect of interagency working and sensitisation to victim centred and child friendly approaches to domestic violence.	High
Consider implementing secondment programmes for trainee social workers whereby they would spend some time at a specialist centre.	Low
Develop a comprehensive set of guidelines as a training tool for unified social services and community social workers. It should include training on gender-based violence, trauma informed approaches and raise awareness on a range of impacts of domestic violence.	Medium

## ii. Health-care services

Article 17 of the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence assigns specific obligations to the Ministry of Health to ensure that victims receive medical assistance and services free of charge or under preferential conditions when these needs arise as a direct consequence of domestic or family violence and that health-care institutions must conduct regular training for their personnel. Challenges such as the uneven distribution of trained professionals, underreporting by patients, and the need for continuous resource allocation remain barriers to fully realising the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence's intent in practice.

The domestic violence support services network representatives, for example, have expressed concern that health services demonstrate a systematic lack of a victim-centred approach. Forensic medical staff have been cited as lacking respect for the victim and approaching them with an attitude that normalises abuse and domestic violence which can be particularly acute in rural areas. Health services did not always recognise the need for safety and confidentiality.

There are significant lines of action in the current Gender Strategy and Action Plan aimed at improving the healthcare response to violence against women and domestic violence including notably the development of a clinical guide for the treatment of women who have been sexually abused, increased access to healthcare and sensitivity towards vulnerable groups and steps to tackle sex selective abortion.

Overall, the main barrier to providing a good general service is lack of understanding of the victim in domestic violence and sexual violence cases. **Proper sensitisation in respect of a victim centred, trauma informed approach and the importance of confidentiality and data protection across these services is required to ensure that the law is properly implemented.**

24. Government Decree No. 51-N on "Approving the Procedure for Opening and Managing Temporary Support Accounts for Victims of Domestic and Gender-Based Violence" adopted on January 16, 2025 <https://www.arlis.am/hy/acts/202289>.

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Develop clear multi-agency protocols that continually address risk and draw on both general and specialist support services and enable the services to understand the relevance of each other.	High
Develop multi-agency meetings at local level with clear lines of responsibility for actions.	High
Build capacity and understanding of a victim centred, trauma informed response to domestic and gender-based violence in all general services.	High

### Specialist support services (Article 22)

The aim of specialist support is to ensure the complex task of empowering victims through optimal support and assistance catered to their specific needs. Much of this is best ensured by women's organisations and by support services provided, for example, by local authorities with specialist and experienced staff with in-depth knowledge of gender-based violence against women. It is important to ensure that these services are sufficiently spread throughout the country and are accessible to all victims. Moreover, these services and their staff need to be able to address the different types of violence covered by the scope of the Istanbul Convention and to provide support to all groups of victims, including hard-to-reach groups. The types of support that such dedicated services need to offer include providing shelter and safe accommodation, immediate medical support, the collection of forensic medical evidence in cases of rape and sexual assault, short and long-term psychological counselling, trauma care, legal counselling, advocacy and outreach services, telephone helplines to direct victims to the right type of service and specific services for children as victims or witnesses.<sup>25</sup>

Support centres play a central role in delivering specialised services (Article 19, Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence). They are mandated to provide psychological and legal assistance, as well as other necessary social services, free of charge. They also serve an essential informational function (see above). These services are made available not only to the victim themselves but, where needed, also to their family members, such as children or dependents.

Support centres must also assist in organising the victim's placement in a shelter if required, conduct risk assessments, and evaluate the causes and context of the violence. In fulfilling these roles, the support centres act as vital intermediaries between the victim and other services, including the Police and courts. They can also submit applications for protective measures on behalf of the victim, provided the victim consents.

Support centres are overseen by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs under Article 14 of the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence which outlines the Ministry's responsibilities, which include certifying support centres, monitoring the quality of services, and ensuring their compliance with government-established standards. The Ministry also coordinates with non-governmental organisations to fund and operate these services, signs contracts based on model agreements approved by the Government and ensures that funding is used appropriately.

The Government Decree No. 158-N of 13 February 2025, titled "On Approving the Requirements for the Operation, Services Provided, and Personnel of Support Centres Providing Social Services to Victims of Domestic and Family Violence, and the Procedure for Service Delivery by Support Centres,"<sup>26</sup> establishes detailed standards for the functioning of support centres. It defines the scope and nature of services to be provided, including psychological, social, legal, and other forms of assistance, and sets clear professional and qualification requirements for staff.

Since 2020, three support programmes for victims of domestic and family violence have been financed through the state budget. These include services provided by support centres (96 million AMD), shelter services (12.5 million AMD), and the provision of one-time financial assistance to victims (15 million AMD).<sup>27</sup>

The staff of support centres must undergo regular training, and their services are expected to reflect a multidisciplinary approach. Typically, the support provided includes collaboration among social workers,

25. Explanatory Report to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence Istanbul (2011), para 132.

26. The Government Decree No. 158-N of 13 February 2025, on "Approving the Requirements for the Operation, Services Provided, and Personnel of Support Centres Providing Social Services to Victims of Domestic and Family Violence, and the Procedure for Service Delivery by Support Centres," <https://www.irtek.am/views/act.aspx?aid=128515>.

27. Response to the questionnaire.

psychologists, lawyers, and, where necessary, other professionals such as health care providers or educators. In this way, support centres are designed to deliver a holistic response to the complex and interrelated needs of victims of domestic and family violence.

Ministerial Order No. 173-N, adopted by the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs on 10 December 2024, regulates follow-up procedures for individuals who have accessed support centres or been placed in shelters. In this context, the monitoring and assessment is conducted by a social worker. The purpose of the assessment is to evaluate whether there is a further risk of violence and evaluating the individual's social needs including whether there is a continued need for the individual to remain in the shelter. This provision recognises that safe housing may be needed repeatedly or on a longer-term basis, particularly when the risk of violence persists. While the institutionalisation of monitoring is welcome, it is critical that its implementation ensures confidentiality, builds trust with beneficiaries, and is supported by adequate training and resources. This mechanism serves to inform future interventions, adapt the support services to evolving circumstances, and strengthen early detection of repeated victimisation.

Support centres also collect and maintain statistical data related to domestic violence cases and report this data to the competent authority. Their operations are further informed by the results of such data, helping to inform policy and improve future interventions.

The domestic violence support services regional network in Armenia was set up by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs working with key stakeholders including the Women's Support Centre in Yerevan and other CSOs within a short period of time and built capacity into the work of regional CSOs. The network also resulted in the establishment of the [Coalition to Stop Violence against Women](#). Following this development 11 services are now operating across the country resulting in a significant increase in capacity. These shelters are available in the capital Yerevan and in several regions such as Lori, Shirak, Kotayk, Syunik, Ararat, and Tavush. They offer secure living conditions and comprehensive support services for victims of domestic violence and, in some cases, victims of trafficking and their children. Services provided include legal counselling, psychological support, food and hygiene packages, educational support for children, and assistance with health care. These centres possess significant expertise in dealing with domestic violence cases, particularly those involving women and children. Their work is often carried out in close co-operation with medical institutions, police departments, and judicial bodies, ensuring a more coordinated response to domestic violence.

The domestic violence support services have been assessed and extensively addressed in the Council of Europe publication 'The regional specialist domestic violence service network in Armenia: building capacity, quality and continuous improvement' (James & Hovakimyan, 2024). This report demonstrates that capacity and expansion to the regions of specialist domestic violence services was achieved very quickly through good governmental and CSO collaboration. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs was keen to identify best practice in developing monitoring and evaluation of the services, considering capacity, improving co-operation and outlining the respective responsibilities of the domestic violence support services network and other agencies such as the police and universal social services. The report makes a series of recommendations which will improve the service. The strongest recommendations relate to the development of protocols for multi-agency working. On the basis of this comprehensive report, although there are improvements that could be made to the system of specialist support services there is nothing at present to indicate that there are barriers to ratification of the convention.

Another critical issue relates to the financial sustainability of these services. Although some CSOs benefit from state support, this funding is frequently project-based, short-term, and unpredictable, which undermines the ability of organisations to plan and deliver services over the long term. Consideration could be given to extending the contracts for CSOs for more than one year- for example for a period of between 3-5 years which would increase financial security and reduce the need to continually bid for a new contract each year. (James & Hovakimyan, 2024) Furthermore, specialist support remains underdeveloped for certain groups of victims, including men, persons with disabilities, elderly victims, and survivors of sexual violence. The absence of tailored services for these populations' risks leaving their specific needs unmet.

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Ensure specialist support reaches all groups of victims including men, persons with disabilities, elderly victims and survivors of sexual violence	High
Consider extending the contracts for CSOs for more than a year- for example a period of between 3-5 years.	Medium

## Shelters (Article 23)

The convention requires parties to provide for the setting up of appropriate, easily accessible shelters in sufficient numbers<sup>28</sup> to provide safe accommodation for and to reach out proactively to victims, especially women and their children.

Armenia has taken considerable steps to implement the shelter requirement through national legislation and practical arrangements. According to Article 20 of the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence, shelters must be certified by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and must meet specific standards regarding infrastructure, safety, accessibility, and services offered. These include psychological and legal assistance, basic needs such as food and clothing, and support for children's education and development. This is supplemented by [Government Decree No. 364-N](#) (29 March 2019) which sets out the standards for shelters, including infrastructure, personnel qualifications, and service quality requirements. Importantly, it also approves a standard financing contract to be signed between the competent authority and non-commercial entities operating shelters. This framework ensures a legal basis for public financing while also introducing contractual obligations and monitoring mechanisms to guarantee effective and accountable use of funds. Financial support is determined based on competitive selection procedures and ongoing compliance with state standards.

Article 26 of the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence stipulates that social protection institutions are responsible for providing long-term or short-term shelter and 24-hour comprehensive care to various groups in need. Specifically, it identifies shelters as legitimate social protection institutions that offer accommodation and care to victims of domestic violence and their dependents as well as to victims of trafficking and exploitation.

