

Gender equality and the Istanbul Convention: a decade of action

**Conference organised by the Council of Europe in partnership with the
German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens,
Women and Youth in the framework of the
German Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe**

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While, in the last half century, progress has been achieved in the fight for gender equality and the right of every woman and girl to a life free from violence, we are witnessing attempts to question such progress. The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), which celebrates 10 years from its adoption, has been a primary target of such attacks, in spite of its positive impact. In the words of Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuk, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women, “there is a need to recapture and fast forward from the gains made thus far, which are now under threat. Rather than incremental steps, big bold steps need to be taken”. With this conference, the Council of Europe, under the aegis of the German Presidency of the Committee of Ministers, aims at drawing attention to the progress made and to the challenges ahead, and at taking a bold step towards securing and surpassing the gains reached thus far.

First part of the conference: 10th anniversary of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention)

May 2021 marks the 10th anniversary of the opening for signature of the Istanbul Convention. The international recognition that the Istanbul Convention has obtained and the concrete impact that it has had on national legislation and practices, as well as - what is most important - on victims, are all causes for celebration. Drawing on international and European standards and case law, as well as best practices and lessons learned at national level, the Istanbul Convention is widely recognised as the most far-reaching legal instrument to prevent and combat violence against women. The evaluations carried out thus far by GREVIO (the monitoring mechanism set up by the Istanbul Convention) clearly show that the convention has inspired and brought changes to legislation and practices in states parties. The treaty is thus delivering tangible results that are trickling down to victims of violence against women.

Yet, against the backdrop of a general “backlash” in the area of gender equality and women’s rights in the world, the Istanbul Convention is increasingly under attack by different groups. Using discourse based on false narratives and incorrect assumptions about the implications of the convention, these voices gained some support and detract attention from the phenomenon of violence against women and the tools provided by the convention to tackle it. In some cases, this has resulted in a delay or rejection of the ratification of the convention. Council of Europe bodies, GREVIO experts and representatives of the Committee of the Parties to the convention have addressed the objections raised and dispelled the misconceptions around the convention with very clear, evidence-based messages that draw from GREVIO evaluations and states parties’ experience. Demonstrating the unfoundedness of these objections and the convention’s positive impact on states parties, they have underscored the need for an international instrument in addition to solid national legal and policy frameworks. The strength and importance of the convention has therefore been emphasised and action towards further progress should continue.

The objective of the morning of the conference is three-fold:

- ✓ Celebrate the 10th anniversary of the opening for signature of the Istanbul Convention;
- ✓ Take stock of the Istanbul Convention’s achievements as well as the challenges faced;
- ✓ Encourage member states of the Council of Europe who have not already done so, as well as non-member states, to sign and ratify.

The conference will pay tribute to the important role of the Istanbul Convention in filling a gap in the protection of women from gender-based violence in Europe and beyond. Particular emphasis will be placed on the added value of the convention, the link between achieving gender equality and combating violence against women, as well as recognising violence against women as a human rights violation. In an engaging and interactive manner, the conference will address the current challenges that the Istanbul Convention is facing, placing it into the wider context of the general regression in the area of gender

equality and women's rights in the world, including by giving voice to representatives of Council of Europe member states who have not yet ratified the Istanbul Convention, or who have successfully overcome difficulties in the ratification process. The conference is expected to reaffirm the political will of states parties to fully implement the convention, and to generate genuine interest in the convention among key stakeholders, media and NGO representatives in states who are not yet parties.

Second part of the conference: Combating gender stereotypes and sexism: tackling the roots of gender inequality and violence against women

Sexism and gender stereotypes are widespread and prevalent in all sectors and societies – they are also closely linked to violence against women, as they permeate the fabric of society. This sexist sub-culture is pervasive and often normalised, and yet it enables, condones, and even supports the violence against women. Allowing 'lesser' incidents of sexism go unnoticed leads to an acceptance of discrimination and violence.

Combating gender stereotypes and sexism has been a priority of the Council of Europe since 2013 and various activities have been carried out, in particular in the [media and education sectors](#). The [current Gender Equality Strategy of the Council of Europe for 2018-2023](#), like the previous one, includes the need to prevent and combat gender stereotypes and sexism as one of its objectives. The landmark [2019 Council of Europe Recommendation on preventing and combating sexism](#) calls on member states to monitor the implementation of policies to combat sexism at the national level, including through legislative and policy measures. This recommendation provides practical guidelines on preventing and combating sexism in key areas. It recommends, for instance, to provide digital literacy training, especially for young people and children for a safe and critical use of digital media; to legally define and criminalise sexist hate speech, also online; to put in place complaint mechanisms, disciplinary measures and support services; to promote research and the gathering of data on sexist behaviour; or also to teach women's history. These can be long and short-term powerful antidotes to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes and sexism.

The afternoon panel will discuss the implementation of the Council of Europe Recommendation on preventing and combating sexism and the related Council of Europe campaign "[Sexism: See it. Name it. Stop it!](#)", highlighting relevant initiatives of decision makers and civil society at the national and regional level.

Targeted participants:

High-level decision makers and policy makers from Council of Europe member states, observers and non-member states; members of the Gender Equality Commission; members of the Committee of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention); members of the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO); representatives of relevant Council of Europe institutions and bodies; independent international expert groups and treaty bodies; representatives of other regional and international organisations; parliaments; national human rights institutions and equality bodies; NGOs and civil society representatives, including women's rights organisations; academics; media representatives.

Venue and date of the conference

The conference will take place online from Berlin (Germany) on 11 May 2021.