

THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION: 10 YEARS OF ACTION

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



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preventing and combating
violence against women and
domestic violence**

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10 YEARS OF THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION



The Istanbul Convention, officially known as [the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence](#) marked the 10th year anniversary of its opening for signature on 11 May 2011.

The convention is the most comprehensive international legal instrument that aims to protect women against all forms of violence and sets obligations on states to prevent and combat violence against women.

Over its 10 first years, it has helped many states improve their legislation and policies in order to prevent and combat violence against women effectively.

The 10-year anniversary in 2021 provided an occasion to join forces from different sectors to promote this landmark's objectives and values. It also gave the opportunity to take stock and identify achievements over the past decade, to encourage more actions that still need to be done, to prevent and respond violence against women.

KEY FACTS ABOUT THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION

1. The Istanbul Convention is a major human rights treaty providing internationally acknowledged legal standards to ensure women's right to live a life free from violence.
2. The Istanbul Convention creates clear obligations for states which serve to prevent and combat violence against women.
3. As of July 2022, the Istanbul Convention has been signed by 44 countries and the European Union and 37 members of the Council of Europe have ratified it. In 2022 alone, two member states of the Council of Europe - Ukraine and the United Kingdom ratified the Istanbul Convention. In addition, three non-Council of Europe states have requested accession to it: Israel, Kazakhstan and Tunisia.
4. The Istanbul Convention recognises violence against women as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women.

Gendered-based violence against women: what does it mean?

The Istanbul Convention sets out, in its Article 3, key definitions of concepts that are fundamental to its implementation.

What is gender?

“is the “socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men” (Article 3.c).



Defining the term “gender” also helps in understanding the definition of “gender-based violence against women” which is used in the Istanbul Convention and refers to:

“violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately” (Article 3.d).

The convention speaks about the “gendered” nature of violence against women, which means that violence needs to be addressed in the context of the prevailing inequality between women and men.

Types of Violence Against Women and how to combat them

The Istanbul Convention identifies several forms of gender-based violence against women that should be criminalised (or, where applicable, otherwise sanctioned).

These are:

1. psychological violence
2. stalking
3. physical violence
4. sexual violence (including rape)
5. forced marriage
6. female genital mutilation

7. sexual harassment
8. forced abortion and forced sterilisation
 - ▶ Under the Istanbul Convention, culture, custom, religion, tradition or so-called “honour” cannot be used as a justification for any of these types of violence (Article 42).
 - ▶ Domestic violence includes all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, even if victim and perpetrator do not share the same residence (Article 3.b).
 - ▶ Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to establish as offence, when committed intentionally, aiding or abetting the commission of the above-mentioned offences (Article 41).

The Convention’s “four Pillars”: Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and Co-ordinated Policies

The Istanbul Convention covers four pillars of action, often called the four “Ps”. These are:

- preventing violence against women,
- protecting victims,
- prosecuting perpetrators, and
- implementing co-ordinated policies.

These four pillars create a thorough framework to prevent and combat to violence against women and domestic violence at national level. Under each pillar, the provisions of the convention include concrete examples of responses, such as:

PREVENTION

- ▶ Creating treatment programmes for perpetrators, and addressing the role of the media in eradicating gender stereotypes;
- ▶ Preventing violence by obliging parties to invest in awareness-raising campaigns and education;
- ▶ Promoting equality between women and men, encouraging mutual respect or non-violent conflict resolution, and questioning gender stereotypes.

PROTECTION

- ▶ Offering sufficient and accessible shelters;
- ▶ Ensuring that victims can claim compensation;
- ▶ Providing information and access to support services, such as 24/7 telephone helplines, rape crisis centres, counselling, and shelters.

PROSECUTION

- ▶ Defines and criminalises various forms of violence against women;
- ▶ Introducing proportionate criminal or legal sanctions for perpetrators with effective public prosecution and consideration of aggravating circumstances;
- ▶ Taking special measures protecting victims' rights, including protection of child victims during investigation and judicial proceedings.

CO-ORDINATED POLICIES

- ▶ Ensuring inter-agency co-operation among the judiciary, public prosecutors, law-enforcement agencies, local and regional authorities and NGOs for better combating violence against women;
- ▶ Adopting human rights-based policies where the needs and rights of the victims are prioritised;
- ▶ Collecting data and conducting research on the prevalence of all forms of violence against women.

The Istanbul Convention puts victims at the centre of its action without any discrimination. It means that the protection and support provided under the Istanbul Convention must be available to any victim regardless of her characteristics, such as age, disability, marital status, association with a national minority, migrant or refugee status, gender identity or sexual orientation.