As of early 2025, shelter services for victims of domestic violence in Armenia are primarily provided by non-governmental organisations with co-financing from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. One such operational shelter is run by the "Women's Support Centre" CSO in Yerevan. This shelter offers a wide range of essential services including secure accommodation, social and psychological support, legal assistance, and medical care. Beneficiaries also receive food, clothing, and, for children, the necessary environment and supplies for education. Access to the shelter is facilitated through support centres or direct contact and generally requires presentation of identification and a social services number. The Women's Support Centre notes that the model adopted whereby they are responsible for operating shelters enables them to overcome barriers to placement of survivors.

Furthermore, Armenian legislation has introduced an important safeguard to protect the confidentiality and safety of victims of domestic violence residing in shelters. According to Article 47.14 of the Administrative Offences Code, disclosing the location of a person placed in a shelter, under the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence, by someone who obtained this information through the performance of official or professional duties and shared it with a person not authorised to receive it, constitutes an administrative offence. This violation is punishable by a fine ranging from 200,000 to 400,000 AMD (approximately 470 to 940 EUR), thereby reflecting the seriousness of the breach.

Nevertheless, there are important challenges that continue to impact the accessibility and effectiveness of shelter services. One of the most pressing issues is the rough geographic distribution of shelters, which results in inadequate access for victims in remote or rural communities. The same issue arises in the case of support centres. Additionally, while the government has made efforts to provide funding, many shelters remain reliant on short-term grants or donor projects, which undermines the long-term planning and sustainability of services.

There is also a need to improve the inclusiveness of shelters, particularly in terms of accommodating the needs of diverse victim groups, including male victims, persons with disabilities, elderly persons, refugee women and girls and others. Though these groups are legally entitled to shelter services, the infrastructure and support services are not always adapted to their specific needs.

**Despite these limitations, the legal recognition of shelters as part of the national social assistance infrastructure marks a significant achievement. Continued efforts will be needed to enhance shelter availability, ensure sustainable funding, and develop more inclusive, needs-based services.**

28. The Final Activity Report of the Council of Europe Task Force to Combat Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence (EG-TFV (2008)6) recommends safe accommodation in specialised women's shelters, available in every region, with one family place per 10 000 head of population. However, the number of shelter places should depend on the actual need. For shelters on other forms of violence, the number of places to be offered will again depend on the actual need. (Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, 2011, para 135).

## Significant progress has been made

### Telephone Helplines (Article 24)

There should be at least one free national helpline covering all forms of violence against women operating 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and providing crisis support in all relevant languages. Counsellors must be trained and callers must be able to remain anonymous.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs provides a national toll-free helpline at 114. This helpline is accessible throughout the territory of Armenia, including Yerevan and all marzes (provinces). It serves as a critical first point of contact for victims or individuals concerned about cases of domestic violence, offering information, consultation, and guidance on available protection and support measures. This is a welcome measure however it is not a national helpline covering all forms of violence against women but focused on providing all citizens with information about all social services.

There are additional 24/7 helplines run by support centres functioning in different parts of Armenia, including in Yerevan, Gyumri, Goris, Vanadzor, and Gavar, to ensure immediate response capacity. These helplines are staffed by trained professionals capable of providing initial psychological support, legal advice, and referrals to other services. However, this is fragmented rather than one single helpline.

Further steps are being taken to improve helpline accessibility and service coordination. In co-operation with the World Bank, the Ministry is currently working on establishing a single unified national helpline for domestic and family violence cases. This system aims to replace the fragmented structure of multiple helplines with a single point of contact, improving the efficiency of referrals, information dissemination, and emergency responses. Women's organisations are concerned that the proposed universal helpline will simply act as a referral system to their helplines without necessarily increasing the funding available to them to serve the referrals. Moreover, there are already real staffing issues in some rural areas that must be resolved with some support services referring to the pressure of keeping their helplines going 24 hours a day and the fear of burnout. (James & Hovakimyan, 2024, p19)

**Armenia should take steps to ensure that there is one national helpline covering all forms of violence against women and domestic violence. The number should be free, widely publicised and accessible. Counsellors will require training in all forms of violence against women.**

### Progress has been made but some areas remain outstanding

Action	Priority
Ensure the availability of a single helpline dealing with all forms of violence against women.	High

### Support for victims of sexual violence (Article 25)

The Final Activity Report of the Council of Europe Task Force to Combat Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence (EG-TFV (2008)6) recommends that **one such centre should be available per every 200.000 inhabitants and that their geographic spread should make them accessible to victims in rural areas as much as in cities**. The term "appropriate" is intended to ensure that the services offered are suitable for the needs of victims.

Armenia has taken initial steps to introduce specialised services for victims of sexual violence and a Sexual Assault Crisis Centre operates in Armenia through a grant agreement with the Ministry.<sup>29</sup> This civil society organisation provides psycho-social support services specifically to victims and potential victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation, thus indirectly covering survivors of sexual violence as well. The services offered include crisis intervention, trauma-informed psychological counselling, and social work assistance.

Despite this progress, Armenia has yet to establish a comprehensive network of rape crisis or sexual assault referral centres that would guarantee all victims of sexual violence access to integrated medical, psychological, and legal support in a timely manner. The existing services, although crucial, remain limited in scope and geographic coverage. As mentioned, specialised crisis intervention and trauma services are mostly concentrated

<sup>29</sup>. Response to the questionnaire.

in Yerevan, and referrals to them from law enforcement, health care providers, or support centres are not yet systematised. One app has been developed ‘Safe You’<sup>30</sup> which works to bridge the gap between sufferers of sexual assault, resources and service providers. (Almadjian, 2024)

In the context of child sexual abuse, a serious challenge posed by the lack of a procedure for first responder medical practitioners to collect biological samples resulting in delays and irrecoverable loss of physical evidence has been noted. (Council of Europe et al., 2024, p22). In mid-2024 consultations were underway to develop procedures including creating a network of medical practitioners/facilities licensed to conduct emergency sexual assault examinations using sexual assault evidence kits. This should not be limited to children.

**There is a clear need for improved services in this area. It is essential that evidence can be obtained and preserved even where women do not wish to report offences or press charges immediately. As noted above, there are clear lines of action in the Action plan and Gender Strategy to improve the response of healthcare. Further action may be required to ensure best practice in support for victims of sexual violence.**

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Expand the provision of sexual assault services to the regions	High

### Protection and support for child witnesses (Article 26)

Article 26 therefore requires parties to take due account of the rights and needs of child witnesses of all forms of violence covered by the scope of the convention and to remember that witnessing violence may be considered a form of violence itself. Measures shall include age-appropriate psychosocial counselling and parties shall have due regard to the best interests of the child.

Children who witness abuse between family members are considered victims (Article 4 Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence) and are thus granted access to the same safeguards and support services as those directly subjected to violence. Additionally, Article 2 emphasises the primacy of *the best interests of the child* in all interventions related to domestic violence.

However, despite the legal recognition, Armenia still lacks a fully functional and specialised institutional framework to assess the risk and wellbeing of children exposed to family violence and has some challenges relating to enforcement and oversight of final judgments from court proceedings involving custody and visitation. There are currently a lack of dedicated services or professionals systematically tasked with evaluating the child’s vulnerability in such contexts. As noted in recent assessments, sexual and physical abuse of children within the family remains largely under-addressed, with limited state intervention to remove children from harmful environments or provide targeted protection. (Council of Europe et al., 2024) In practice, much hinges on the first responders, especially the Police. The actions taken at the scene of domestic violence incidents are of critical importance when children are present.

Reporting in September 2024, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child welcomed amendments made to the Criminal Code of 2021 including making the interviewing of children by specialised psychologists and videorecording for courts mandatory and the establishment of the Barnahus ‘safe corner’ system. Armenia initiated the Barnahus system in 2023 opening centres in Yerevan and Kapan. (*Creating Safe Corners for Child Victims of Abuse*, 2023). The Committee of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recommended strengthening Armenia’s child protection system by: expanding the Safe Corner facilities nationwide, with a sufficient budget, ensuring multidisciplinary child-and gender-friendly investigations which avoid repetitive interviews and retraumatisation of the child in cross-examination, strengthen trauma-focused therapy and other support services for children who are victims of violence.

Information suggests that a significant number of sexual abuse victims are children and therefore the UNCRC Committee made a series of recommendations to improve children’s access to justice particularly in respect to child sexual abuse and domestic violence.

The CRC Committee also recommended a comprehensive assessment of the extent, causes and nature of domestic violence and to ensure that legislation aimed at protection provides for sufficient psychosocial support for children and sanctions, including penalties, commensurate with the gravity of the crime and takes into account the best interests of the children. Additionally, child friendly, confidential reporting mechanisms

30. For more information, the official website is available at: <https://safeyou.space/en>.

are required and audio-visually recorded interviews should be accepted as evidence in court proceedings and steps taken to ensure that cross-examination, if needed, can take place without delay at the pretrial stage with a view to avoiding any need for a child to give further testimonies. The Committee also recommended the training of professionals working with and for children who are victims or witnesses of violence, and to facilitate and promote the mandatory reporting of violence against children by such professionals (UN CRC Committee, 2024).

While the legal framework in Armenia provides a progressive starting point by acknowledging children as victims when they witness domestic violence, full implementation of these principles requires institutional reform. This includes the establishment of specialised child protection services, trauma-informed training for all professionals involved, and stronger inter-agency coordination.

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Improve sensitisation of all actors in the protection system to the experience of children of domestic violence and in particular how this can appear in custody and visitation cases.	High
Continue to implement the system of Safe Corners.	Medium

### Reporting (Article 27) and Reporting by professionals (Article 28)

Article 27 requires Parties to take measures to encourage those who witness or who have reasonable grounds to believe that acts contrary to the convention may be committed, or that further acts of violence are to be expected, to report this to the competent organisations or authorities.

The obligation on professionals entailed by Article 28 of the convention is carefully worded in order to allow healthcare and other staff, where they have reasonable grounds to believe that a serious act of violence has been committed and that further serious acts of such violence are to be expected against an adult, to report their suspicion to the competent authorities without risking being sanctioned for breaching their professional duty of confidentiality. However, in those cases where there are no reasonable grounds to believe that further serious acts of violence may be committed, the personal autonomy and choice of the woman concerned should be respected. The explanatory report explicitly states that this provision does not impose an obligation on such professionals to report particularly in the absence of consent by the victim. The exception would be cases such as where the victim is a minor or is unable to protect herself due to physical or mental disabilities.

In Armenia, in terms of witnesses to violence the prevailing societal attitude that domestic violence remains a private matter discourages both professionals and the broader community from recognising violence as a public concern and reporting it to the authorities. As a result, many cases remain hidden, and opportunities for early intervention are lost. A new Government Decree of February 2025 seeks to remedy the previous gap in respect of inter-agency reporting and covers the Police, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, care and nursing bodies and recognises other organisations who receive information about domestic violence in the course of their work can also be sources of information for the police or special structures.

The February 2025 Decree setting out the ‘procedure for the detection of cases of domestic and domestic violence, the referral of persons subjected to domestic and household violence, and the risk assessment of recurrence of domestic and household violence incidents’ permits information sharing between relevant bodies but does not mandate it unless there is a risk to life or health or a risk of recurrence. **Relevant professionals will need to be made aware of this new decision, provided with guidance and trained on how to implement it.**

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Develop guidelines for relevant professionals on when and how they are required to report, who to and how.	Medium

## Chapter 5

# Substantive law

## Civil law

### Civil remedies against the authorities and ensuring due diligence (Article 29)

Access to civil remedies against public authorities is a cornerstone of a functioning system for the protection of human rights. When state institutions fail to prevent, investigate, punish acts of violence, or protect individuals from harm, the availability of judicial or quasi-judicial mechanisms to challenge such failures is essential to ensuring accountability and the rule of law. The recognition of the individual's right to seek redress against state inaction or misconduct reinforces the principle that the state has a duty not only to refrain from violating rights but also to act with due diligence to prevent violations by others.

Article 3 of the Administrative Procedure Code of the Republic of Armenia establishes the right of every natural or legal person to apply to the administrative court if they believe that an administrative act, action, or inaction by a state or local self-government body or official has violated or may directly violate their rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution, international treaties, or other legal acts. These rights include not only the protection against unlawful interference but also the positive obligation of the state to create the necessary conditions for the exercise of those rights. Individuals may contest unlawful administrative actions, omissions, or decisions, and seek appropriate remedies.

In addition to the judiciary, the Human Rights Defender of Armenia plays a vital role in ensuring civil remedies against authorities through its independent constitutional mandate. While not a judicial body, the Defender acts as an accessible mechanism for victims of domestic violence and other rights violations to seek review of administrative practices and institutional failures. The Defender may initiate inquiries, issue recommendations, and advocate for individual and systemic redress. Under the Law on the Human Rights Defender, the institution can intervene in matters involving the failure of public authorities to comply with their obligations under domestic legislation, including the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence, and support victims in securing protection, services, and justice.

However, continued efforts to ensure the accessibility, efficiency, and victim-sensitivity of these mechanisms are essential to strengthen the accountability framework.

Significant progress has been made

### Compensation (Article 30)

The convention requires states to provide for compensation in two circumstances. Firstly, to ensure that victims have the right to claim compensation from perpetrators for any of the offences established in accordance with this convention. Secondly to ensure that there are adequate civil remedies available if the State authorities fail in their duty to prevent or protect relevant violence.

Article 23(3) of the Criminal Procedure Code of Armenia, any person who has suffered harm from a presumed crime, including those subjected to domestic and gender-based violence, has the right to apply to court both to demand that the offender be held criminally liable and to request compensation for the damage caused. This dual-purpose application reflects the integrated status of the victim as both a *victim* and a *civil claimant*, as further clarified in Article 50(2) (22–24) and enables compensation to be adjudicated in the same process as criminal liability which may reduce secondary victimisation and streamline legal proceedings. Article 41(1) (9) obliges the investigator at pre-trial stage to take measures aimed at securing compensation for the victim, including the potential seizure of the accused's assets and recovery of procedural costs. The legal provisions thus create a structured mechanism through which victims can pursue effective remedies for the harm inflicted upon them, reinforcing the state's responsibility to ensure access to justice and reparation for all victims of violence.

Armenia thus has a basic system of compensation, but some improvements are required. One of the main gaps in the Armenian system remains the absence of a state-funded compensation scheme that would serve victims who cannot obtain compensation from the perpetrator.<sup>31</sup> The existing forms of financial assistance from the State, although valuable, do not amount to compensation for harm in the legal sense. (see e.g. Government Decree No. 51-N of 16 January 2025, adopted pursuant to Article 14(1)(11) of the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence which establishes a procedure for providing temporary financial assistance to victims of domestic violence.)

**These obligations already exist under the European Court of Human Rights, and it is understood the consequences of the judgments in both *Khachatryan v Armenia* and *Petrosyan v Armenia*<sup>32</sup> (Article 2) are under active consideration.**

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Introduce a mechanism to enable victims of domestic and gender-based violence to claim compensation for non-pecuniary damage either directly from the perpetrator or indirectly via the state.	High

### Custody and visitation rights and safety (Article 31)

Custody and visitation decisions in relation to families with a history of abuse require a careful balancing of the different interests at stake. Article 31 of the convention seeks to ensure that incidents of violence covered by the convention, in particular domestic violence, are taken into account in decisions on custody and visitation rights to ensure that the exercise of these rights does not harm the rights and safety of the victim or children.

Armenia’s Family Code does not contain explicit references to domestic violence as a factor to be taken into account by civil court judges in custody and visitation decisions. The integration of safety considerations into decisions on custody and visitation remains a growing area of concern. While the legal framework provides some entry points for such assessments, further harmonisation with specialised standards—such as those recognising the pattern and impact of coercive control, or the trauma of exposure to violence—would strengthen compliance with human rights obligations and further protect victims and children from re-victimisation. Women’s organisations report that child custody and visitation rights are very problematic because they are not victim centred and fail to take into account domestic violence. One of the reasons for this is believed to be the lack of seriousness that domestic violence is accorded by the criminal justice system and, in particular, the number of cases that are cancelled at investigator committee stage. This is discussed further below.

When discussing custody meetings, the domestic violence support services felt that social workers do not always see the needs of children and mothers in the context of domestic violence and the trauma they have lived with. This can result in the risks to children not being recognised. (James & Hovakimyan, 2024, page 24). There are also reports from the Compulsory Enforcement Service that contact and visitation orders are not always clear and that they have limited options in terms of enforcing orders. Moreover, the powers of investigation when children refuse contact with a parent are limited to requesting psychological reports rather than fully investigating the surrounding circumstances.

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Introduce mandatory screening for domestic violence in civil courts. Develop guidelines to ensure that domestic or other violence is properly taken into account in separation, custody and visitation decisions.	High
Consider introducing standard forms for decisions in custody and visitation cases to enable proper recording of the terms of custody and visitation orders and any relevant findings on violence.	Medium

31. *Hasmik Khachatryan v Armenia* (Appln No. 11829/16), 12 December 2024, at: <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-238376>.

32. *Petrosyan v Armenia* (Appln No. 51448/15), 4 April 2025, at: <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/?i=001-238658>.

Ensure proper coordination mechanisms between the criminal and civil courts and a proper understanding of any differences in burden and balance of proof when determining past events and future risk of violence.	High
Ensure that relevant professionals are able to monitor and document evidence of abuse or harmful impacts of visits (whether supervised or unsupervised) and inform the court so that courts can review and/or reconsider any decisions on visitation or custody based on up-to-date information.	High
Ensure social work centres have adequate resources including sufficient space and staff to enable supervised visits to take place in a safe environment and with necessary support as well as to recognise potential signs of distress in children as a result of supervised contact.	High

## Criminal law

The primary aim of criminal law measures is to guide Parties in putting into place effective policies to rein in violence against women and domestic violence. The drafters agreed that, in principle, all criminal law provisions of the convention should be presented in a gender-neutral manner; the sex of the victim or perpetrator should thus, in principle, not be a constitutive element of the crime. However, this does not prevent Parties from introducing gender-specific provisions. (*Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention*, 2011, paragraphs 152-3)

The adoption of the new Criminal Code in 2021<sup>33</sup> and the comprehensive legislative amendments enacted in 2024<sup>34</sup> were designed to ensure that the substantive criminal law of Armenia in respect of violence against women and domestic violence. These included psychological violence and stalking and also strengthened protection against acts such as privacy breaches, illegal deprivation of liberty, extortion, and threats, by embedding the relationship-based aggravating factors and recognising situations of vulnerability and dependence. For the first time, the Code provides a more holistic understanding of abuse, capturing the cumulative and non-physical forms of harm that typify domestic violence. These are in broad compliance with the convention and examined under the respective articles below.

One suggestion that has been made by various local and International CSOs is that Armenia requires a specific offence of domestic violence to ensure that it is taken seriously by all actors in the criminal justice system and throughout the system of protection orders, visitation and custody. Although not a requirement of the Istanbul Convention, such an approach can help, for example, to ensure the dynamics of coercion and control are properly understood and taken into account and when ensuring joined-up practice across different authorities and in particular between the criminal decisions and proceedings relating to custody and visitation. An alternative method of achieving this understanding is through policies and guidelines and ensuring appropriate flagging or data sharing between the courts that recognises the offence as one of domestic violence. The inclusion of the domestic relationship as an aggravating feature of offences may help to ensure this. What is important is that the specific offences of violence against women in the domestic sphere are properly recognised in law and prosecuted with the availability of sentences commensurate to the gravity of the offence and capable of acting as a deterrent. The 2024 amendments to the criminal code recognising the domestic relationship between perpetrator and victim and the newly developed database may assist in ensuring that domestic violence is viewed with the seriousness it requires.

The current Gender Strategy and Action plan includes budgeted lines for training law enforcement, prosecutors and judiciary in respect of these offences.

### Psychological violence (Article 33)

Armenia's Criminal Code 2021 at Article 194 introduced the notion of "mental influence" (հոգեկան ներգործություն), criminalising threats of serious crimes, systematic humiliation of dignity, and social isolation when committed under conditions of real danger. Amendments in April 2024 further expanded the scope of Article 194 by including as aggravating circumstances acts committed by a *partner or former partner*,

33. The new Criminal Code of the Republic of Armenia, amended on 12 April 2024, at: [https://foi.am/u\\_files/file/legislation/CRIMINAL%20CODE%20OF%20THE%20REPUBLIC%20OF%20ARMENIA.pdf](https://foi.am/u_files/file/legislation/CRIMINAL%20CODE%20OF%20THE%20REPUBLIC%20OF%20ARMENIA.pdf) [English].