A monitoring mechanism to identify barriers and challenges

Countries that have ratified the Istanbul Convention are legally bound to put its provisions into practice. The convention establishes a monitoring mechanism mandated to monitor the implementation of the Istanbul Convention by its state parties. This is done through two bodies, which assess the situation at national level and provide guidance to national authorities:

The Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO):

GREVIO is a specialised independent body responsible for monitoring the implementation of the convention by the countries that have ratified it. It evaluates the situation in each country through on-site visits, and by publishing reports assessing the legislative and other measures taken to comply with the requirements of the convention.

The Committee of the Parties:

This body is composed of the representatives of the national governments who joined the convention. The Committee adopts recommendations concerning the measures to be taken to implement the conclusions, suggestions and proposals offered by GREVIO in relation to a specific country. These countries are given a period of three years to implement such recommendations and report back to the Committee. On that basis, the Committee adopts conclusions on the implementation of its recommendations.

The Istanbul Convention in practice: examples of impact

Through its monitoring mechanism, the Istanbul Convention has led to tangible impact over the past decade. The GREVIO Committee's most recent [Mid-term Horizontal Review of GREVIO baseline evaluation reports](#) reveals a list of promising practices in the state parties.

Following the entry into force of the Istanbul Convention, a number of states have **introduced new criminal offences** and **improved** their criminal law in the field of violence against women and domestic violence. These efforts cover in particular the criminalisation of stalking, forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

In addition, many states have increased the range of support services available to women victims, for example, by creating national telephone helplines, increasing the number of shelters or introducing specialised services for victims of sexual violence.

For instance, the impact has been very concrete in a several states such as Portugal inaugurated in 2016 its first crisis centre for women and girls victims of sexual violence; in Belgium, three support centres for victims

of sexual violence were set up in 2017. Such progress followed up with the increase in the number of national telephone helplines for victims in at least 17 countries evaluated so far by GREVIO.

By showing the achievements and challenges in its implementation, the Istanbul Convention and its monitoring mechanism are proving to be key in guiding governments to efficiently respond to violence against women.

The Istanbul Convention and the pandemic

Globally, lockdowns in the Covid-19 pandemic have led to increased levels of domestic, sexual and other gender-based violence. Despite the global health crisis, the Istanbul Convention is a roadmap for governments to prevent and combat violence against women at all times.

On 20 April 2020, the Committee of the Parties to the Istanbul Convention made [a declaration](#) recalling the importance of promoting co-ordinated and holistic responses to common challenges.

GENDER EQUALITY: THE KEY TO ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence against women is not only a cause but a consequence of inequality between women and men. Since the 1990's, key international documents such as the [United Nations Declaration](#) on the Elimination of Violence against Women, [the Beijing Platform for Action](#) and the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women's [General Recommendation No. 35](#) on gender-based violence against women have highlighted it.



In the Istanbul Convention, violence is also considered a form discrimination. In this line, the Istanbul Convention frames the eradication of violence against women and domestic violence in the context of achieving gender equality in law and in practice, and recognises the structural nature of violence as:

“A manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between women and men that have led to the domination and discrimination of women by men” and “one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are kept in a position of subordination to men.”

JOINING FORCES: CIVIL SOCIETY AND INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Ensuring the right of every woman to live free from violence requires joint efforts and commitment at international, European and national level. The Istanbul Convention provides opportunities to bring all relevant actors together, including international organisations, national decision-makers, civil society organisations and NGOs.



Getting involved: NGOs and civil society as partners in advancing the Istanbul Convention

NGOs and civil society organisations are key actors in preventing and combating violence against women and their role is essential for proper implementation of the Istanbul Convention.

Therefore, national governments who ratify the convention have a legal obligation to recognise, encourage and support their work and to establish effective co-operation with them. This obligation is stated in Article 9.

Reporting: Civil society contributions to the monitoring of the Istanbul Convention

NGOs and civil society organisations are also major partners in monitoring the implementation of the Istanbul Convention in practice.

and other members of civil society are vital sources of information for GREVIO. They are therefore strongly encouraged to contribute at any time.

GREVIO invites NGOs and civil society organisations working in that country to provide relevant information. To date, around 70 NGOs and civil society organisations, including national human rights institutions, have made use of this possibility.

GREVIO also hold meetings with NGO and civil society representatives during its evaluation visits to countries party to the convention. In addition, GREVIO may consider using other tools of evaluation, such as organising hearings for NGOs and civil society.

Being vocal: campaigning and advocacy around the Istanbul Convention

In addition, many civil society organisations and NGOs have carried out national, multi-country or European campaigns in support of the Istanbul Convention.

Some examples can be found here: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/joining-forces>

International and European co-operation

The promotion of international co-operation with a view to eliminating violence against women and domestic violence is one of the purposes of the Istanbul Convention (Article 1). Co-operation among state parties to the convention, among the stakeholders relevant for the treaty's implementation, among institutions and entities at global and European level and with parliamentarians and civil society is key in ensuring ratification and implementation of the convention.