34. The new Criminal Code of the Republic of Armenia, amended on 12 April 2024, at: <http://parliament.am/legislation.php?sel=show&ID=9204&lang=arm> [Armenian].

and by recognising the *gender-based motivation* of the offence through the explicit inclusion of “sex” (սեռ) among protected characteristics. These changes made it possible to better address psychological abuse within domestic settings by contextualising the perpetrator–victim relationship and motive.

Additionally, Article 196 was amended to criminalise inflicting severe mental suffering or physical pain in cases not leading to physical injury, with harsher penalties where the victim is a partner, former partner, or a particularly vulnerable individual. These provisions allow for legal responses to patterns of emotional abuse, intimidation, and coercive control, even in the absence of physical violence.

**To ensure consistent application and effectiveness, guidance and training on definitions and thresholds for “mental influence” or “mental suffering” and a victim sensitive approach to evidence collection and interpretation is required.**

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Guidance could be issued to police, prosecutors, lawyers and the judiciary to ensure that psychological harm, coercion and control are properly identified, prosecuted and punished.	Medium

### Stalking (Article 34)

Stalking is the intentional conduct of repeatedly engaging in threatening conduct directed at another person, causing her or him to fear for her or his safety. Stalking in the digital sphere includes threats (of a sexual, economic, physical or psychological nature), damage to reputation, monitoring and gathering of private information on the victim, identity theft, solicitation for sex, impersonating the victim and harassing with accomplices to isolate the victim. (GREVIO, 2021)

Among the most transformative developments of the 2024 criminal justice reform was the introduction of Article 196.1, which established the criminal offence of *stalking*. This article criminalises a repeated course of conduct that instils fear, anxiety, or a need to alter one’s life due to safety concerns. It explicitly includes both physical and technology-facilitated stalking and recognises the specific vulnerability of victims when the perpetrator is a current or former partner, relative, or someone in a position of power.

Practical enforcement however always presents considerable challenges and requires a shift in practice. Law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and judges must be equipped to identify and assess cumulative acts that, when viewed collectively, create a persistent and threatening presence in the victim’s life. This will require guidance on how to operationalise this norm. Otherwise, stalking may frequently be misclassified under general harassment or dismissed altogether, particularly when the perpetrator is known to the victim. This highlights the need for specialised training, awareness-raising, and the development of risk assessment protocols to treat stalking as both a standalone crime and a warning sign for potentially escalating violence, including femicide.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of the new law depends on its integration into Armenia’s broader protection system under the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence. Stalking victims must have timely access to protection orders, safe housing, and psychosocial support. Enhanced inter-agency coordination between law enforcement, social services, and judiciary is crucial to ensure a swift and gender-sensitive response. Hence, the successful implementation of Article 196.1 will ultimately hinge on sustained institutional commitment, public awareness, and the gradual development of a coherent body of case-law that reflects the lived experiences of stalking victims, both online and offline.

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Develop protocols and guidance for all relevant actors to operationalise the new law on stalking in both the online and offline sphere.	Medium
Train relevant actors on risk assessment and effective implementation of the law.	Medium

## Physical violence (Article 35)

Physical violence remains one of the most evident and mostly reported manifestations of abuse in intimate and domestic relationships. It encompasses actions that intentionally inflict bodily harm, pain, or physical suffering, whether through direct physical assaults, forced restraint, or repeated beatings. It also encompasses death or femicide.

In the Armenian legal context, criminal liability for such all forms of relevant physical violence is established through a graduated set of offences, reflecting the severity of the physical injury inflicted and, increasingly, the relational context in which the violence occurs.<sup>35</sup> In addition to the core provisions, Armenian law recognises other forms of physical aggression that may not lead to visible injury but nonetheless cause significant pain or suffering. Article 195 criminalises *physical assault*, such as blows or slaps, even when they do not result in a diagnosable injury. Article 196 addresses the *infliction of intense physical pain or psychological suffering*, filling an important gap in cases of degrading and coercive violence that falls short of bodily injury but reflects patterns of control and punishment.

A key change in the 2024 amendments was the expansion of aggravating circumstances to explicitly include acts committed by a *partner or former partner*. Previously, only close relatives were covered, leaving a gap in protection for victims in non-marital or non-cohabiting intimate relationships. The amendments also introduced sex as a protected ground under the discriminatory motive clauses, making it possible to qualify certain acts of physical violence as gender-based, thereby better reflecting the underlying motives and power dynamics often present in domestic violence cases.

Care should be taken to ensure that *fines or non-custodial penalties* are not used in serious cases as this risks undermining the deterrent effect of criminal law. When monetary sanctions are applied in situations of economic dependence, they may also place an indirect burden on the victim.

The consistency of judicial practice and clarity in classifying and prosecuting domestic violence has been identified as an area requiring further attention. **Ensuring effective application of the amended provisions will require ongoing professional training and the development of specialised guidance for law enforcement and the judiciary, grounded in an understanding of the gendered dynamics and recurring nature of domestic violence.**

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Produce guidance for law enforcement and the judiciary to cover the new offences.	Medium

## Sexual violence including rape (Article 36)

The Istanbul Convention requires that the following intentional conducts are criminalised:

- a) “engaging in non-consensual vaginal, anal or oral penetration of a sexual nature of the body of another person with any bodily part or object”;
- b) Engaging in other non-consensual acts of a sexual nature with a person;
- c) Causing another person to engage in non-consensual acts of a sexual nature with a third person” (Article 36, paragraph 1).

The Armenian Criminal Code, as adopted in 2021, already provided a relatively detailed legal basis for addressing sexual offences. Among its significant features was the shift towards a *consent-based definition of rape*, aligning with evolving international standards that move away from requiring proof of physical resistance. The offence of rape is criminalised under Article 198 of the Criminal Code, covering non-consensual vaginal, anal or oral penetration committed against the will of the person or in disregard of their will, by the use or threat of force, or through taking advantage of the victim’s vulnerability. However, this means that where the victim is not considered vulnerable and there is no violence or threat, but non-consensual penetration takes place it will not necessarily be considered rape. This definition does not fully meet the requirements of the Istanbul Convention, and consideration should be given to reforming the law.

35. Article 166 criminalises grievous bodily harm, such as life-threatening injuries, loss of function or organs, disfigurement, or lasting health damage. Article 167 addresses moderate bodily harm, while Article 171 punishes minor bodily harm that causes short-term health impairment or minor loss of working capacity.

Further relevant provisions are found in Articles 199-202, which address a range of acts related to *sexual coercion, exploitation of vulnerable persons, and sexual acts with minors*. These articles also foresee *aggravated forms of offences* when committed either whether there is a lack of reasonable belief in consent or against certain categories of victims, such as pregnant women, children, or individuals in a helpless state.

The 2024 amendments introduced a series of critical refinements, further strengthening the legal response to sexual violence. One of the most meaningful changes was the systematic inclusion of the partner or former partner as an aggravating circumstance across a wide range of sexual offences, including rape.

The amendments also expanded aggravating circumstances for sexual violence to include the ground of *sex* and where the offence is committed through the abuse of *official capacity or authority*, or by exploiting *material or psychological dependence*.

Despite these advancements, the implementation of legal standards remains uneven. Concerns persist around the *underreporting of sexual violence*, often linked to societal stigma, challenging the possibility of rape in domestic settings, lack of victim-sensitive procedures, and gaps in enforcement. **There is also a need for comprehensive guidance and specialised training for law enforcement, prosecutors, and judges to ensure that the consent-based framework is correctly interpreted and applied in practice. Strengthening procedural safeguards, ensuring access to legal assistance, and creating a supportive environment for survivors to come forward remain essential steps in ensuring the effective realisation of legal protections against sexual violence in Armenia.**

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Consider reforming the law on rape to ensure it is clear that all forms of non-consensual penetration are considered criminal.	High
Produce specialist guidance, protocols and training for law enforcement, lawyers (including defence lawyers), and the judiciary for dealing with sexual violence cases including the treatment of witnesses.	Medium
Consider taking awareness raising measures to reduce stigma and improve the reporting rates for rape.	Medium
Increase access to specialist sexual assault centres (see above).	Medium

### Forced marriage (Article 37)

Forced marriage represents a serious violation of personal autonomy and dignity, often occurring within the broader context of coercive control and gender-based subordination. In Armenia’s legal framework, this form of abuse is explicitly addressed under Article 197 of the Criminal Code. The article establishes criminal liability for compelling a person to enter into or dissolve a marriage, or to have a child, by means of *violence, threats of violence, blackmail, degrading treatment, threats to property*, or through *abuse of material or other dependence*. It also encompasses other coercive means aimed at overriding the free will of the individual.

Nonetheless, practical challenges remain. According to Equality Now et al ((Equality Now et al et al., 2024) there is a notable absence of data and procedures to identify forced marriages (committed not only against minors, but adults), as well as a lack of prevention programmes addressing early marriage. The offence is rarely prosecuted, and the *low level of awareness*, both among professionals and the public, can prevent victims from recognising and reporting such coercion. In addition, the relatively *lenient sentencing framework*, which includes non-custodial penalties, raises concerns about whether the response is proportionate to the severity and long-term consequences of forced marriage.

To ensure the effective application of this norm, there is a pressing need for *targeted training* for law enforcement, social workers, and child protection services, as well as *awareness raising activities* for the public at large. Early identification mechanisms, risk assessment procedures, and victim-centred protective measures must also be strengthened to prevent and respond to forced marriage in a manner that upholds the dignity and rights of those affected.

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Take awareness raising measures in the general population, particularly rural areas and train relevant personnel	Low

### Female genital mutilation (Article 38)

Due to the nature of female genital mutilation (FGM), this is one of the criminal offences that break with the principle of gender neutrality of the criminal law part of this convention. It sets out the criminal offence of female genital mutilation, the victims of which are necessarily women or girls. (*Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, 2011*)

While certain provisions of the Armenian Criminal Code could theoretically apply to acts of FGM, such as *Article 166 on causing serious damage to health*, or *Article 197 on compelled childbirth or marriage* in a broader interpretation, the absence of a dedicated provision specifically prohibiting FGM means that the law does not reflect the *specific nature, motives, and consequences* of this practice. It also creates uncertainty about the scope of protection and the adequacy of legal deterrence, especially in situations where such acts may be carried out under the guise of cultural or familial customs.

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Amending the legislation to include specific provision prohibiting FGM	Medium
Raise awareness of the issue of FGM amongst the general population	Medium

### Forced abortion and forced sterilisation (Article 39)

*Forced abortion and forced sterilisation* refer to severe violations of a person's bodily autonomy and reproductive rights. These acts involve terminating a pregnancy or conducting a sterilisation procedure without the victim's prior and informed consent, often under coercion, deceit, or pressure.

The Armenian *Criminal Code* explicitly criminalises both of these practices as distinct offences. Under this provision, it is a criminal act to cause a woman to terminate a pregnancy or undergo sterilisation through violence, threat, deception, or abuse of power, or by taking advantage of the victim's vulnerable position. The sentence is higher if the offence is committed by a partner or family member. The Gender Strategy identifies the problem of sex selective abortion and proposes awareness raising and training measures designed to prevent this. [p27]

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Implement the provisions of the Gender Strategy with respect to sex-selective abortion.	Medium

### Sexual harassment (Article 40)

*Sexual harassment* encompasses any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal, or physical conduct of a sexual nature that violates the dignity of a person, especially when it creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment. GREVIO's General Recommendation No. 1 considers the following behaviour online or through digital means to come under this definition: 1) non-consensual image or video sharing; 2) non-consensual taking, producing or procuring of intimate images or videos; 3) exploitation, coercion and threats 4) sexualised bullying; and 5) cyberflashing.

Under the Istanbul Convention sexual harassment can be covered by either criminal law or other legal sanction. Under Armenian criminal law, sexual harassment is not explicitly criminalised as a separate offence. Neither the Criminal Code of 2021 nor the 2024 amendments introduced a provision that directly addresses this conduct. While certain manifestations of sexual harassment may be prosecuted under general provisions, such as those relating to coercion, threats, or abuse of authority, these are not designed to capture the more

subtle, persistent, and often non-physical forms of harassment that are common in social, professional, and educational settings. Unwelcome sexual comments, insinuations, or gestures that do not rise to the level of assault remain outside the scope of the current criminal framework.

Sexual harassment is defined in the Law on Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men as a form of gender discrimination in Article 3(21) read in conjunction with article 6 (which prohibits gender discrimination). Discrimination is criminalised under Article 203 of the Criminal Code however this is not used in practice and no sanction is foreseen either under civil or criminal law.

Armenia has yet to enact a comprehensive anti-discrimination law, which would likely include a prohibition on sexual harassment as a form of discrimination. This legislative gap is particularly significant given the documented prevalence of sexual harassment in workplaces, schools, and public spaces. Although some protection may be available through administrative mechanisms under labour or anti-discrimination law (once adopted), these do not offer the kind of deterrence or redress that criminalisation would provide.

In terms of the digital dimension of sexual harassment, Armenia does not yet have specific laws. It is worth recalling that online stalking has been criminalised, however, although the production and dissemination of pornography is prohibited, Armenian law has not yet been amended to fully take into account the digital dimension of violence against women. Personal data may be protected under the data protection laws or laws on electronic communications, but it is unlikely that this would cover the range of harassment and abuse experienced by women in the digital sphere.

Progress has been made but some areas remain outstanding	
Action	Priority
Review the law to ensure that sexual harassment is adequately covered. This may be under criminal or civil law but should cover sexual harassment in all forms including in employment, at school and street harassment.	High
Review the law in respect of the digital dimension of harassment to ensure the following matters are adequately covered: 1) non-consensual image or video sharing; 2) non-consensual taking, producing or procuring of intimate images or videos; 3) exploitation, coercion and threats 4) sexualised bullying; and 5) cyberflashing.	High

### Sanctions and measures (Article 45)

Offences established in accordance with the convention must be punishable by effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions, taking into account their seriousness. Sanctions can include monitoring and supervision and the withdrawal of parental rights if the best interests of the child cannot be guaranteed in any other way.

Following the 2024 amendments the Criminal Code explicitly recognises the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, such as current or former partners as an aggravating feature of an offence. The penalties prescribed vary according to the gravity of the offence, ranging from fines and alternatives to imprisonment to different terms of imprisonment. Crimes involving physical and sexual violence, trafficking, or sustained psychological harm may result in long custodial sentences, particularly when accompanied by aggravating factors like prior abuse, coercion, or discriminatory motives.

Despite legislative improvements, many offences still provide for non-custodial measures such as fines, even in cases of repeated abuse or intimate partner violence. As already mentioned on specific criminal offences above, this is problematic in situations where the perpetrator and victim share financial resources or cohabitation, potentially burdening the victim and undermining the protective purpose of the sanction. Furthermore, monetary penalties are often perceived as insufficient in reflecting the harm and gravity of coercive control or long-term abuse.

In *Khachatryan v Armenia*, one issue identified by the Court was the reclassification of the offending, which led to a short enough prison sentence to render him *a priori* eligible for an exemption for serving his sentence. The ECtHR held at paragraph 199 that it could not be said that the reclassification of the offence and the consequence imposition of a more lenient sentence took place following careful scrutiny of all the relevant considerations related to the case. [199] Moreover, an amnesty or pardon is not compatible with the duty incumbent on the state to investigate acts of ill-treatment and to combat impunity. [201] Importantly the Court held that:

'In the Court's view, such an approach by the domestic courts may be indicative of a certain leniency as regards the punishment of violence against women, instead of communicating a strong message to the community that violence against women will not be tolerated...Such leniency may in turn further discourage victims of domestic violence from reporting such acts, where this is already an issue of significant concern as far as Armenia is concerned...' [203]

**There appear to be a number of challenges in implementation in particular in relation to either dropping prosecutions or reclassifying them as lower offences. These are discussed in more detail below under investigation and prosecution.**

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Research the imposition of penalties by the judiciary to identify whether domestic violence and violence against women is being appropriately sanctioned.	Medium

### Aggravating circumstances (Article 46)

Articles 69 and 71 of the Criminal Code as amended by the 2024 amendments provide for the aggravating circumstances required by Article 46 of the convention. The 2024 amendments provide explicit recognition of the gendered and relational dynamics that often underpin violence in private or domestic settings. If consistently and effectively applied these measures should help to remedy a previous tendency to downplay the significance of domestic violence as referred to above. However, their **effective implementation requires capacity strengthening among legal practitioners, consistent interpretation by courts, and data systems capable of capturing how these circumstances are applied in practice.**

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Build capacity amongst legal practitioners and the judiciary to ensure aggravating features are applied in sentencing decisions.	Medium
Monitor the use of aggravating features in sentencing decisions to ensure they are appropriately applied.	Low

### Prohibition of mandatory alternative dispute resolution or sentencing (Article 48)

Armenian criminal law does not impose mandatory alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, such as mediation, in cases involving acts of violence, including domestic or gender-based violence. The Criminal Procedure Code establishes prosecutorial discretion and judicial oversight in determining the appropriate procedure but does not permit or require that victims of violence enter into reconciliation processes with alleged perpetrators as a condition for prosecution or sentencing. This legal position reflects an awareness of the risks inherent in applying restorative or alternative justice models in cases where power imbalances, coercion, or repeated victimisation may be present.

Furthermore, in the context of domestic violence, the [Law on Reconciliation](#) provides a critical safeguard. Specifically, Article 5, (2) (5) and Article 6, (2) (5) establish that if the mediator has reasonable grounds to suspect that a party has been subjected to domestic violence, they are obligated to inform the presumed victim about the protection mechanisms available under the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence. This reflects an important recognition that reconciliation may not be safe or appropriate in cases of domestic violence due to power imbalances, the risk of re-victimisation, and the need to prioritise victim safety. These provisions are designed to ensure that mediators remain vigilant to signs of abuse and take steps to redirect victims toward rights-based remedies rather than reconciliation attempts.

Recent legislative changes have introduced a compulsory mediation requirement in family disputes under Article 7 of the Family Code of Armenia, which now states that mediation is mandatory before filing a court claim in family disputes, as regulated by the Law on Mediation. Additional procedural aspects are detailed in Article 11.1 of the Law on Mediation, which explains how mandatory mediation should be conducted. While participation in the mediation session is obligatory, including hearing the basic information presented by

the mediator, the process itself does not force a settlement, and parties may still proceed to court afterwards. These provisions are expected to be implemented from 1 July 2025, once the official register of mediators is established. However, at the same time amendments to the Law on Mediation were recently adopted and will come into force starting 1 July 2025. According to these changes, mandatory mediation will apply prior to court proceedings in a broad range of family disputes, including those related to divorce, child custody, child support, division of marital property, and parental rights. Therefore Article 2.1 of the Law now explicitly establishes exceptions to the mandatory mediation requirement. Parties are not required to undergo mandatory mediation in cases where:

- i) A protection order has been issued under the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence;
- ii) One party has been criminally prosecuted for intentional crimes against the other party or their close relatives;
- iii) One party has been declared missing, is legally incapacitated, is in pre-trial detention, or is serving a custodial sentence.

These amendments aim to strengthen the framework for mediation and reduce the court workload while also recognising that mediation may be unsafe or inappropriate in cases involving domestic violence or other serious vulnerabilities.

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Monitor the use of fines in sentencing to ensure commensurate to the gravity of the offence and that the fine does not impose a burden on the victim.	Low
Ensure all relevant judges and legal professionals are aware of the legal changes resulting in exceptions to mandatory mediation in family cases.	Medium

## Chapter 6

# Investigation, prosecution, procedural law and protective measures

### General obligations, immediate response, prevention, protection (Articles 49 and 50)

An effective response to domestic and intimate partner violence requires not only political will and preventive measures but also a robust system of investigation, prosecution, and victim-centred procedural safeguards. In recent years, Armenia has undertaken significant steps to strengthen its institutional and legal response to such violence, including improvements in Police procedures, risk assessment mechanisms, and protective interventions.

### Reporting to, immediate response and investigations by law-enforcement agencies

Under Armenia's domestic violence prevention framework, law enforcement officers are under a legal and institutional obligation to register and respond to all reports of domestic and intimate partner violence, regardless of whether the report originates from the victim or a third party. This approach reflects the evolving understanding that the responsibility for intervention and protection must not rest solely on the victim's initiative.