Dialogue among monitoring mechanisms on women's rights and violence against women

Independent expert mechanisms play a decisive role in monitoring the implementation of the human rights standards necessary to tackle violence and discrimination against women. [The Platform of Independent Expert Mechanisms on Discrimination and Violence against Women \(EDVAW Platform\)](#) gathers seven United Nations and regional independent expert mechanisms on violence against women and women's rights operating at the international and regional levels, including GREVIO.

The seven independent expert mechanisms that make up the EDVAW Platform are responsible for monitoring and supporting the implementation of states' commitments. It seeks to strengthen institutional links and thematic co-operation between the mechanisms with a view to working towards harmonised strategies and undertaking joint action.

A role for Parliamentarians

One of the major innovations of the Istanbul Convention is the obligation placed on national governments to invite their parliaments to participate in the monitoring process and to submit GREVIO's evaluation reports to them. The Istanbul Convention also foresees a significant role for the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, which is invited to take stock of the implementation of the convention at regular intervals.

The Parliamentary [Network Women Free from Violence](#) brings together parliamentarians from the national delegations to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and observers and partners for democracy. Additional information on the role of parliamentarians can be found in the [handbook for parliamentarians on the Istanbul Convention](#).

TESTIMONIES: THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION SAVES LIVES



**Joanna
Maycock**

Secretary General of the
European Women's Lobby

“With the increased risk of violence brought by the COVID-19 crisis, women and girls in Europe need the Istanbul Convention more than ever to be protected from violence inside and outside their homes.”



**Patrizia
Romito**

Professor at the University of Trieste
and member of the Italian Academic
Network against Gender-based
Violence - UN.I.RE (Italy)

“The Istanbul Convention represents a fundamental milestone in the prevention of violence against women, and I am keenly aware of the responsibility universities have in this process.”



**Ceyhun
Qaracayev**

Judge at Constitutional Court of the
Republic of Azerbaijan and Member
of the European Committee for the
Prevention of Torture (Republic of
Azerbaijan)

“The Istanbul Convention is a major legal tool that has successfully performed its mission for years and has a great potential for the protection of women against violence.”



**Slavenka
Drakulić**

Journalist and writer (Croatia)

“The Istanbul Convention is one of the only international joint efforts to establish a legal framework for reducing violence against women. It would be ideal if such a convention was not needed. However, even when only formally adopted, it is already a step in the right direction, something that women can rely on when they need help.”

AZERBAIJAN AND THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION

As member state of the Council of Europe, Azerbaijan actively participated in drafting the Istanbul Convention through the works of the Ad Hoc Committee for preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (CAHVIO).

Azerbaijan has not yet signed the Istanbul Convention; however, a number of improvements have been made in the national legislation and policy in the field of domestic violence in

the past years. If the Istanbul Convention was signed, Azerbaijan could continue its path to bringing domestic frameworks closer to international standards:



- ▶ In 2010, the Azerbaijani parliament adopted the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence;
- ▶ Between the years of 2011-2012, four resolutions were adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers of Azerbaijan covering a broad range of issues, including the rules for establishment of shelters, data collection of domestic violence cases, review of domestic violence complaints and issuance of protection orders and offender management system;
- ▶ On 27 November 2020, the Azerbaijani President signed the Order on National Action Plan for Combating Domestic Violence for 2020–2023. The National Action Plan also seeks to bring national framework in the field of combating domestic violence more in line with international practice;
- ▶ The Human Rights Commission of Azerbaijan recommended to both the Government and the parliament to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention).

CORE RESOURCES ON THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION

General information about the Istanbul Convention

- [The text of the Istanbul Convention and its Explanatory Report](#)
- [Leaflet on the Istanbul Convention](#)
- [General Leaflet on the monitoring mechanism](#)
- [Questions and answers on the Istanbul Convention](#)
- [Info graphics on the four pillars of the Istanbul Convention](#)
- [Brochure on the four pillars of the Istanbul Convention](#)
- [Preventing Violence Against Women: Article 12 of the Istanbul Convention](#)
- [Raising Awareness of Violence Against Women: Article 13 of the Istanbul Convention](#)



This brochure aims to highlight the benefits of the Istanbul Convention and showcase the improvements it has already brought for ratifying states in the first decade of its implementation. The brochure also has a dedicated section showcasing the potential benefits for Azerbaijan.

For further information, please visit the the following links: www.coe.int/Istanbul-convention, <http://partnership-governance2-eu.coe.int>

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The Member States of the European Union have decided to link together their know-how, resources and destinies. Together, they have built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development whilst maintaining cultural diversity, tolerance and individual freedoms. The European Union is committed to sharing its achievements and its values with countries and peoples beyond its borders.

<http://europa.eu>

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

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