Police officers are instructed to act without delay once such incidents are reported. The registration of incidents is mandatory and formalised through standardised procedures under Order No. 22-L (2019), while Government Decree No. 1381-N (2019) further institutionalises the requirement to input case data into a centralised electronic registry. This ensures consistency, accountability, and coordination among actors, while also allowing law enforcement agencies to track patterns and monitor compliance.

Once a case is registered, law enforcement officers should assess the situation on site using structured interviews with the victim, the alleged perpetrator (if present), and any other witnesses, and check whether the perpetrator possesses firearms. Although it is not envisaged that these are joint interviews this is not made clear in the standardised procedures however this is made clear in the "Police response to domestic violence: Handbook for Armenian police officers" (Council of Europe, 2024b). These procedures are supported by the structured risk assessment tool adopted by the Order of the Head of the Police of the Republic of Armenia N 88-L, on "Establishing the Criteria for Assessing the Immediate Danger in Cases of Domestic Violence Threat or Continuation" on 13 December 2024. The officer then decides whether to issue a warning (in low-risk, first-time cases) or an emergency intervention order (in the presence of immediate danger). According to the reply to the questionnaire, the effectiveness of these early interventions is demonstrated by a low rate of repeat incidents.

As confirmed in the Police reply to the questionnaire, once an incident is documented and assessed, the Police forward all relevant materials, including statements, intervention orders, and supporting documentation, to the Investigative Committee to determine whether a criminal case should be initiated. This procedure ensures that law enforcement serves not only as the first responder but also as a facilitator of broader protective and judicial processes. These institutional measures reflect a comprehensive and operational approach to immediate Police response that integrates reporting, risk-informed decision-making, victim protection, and coordination with investigative and support institutions. The police have undertaken training to increase capacity and have reportedly significantly improved the response to domestic violence over recent years. The specialist domestic violence units have recently been disbanded. The police hope that this will lead to a wider spread of expertise amongst the general police services. This should be monitored to make sure this happens in practice and that it does not lead to a reduction in expertise and response for victims of gender-based violence and domestic violence.

In addition, following ongoing institutional reforms, territorial subdivisions of the Police have been staffed with new personnel, for whom targeted training courses are organised to develop professional knowledge and skills. The Department for Professional and Methodological Support of the Community Policing General Department has been reorganised and now provides daily supervision and methodological assistance to territorial subdivisions, aiming to strengthen their professional capacities and enhance the quality of their work. At the same time, the restructuring has led to the influx of new staff, which highlights the continued need for systematic and specialised training to ensure that all officers are adequately equipped to handle cases of domestic and family violence in line with best practices. There has also been an improvement in the number of female officers employed by the police.

The Human Rights Ombudsman reported that stereotypes and misconceptions of violence against women and domestic violence were among the greatest challenges in combating and preventing domestic violence. (Annual Report of the Human Rights Ombudsman on the activities of the 2023 year, human rights and on the state of protection of freedoms, 2024, p. 521)

As in all areas, there remain challenges based on perceptions and misconceptions about domestic violence, violence against women and victim behaviour and victim blaming. These are best addressed through continued training and formalised monitoring of the effectiveness of that training. Furthermore, the effect of disbanding of the specialist units with the intention of increasing general capacity should be monitored.

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Continue training programmes designed to sensitise and increase police capacity	Medium
Ensure good representation of female officers in the police	Medium

## Effective investigation and prosecution

Once domestic violence is recorded, the relevant documents, including the incident report, the risk assessment, and any protective measures, are referred to the territorial units of the Investigative Committee for a decision on whether to initiate criminal proceedings.<sup>36</sup> This procedural handover is critical to ensuring that the Police response does not remain administrative but transitions to judicial enforcement where necessary.

The co-operation between the Police and the Investigative Committee has been gradually formalised and strengthened. In recent years, and with the support of the Council of Europe, joint trainings have been organised for Police officers and investigators, aimed at reinforcing inter-agency coordination and improving the victim-sensitive handling of domestic violence cases. These capacity-building efforts are part of a broader institutional reform intended to reduce fragmentation between the various actors involved in criminal justice processes.

There is limited availability of disaggregated data on prosecution and conviction rates in domestic violence cases. While statistical data on reported cases is gathered and centralised through the Police Information Centre and entered into the electronic registry (Government Decree No. 1381-N, 2019), the ability to track how many of these result in charges, trials, and convictions is not always guaranteed. More detailed and gender-sensitive judicial statistics are needed to assess whether investigations are resulting in meaningful accountability. The current difficulty in properly analysing the statistical data may be resolved by the new database. In a welcome development there has been a slight increase in the proportion of women holding senior positions in the Investigative Committee which has steadily increased, from 14% (93 women) in 2021, to 14.9% (118 women) in 2022, and reaching 16.7% (130 women) in 2023.

In sum, while Armenia has established the formal legal pathways to enable the effective investigation and prosecution of domestic violence, continuous efforts are needed to ensure that these mechanisms are accessible, consistent, and ultimately capable of delivering justice. This includes institutionalising multi-disciplinary co-operation, strengthening *ex officio* procedures, improving case tracking, and addressing cultural and procedural barriers that may discourage victims from seeking or sustaining legal protection.

<sup>36</sup> Response to the questionnaire.

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Develop and adopt protocols for the proper and effective investigation of gender based and domestic violence including best practice evidence collection and storage including the digital dimension of such violence	High

## Conviction rates

Conviction rates are a key indicator of the effectiveness and credibility of the justice system in responding to domestic and intimate partner violence. They reflect not only the capacity of investigative and prosecutorial bodies to substantiate cases but also the broader system's willingness to hold perpetrators accountable.

In Armenia, comprehensive and disaggregated data on conviction rates in domestic violence cases remain limited and fragmented, which presents a challenge for monitoring enforcement and measuring impact. A new data collection system implemented in 2024 may improve this.

Police statistical data collection on reported domestic and intimate partner violence cases has been centralised through the Police Information Centre, with input provided by territorial units via quarterly reporting in line with the requirements set forth by the Order of the Head of the Police N 22-L on establishing the form for reporting the activities related to domestic violence cases carried out by the Police divisions. This data feeds into the electronic registry system operationalised under Government Decree No. 1381-N (2019) on the centralised registration of domestic violence cases. However, while this system tracks incidents, protective measures applied, and individuals involved, it does not systematically link these records with outcomes in the criminal justice process, namely, whether investigations lead to indictments, prosecutions, and ultimately, convictions and the sanctions imposed.

While the electronic registry has strengthened data standardisation, it does not yet produce analytical outputs that track outcomes across the justice chain. As a result, the public and oversight bodies lack a full picture of how effectively the criminal justice system addresses domestic violence.

The findings of the "Study on the Regulatory Framework for Data Collection on Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence" (Voskanyan, 2024) further illustrate this gap. According to data compiled in the study using International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) and European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) classification methodologies, the number of initiated proceedings by the Investigative Committee in 2023 was 1,848, yet only 338 cases concluded with an indictment, and 341 individuals were referred to court. This yields a conviction referral rate of approximately 18%, underscoring a significant drop-off between the number of cases processed and those reaching the courtroom. In comparison, in 2022, 122 cases involving 126 individuals were referred to court. The majority of indictments involved physical violence, particularly acts categorised under battery and bodily harm provisions. These figures point to the need for improving procedural follow-through and case-building strategies to ensure that criminal proceedings are not prematurely discontinued or undercharged.

Improving transparency and developing a dedicated system for tracking cases from report through final judicial decision would not only support more effective policymaking but also reinforce public trust in the justice system. In line with international best practices, Armenia should enhance its judicial statistics to include regularly published, disaggregated data on prosecutions, indictments, and convictions, enabling stakeholders to assess progress and identify where institutional gaps persist.

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Improve transparency and develop a dedicated system for tracking cases from report through to final decision.	Medium
Regularly publish disaggregated judicial statistics on prosecutions, indictments, and convictions.	Medium
Research the root causes of the attrition of cases occurring between reports by victims, investigations by the police and final convictions by the Court to ensure that violence against women and domestic violence is being pursued with due diligence.	Medium

## Risk assessment and risk management (Article 51)

Armenia's domestic violence prevention framework places particular emphasis on risk assessment and risk management as critical tools to ensure the ongoing protection of victims and prevent the recurrence of violence.

### Risk assessment

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The legal foundation is laid in Article 13 of the *Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence*, which requires law enforcement and other competent bodies to assess the immediate threat of recurrence or continuation of domestic or intimate partner violence. This assessment must accompany any law enforcement response to a reported incident and inform the selection of appropriate protective measures.

**Government Decree No. 181-N, of 20 February 2025**, "On Approving the Procedure for Identifying Cases of Domestic and Gender-Based Violence, Referring Victims of Domestic and Gender-Based Violence, and Assessing the Risk of Recurrence of Domestic and Gender-Based Violence", establishes a unified and multi-sectoral procedure for identifying cases, referring victims, and conducting risk assessments. The decree sets mandatory timeframes, 12 hours for urgent cases and 24 hours for all others, within which frontline responders must act. It introduces a standardised risk assessment methodology that includes both objective indicators (e.g., prior violence, access to weapons, history of threats) and subjective criteria (e.g., visible fear, emotional instability, or isolation of the victim). Where minors or legally incapacitated persons are involved, an automatic obligation arises to engage the guardianship authorities, who are expected to assess care needs and possible alternative arrangements. The decree also mandates coordination between law enforcement, social protection, education, and healthcare systems in managing identified risks.

Further specificity is provided by the Order of the Head of the Police No. 88-L, adopted on 13 December 2024, which formalises the criteria and procedure for assessing imminent threats at the scene of the incident. Police officers are required to use a structured checklist covering a range of behavioural, situational, and contextual risk factors and document whether at least three risk indicators are present. If this threshold is met, the case is deemed high-risk, triggering an emergency intervention order and subsequent monitoring measures. If implemented well, these tools should help to ensure that police response is not arbitrary but grounded in a structured, evidence-informed approach that prioritises victim safety and justifies preventive action.

### Risk management

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A key mechanism of ongoing risk management is outlined in Article 11 of the *Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence*, titled *Placing a Person Who Has Committed Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence Under Preventive Registration*. This provision establishes a preventive registration system for individuals who are subject to a warning, emergency intervention order, or court-issued protection order, as well as those convicted of a domestic violence-related offence. Preventive registration is not a form of punishment, but a risk mitigation tool aimed at close monitoring of individuals identified as high-risk. Following the issuance of any protective measure, police are required to notify their superior officer, as well as support services and guardianship authorities when minors or legally incapacitated persons are involved, in line with Articles 7(5), 7(9), and 7(12). Additionally, pursuant to Article 11 of the *Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence* and Order No. 91-L (2024), the perpetrator is entered into a system of preventive registration, which includes monthly follow-ups and monitoring visits. These efforts help track behavioural change, facilitate referrals to rehabilitation programs, and prevent further escalation of violence.

According to Order No. 91-L of the Head of the Police, adopted on 17 December 2024, police officers responsible for preventive registration are required to conduct monthly follow-up meetings with both the registered individual and the victim. These meetings serve to monitor behaviour, evaluate any changes in the level of threat, and reinforce the legal obligations imposed on the perpetrator. Where the registered individual has not been subject to any new protection order or conviction within one year from the last known act of violence, they may be removed from the registry. However, during that period, officers continue regular monitoring, risk reassessment, and awareness-raising discussions, including referrals to rehabilitation programs when applicable.

On November 17, 2023, the Republic of Armenia Government adopted Resolution N 1986-N "On the Application and Financing of Electronic Surveillance Means, as well as on Establishing the Procedure for Maintaining the Electronic Surveillance System Database and Using the Data". Electronic monitoring, if implemented properly, can support risk management and the effectiveness of protection orders.

Article 22 of the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence provides that all private life data received by competent authorities on cases of domestic violence and/or crimes involving victims or alleged victims shall be confidential.

Rather than viewing each case as a one-time event, the legal framework has evolved to support a continuum of protection, aimed at reducing long-term harm and preventing re-victimisation. **This approach reflects an increasing alignment with international standards. Implementation of these measures should be monitored and training provided to ensure they are well understood and applied by relevant professionals.**

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Training and monitoring of the implementation of the legal framework and protocols is required.	High

### Emergency barring orders (Article 52)

In Armenia, emergency barring orders, legally termed “անհետաձգելի միջամտության որոշումներ” (emergency intervention orders), are issued by the Police to immediately separate perpetrators from victims, addressing imminent harm when judicial protection might be delayed. These orders are part of a system under Article 5(1) of the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence, which also includes warnings and court-issued protection orders. They are complementary, can be issued regardless of criminal proceedings, require a reasoned decision based on proportionality and necessity, and notably, do not require victim consent (Article 5(2)). Police issue warnings for first-time incidents without imminent threat, and emergency intervention orders for credible risks of continued violence.<sup>37</sup>

Article 7 requires competent police officers to impose emergency intervention orders when there is a substantiated assumption of an immediate threat of repeated or continued violence, including past harm or where risk factors like stalking, controlling behaviour, access to weapons, or previous violations of protective measures indicate a likely recurrence. These orders, effective immediately for 20-25 days, are communicated to both parties. If a victim applies for a court-issued protection order, the emergency decision remains valid until the court decision is rendered, ensuring that there is no gap in protective coverage.

Article 7(3) outlines possible restrictions: immediate removal of the perpetrator from the joint residence (with a single police-escorted return for belongings), prohibition on approaching the victim at specified locations, a minimum distance requirement, temporary weapons confiscation and a ban on all communication with the victim or dependents. Police are required to ensure the immediate departure of the perpetrator and to remain at the residence until the person departs.

The Constitutional Court Decision [ՍԴԴ-1522 \(14.04.2020\)](#) upheld the constitutionality of these orders, including eviction, providing their implementation is proportionate to the aim of protecting the life and health of others and considers the perpetrators alternative housing options and the safety of the victim.

If the order affects the sole legal representative of a child or an incapacitated person, the officer is required to immediately inform the guardianship and trusteeship body, which must arrange temporary care within 24 hours (Article 7(6)). If the victim is to be relocated to a shelter, the Police must stay on the scene until the person and their dependents can safely collect their belongings and leave (Article 7(8)).

Police procedures for issuing warnings and emergency orders were standardised by Order No. 24-L of the Head of Police (4 December 2024). According to the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence (Article 7(11)), responsibility for oversight lies directly with the Police, and any violation of the terms of the decision triggers legal consequences, including potential criminal liability or grounds for escalation to a court protection order. Order No. 86-L of the Head of Police (12 December 2024) governs supervision and enforcement of orders by introducing procedures for monitoring compliance, verifying the continued observance of restrictions, and responding to any breach.

Article 9 of the law regulates the interplay between emergency intervention orders and criminal proceedings. If a case leads to criminal prosecution and the investigative body applies certain procedural measures, such as detention, judicial restraining orders, or witness protection mechanisms, the emergency decision may be

<sup>37</sup>. Response to questionnaire by Police.

partially or fully suspended for the duration of those measures. However, if those procedural measures do not cover all risk factors, the emergency decision may still be issued in parallel.

Appeals against emergency orders are possible administratively or judicially under the Administrative Procedure Code (Chapter 31.3, Article 222.11 requiring a court decision within 36 hours and ruling within 48 hours), but appeals do not suspend execution (Article 7(15)).

The legislation has undergone substantial amendment to implement a system of risk assessment and management, however women’s organisations report difficulties in enforcing in practice. The central issue is the failure to see domestic violence as a serious offence within the criminal and civil justice systems. This perception can lead to the prioritisation of the perpetrators’ rights over the safety and well-being of survivors. This is particularly the case when applying a proportionality test if the risk to the victim is underestimated. Women’s organisations state that ‘often the emergency intervention order is challenged in court by the perpetrator and the court overturns the order leaving the victim unprotected’.<sup>38</sup>

**Steps should be taken to monitor the reasons why emergency intervention orders are overturned, and whether in those circumstances subsequent instances of violence take place. At the same time steps should be taken to ensure judges and other actors in the legal system are properly trained to understand the dynamics of domestic violence, the cycle of power and control and the ways in which violence can affect the presentation of evidence.**

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Training of judges and other actors in the legal system to ensure the legal framework is applied as intended.	High
Collect data on and research the use of emergency intervention orders and proceedings for breach to better understand the reasons they are overturned.	Medium

### Restraining or protection orders (Article 53)

Armenia’s Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence uses protection orders (similar to restraining orders) as part of a system that includes warnings and emergency intervention orders (Article 5(1)). Judicially issued, protection orders aim to ensure victim safety, prevent re-victimisation, and support long-term protection.

Victims or support centres (with consent) can request these orders independently of other procedures (Article 8). For minors or incapacitated individuals, applications can be made by relatives, legal representatives, or guardianship bodies. Protection orders can be issued independently of or alongside criminal proceedings or emergency intervention orders. Courts issue protection orders for 4-12 months, with a possible six-month extension.

Article 8(5) lists potential restrictions: perpetrator removal from shared residence (considering victim shelter and perpetrator housing), prohibition from visiting victim’s frequented places (including those of dependents), a defined no-approach distance, weapon surrender, financial obligations (alimony-equivalent and urgent costs), restricted child contact, and a ban on all communication with the victim or dependents. For shared residences, the perpetrator can collect belongings once every two months under police escort. Weapon surrender must occur within 10 hours. Participation in rehabilitation programs may also be mandated. Police supervise enforcement.

Protection orders remain effective unless suspended or replaced by protective measures in a criminal investigation. Article 9 states that if criminal proceedings lead to measures like detention, psychiatric oversight, or witness protection, corresponding protection order restrictions are suspended. However, if criminal measures don’t restrict proximity or contact, a protection or emergency order can still be sought, for example to restrict contact.

Article 12 clarifies that protection orders cannot be issued against minors or legally incapacitated individuals. In such cases, alternative protection and response measures apply, including referral to rehabilitation services or civil procedures under relevant laws such as the Law on Psychiatric Care and the Civil Procedure Code.

<sup>38</sup>. Response to the questionnaire.

Under the Civil Procedure Code (Article 202) domestic violence protection orders have a 'special claim proceeding', recognising the urgency. Article 22(1)(14) of the Law on State Duty exempts claimants from court fees.

Chapter 27.1 of the Civil Procedure Code details procedural safeguards, allowing applications at the victim's residence or, with consent, where a support centre is located (Article 234.1). Applications require specific information about the parties, danger evidence, and prior interventions (Article 234.2). Courts must decide within five days without a hearing (Article 234.3), can inquire *ex officio* about facts and request information, and should refer criminal signs to the Prosecutor General. Granted orders are immediate, can include temporary shelter, require the abuser to cover medical costs, and are shared with relevant institutions. Police procedures for supervising compliance were updated by Order No. 86-L (December 12, 2024).

Modification or cancellation of orders is possible under strict conditions aimed at balancing protection with procedural fairness.

Despite these provisions, challenges in enforcement persist. Police have reported difficulties in obtaining court action for breaches of orders. This is corroborated by the Women's Rights Centre, which highlights enforcement as a significant issue, noting that legal obligations are not always respected by police, courts, or social services.

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Ensure the planned training in the Action Plan for police, prosecutors and judiciary includes appropriate responses to breaches of protection orders.	High

### Ex parte and ex officio proceedings (Article 55)

Law enforcement officers are empowered to act *ex officio* upon receiving information about a domestic violence incident, including through emergency intervention orders (Article 7, Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence), without requiring the victim to initiate a complaint. The Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence also explicitly prevents the discontinuation of protective measures due to the lack of a formal criminal complaint.

In cases of domestic violence, Article 11 of the Criminal Procedure Code of Armenia empowers the prosecutor to *initiate and pursue the case ex officio* (i.e., through public prosecution). This ensures that prosecution does not depend solely on the victim's initiative, which is particularly important given the dynamics of coercion, dependence, or fear that may prevent victims from pursuing justice on their own.

As above support centres or legal representatives can apply for protection orders in *ex parte* proceedings when necessary to ensure immediate and effective protection. In cases involving minors or legally incapacitated persons, close relatives, legal guardians, or the guardianship authority may petition the court, ensuring that proceedings can advance without undue delay or dependence on the victim's capacity or consent.

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Monitor whether <i>ex parte</i> and <i>ex officio</i> powers are used in practice in particular in cases where a victim seeks to withdraw her complaint.	Low

### Victim support in legal proceedings (Article 55)

Support centres play a key role in informing victims of their rights and helping them navigate legal processes. They offer tailored support, including accompanying the victim to court, ensuring privacy, and coordinating psychological or social services. Under Article 19 of the Law, support centres are required to provide information in an understandable and accessible way, particularly for persons with disabilities, children, or others with specific needs.

In addition, special procedural arrangements are made available when needed, such as closed hearings, remote testimony, or questioning in a separate room, to prevent secondary victimisation. The law emphasises the best interests of the child when children are victims or witnesses, ensuring that proceedings do not cause further emotional harm.

Full realisation of these safeguards depends on consistent implementation, timely inter-agency co-operation, and continued training of legal and support personnel on the specific needs of victims, including trauma-informed practices.

**Significant progress has been made**

### **Measures of protection (Article 56)**

For those involved in criminal proceedings, Armenia’s Criminal Procedure Code and related legal acts allow for additional procedural safeguards, including the possibility of closed hearings, testimony without direct confrontation with the abuser, and special protection arrangements such as identity shielding or relocation. The Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence contains specific provisions to protect the privacy and personal data of victims. This is particularly crucial in preventing further harm or retaliation. Professionals working in shelters and support centres, as well as law enforcement officers, are bound by confidentiality rules to avoid disclosing information that could expose the victim’s location or identity. To be effective this requires consistent and professional implementation across the relevant sectors.

**Significant progress has been made**

### **Legal Aid (Article 57)**

Armenia has a national legal framework governing the provision of legal aid for victims of domestic violence. The Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence expressly provides in Article 8(7) that survivors may receive representation in court proceedings, including through the appointment of a public defender.

This right is further guaranteed under Article 41 of the Law on Advocacy, which defines public defence as free legal aid provided in specific cases. Clause 5(16) of that article explicitly includes victims of domestic violence, thereby recognising their status as a vulnerable group entitled to such protection. Legal aid under this provision includes:

- ▶ Legal advice and drafting of procedural documents (e.g. complaints, motions).
- ▶ Court representation in civil, criminal, administrative, and constitutional proceedings.

Legal representation is not limited to criminal cases. Victims seeking protective orders, whether urgent (emergency) or long-term, are eligible to be represented free of charge through Armenia’s Public Defender’s Office, thereby ensuring their ability to access judicial protection regardless of financial means.

However, women’s organisations report that survivors often face significant financial burdens when seeking access to justice. (The Women’s Rights Centre response to questionnaire)

<b>Significant progress has been made</b>	
<b>Action</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Seek to remove any additional financial barriers to women’s access to court.	Medium

## Chapter 7

# Migration and Asylum

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### Residence status (Article 59)

Armenia entered a reservation to article 59 on signing the convention. Reservations are valid for a period of 5 years and can be renewed. Article 59 requires states to ensure that a residence permit is made available to ensure that victims whose residence status depends on that of the spouse or partner as recognised by internal law, in the event of the dissolution of the marriage or the relationship, are granted in the event of particularly difficult circumstances, upon application, an autonomous residence permit irrespective of the duration of the marriage or the relationship. The purpose of this provision is to ensure that victims of domestic violence are not forced or pressured to stay with their abusers and experience violence for immigration reasons.

### Gender based asylum claims (Article 60)

#### Gender-sensitive asylum determination procedure

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Armenia is a state party to the [1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees](#) (hereinafter “the 1951 convention”) as well as relevant international human rights instruments. These instruments are implemented through the 2008 Law on Refugees and Asylum (Law No. ՀՕ-211-Ն), which is consistent with international standards. The Law provides for refugee status in line with the 1951 convention. In addition, situations of armed conflict, generalised violence, massive human rights violations, etc., are also covered by the refugee status under national law. It also provides for protection against refoulement in case of risk of torture and other forms of ill-treatment. A temporary protection regime may be activated under the Law in case of a mass influx. Armenia recently managed a large-scale influx of refugees of Armenian ethnicity. The vast majority of the displaced population was granted refugee status through providing temporary protection under the Law on Refugees and Asylum, Article 61 and 62. Some of them have Armenian citizenship, residing in Armenia as citizens, and some obtained Armenian citizenship after displacement, terminating their refugee status. In the context of this influx significant work was undertaken by both Armenia and CSOs to identify gender issues in that particular refugee population. However, because of the particularity of the situation it is not necessarily indicative of the general situation from women asylum seekers and refugees.

Although some data is kept on asylum, it does not appear to be disaggregated by gender, nor does it enable an assessment of whether asylum is granted on gender-based grounds, although it is noted that membership of a social group is included in the grounds for asylum.

According to UNHCR, there are some gender-specific practices. These include the ability to request an interpreter and interviewer in a preferred gender and language. Women in situations of vulnerability, such as those with children or disabilities, who are pregnant, are single parents, who have serious illness or mental health issues or are survivors of torture, trafficking or other forms of violence, are not put through accelerated procedures. (UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) website, n.d.) Lawyers are available either through the public defender or privately. It is also possible for a staff member of UNHCR to attend. The interview is confidential. If the claim is refused, pursuant to the Republic of Armenia Law on State duty asylum seekers are exempted from paying state fees in all court instances for examining their application (in 2019 this was reported to be 4,000 AMD in Administrative Court of the Republic of Armenia, 10,000 AMD in the Administrative court of Appeal of the Republic of Armenia and 20,000 AMD in the Court of Cassation of the Republic of Armenia). Pursuant to the Law on Social Protection refugees are included in the list of non-competitive groups at Article 20 which provides the right of additional safeguards in social protection.

Armenia has Standard Operating Procedures for Gender Based Violence interventions, which explicitly relate to refugee and asylum-seeking women and were prepared in the aftermath of the blockade of Karabakh. Prior to this, a programme financed by UNHCR and implemented by the Red Cross, 'Sexual and gender-based violence Prevention and Response' provided psychological assistance to victims of such violence and referred them to specialists and other institutions as necessary. It appears that some training and sensitisation is carried out however this training should be continuous to take into account staff turnover and other developments. This would be strengthened by the existence of gender guidelines and standard operating procedures.

Although improvements can be made to the system of asylum and in particular explicitly ensuring that gender-based persecution is recognised as a ground for seeking asylum, issuing guidelines on gender-based persecution including reference to gender sensitive country of origin material it does appear that UNHCR guidance is used in refugee status determination and that training in respect of gender based claims has taken place.

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Produce gender guidelines and standard operating procedures for the asylum application and determination process.	Medium
Ensure data in respect of asylum is disaggregated on gender grounds.	Medium

## Accommodation

It is possible to be allocated a room in the Reception Centre if requested and a room is available. According to UNHCR 'When allocating a room, the manager of the Reception Centre takes into account the number, sex, age of your family members and other peculiarities. Members of opposite sex not belonging to the same family are not accommodated together.' Where a room is not available, a referral cannot be issued by the asylum seeker, who has the right to apply for financial assistance to rent an apartment. Allocation of assistance is determined according to established criteria by the working group composed of officials of the migration service and UNHCR. Financial assistance is provided in the first place for 3 months up to a maximum of 6 months during which time the processing of the asylum application should have been completed. If a positive decision is made there is the possibility to apply for a room in a dormitory or social house.

These provisions appear to ensure a gender-sensitive approach to accommodating asylum seekers and their families; however, in practice, there are some problems. The shelter can only accommodate about 50 people at a time and this is insufficient. A new Temporary Accommodation centre was being built in 2024, but this is unlikely to fully meet current demand. In common with Armenian nationals, refugees in Armenia report difficulty in finding accommodation on the basis of high prices, poor conditions, lack of basic furniture or infrastructure which is compounded by the lack of livelihood opportunities to enable them to pay for rent and utilities.

The Human Rights Ombudsman has also repeatedly addressed problems related to sanitation, food provision and other documented issues. Moreover, concerns have been raised about the financial assistance for those living outside the centre, which is inadequate. One proposed solution was to change the law to enable asylum seekers to work. This is welcomed however may not be sufficient to solve the difficulties for women asylum seekers owing to their difficulties in accessing the labour market. **Steps may be required to empower women refugees including through language classes and other steps to enable them to obtain employment.**

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Continue to work towards finding accommodation and employment solutions for asylum-seeking and refugee women.	Medium

## Non-refoulement (Article 61)

Armenia's constitution contains a general prohibition on *refoulement* in Part 1 of Article 55. There is no gender-specific information available in respect of the nonrefoulement provision; however, as noted above, those subjected to gender-based violence, including trafficking in human beings, should not be put through accelerated procedures, which should help prevent *refoulement* in practice. Again, standard operating procedures ensuring women have proper access to information and procedures, that make clear that gender-based

persecution can be a ground for seeking asylum and ensuring that women are not simply treated as dependants on their male relative's asylum claims would also act as a protective measure against any risk of refoulement.

Significant progress has been made	
Action	Priority
Produce gender guidelines for the asylum application and determination process to include provisions relevant to non-refoulement.	Medium

### Reservations

Armenia reserved the right not to apply the provisions laid down in the following articles of the Istanbul Convention: Article 30, para. 2; Article 55, para. 1 in respect of Article 35 regarding minor offences; Article 58 in respect of Article 37; and Article 59.

### Conclusion

Armenia is well on the road to ratification of the Istanbul Convention having made significant legal and policy adjustments to ensure a gender sensitive approach to combating violence against women and domestic violence. As highlighted at the outset, Armenian domestic law requires referral of the text of the convention to the Constitutional court before it can be ratified. The opinion of the Venice Commission should assist in this regard. Furthermore, legislative and policy changes since 2019 cover most of the previous areas of objection. There are several residual areas where further action is clearly required such as:

- i. the development of perpetrator programmes;
- ii. sexual assault centres;
- iii. legislative amendments to ensure the digital dimension of violence against women is adequately covered; and
- iv. a national helpline.

It is however clear that these have been identified and are anticipated in the current Gender Strategy. Further awareness work is also likely required to ensure the population agrees to the ratification of the convention however this is also anticipated and underway. There is no clear reason in practice why Armenia should not ratify the convention and start to benefit from the full baseline monitoring process and international co-operation that this would bring.



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