

*Building trust
by delivering support,
protection and justice*

Sweden

First thematic
evaluation report

GREVIO

Group of Experts
on Action against Violence
against Women and
Domestic Violence



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

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Executive summary

This evaluation report addresses progress made in bringing support, protection and justice to victims of violence against women and domestic violence under selected provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention). It offers an assessment made by the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), an independent human rights monitoring body mandated to monitor the implementation of the convention. GREVIO's findings identify developments that have taken place since the publication of its baseline evaluation report on Sweden on 21 January 2019 and are based on the information obtained during its first thematic evaluation procedure as set out in Article 68 of the convention. These include written reports, including a state report submitted by the Swedish authorities and additional information submitted by Victim Support Sweden, Forum Women and Disability in Sweden, the Swedish Women's Lobby, RFSL (Swedish national LGBTI federation), Amnesty International, Barnrättsbyråns, Josefine Hjalmskog, Psychotherapist and Karin Lavén, Attorney Specialized in Family Law and Violence Against Women and Children, as well as a five days evaluation visit to Sweden. A list of the bodies and entities which GREVIO had exchanges with can be found in Appendix II.

The report assesses the wide variety of measures taken by the Swedish authorities to prevent violence against women and domestic violence and to deliver protection, support and justice for victims – the theme chosen by GREVIO for its first thematic evaluation report. In identifying emerging trends in preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, GREVIO shines a light on laudable efforts made for the implementation of this convention. Moreover, it provides in-depth information on the implementation of selected provisions in the areas of prevention, protection and prosecution as building blocks for a comprehensive response to the different forms of violence against women that instils trust in victims.

In this regard GREVIO welcomes Sweden's continued progress in criminalising conduct and introducing obligations that often go beyond the standards of the Istanbul Convention. By way of example, the authorities have criminalised the "violation of a child's integrity", punishing the commission of certain criminal acts such as assault and sexual offences committed in a domestic context when these are witnessed by a child and recognising him/her a right to compensation for the damages incurred. New criminal provisions were passed to punish the conduct of encouraging suicide and negligently encouraging suicide, thereby addressing gender-based violence-related suicides. Moreover, a new offence was introduced criminalising child forced marriages, and, in parallel, the ability to order a travel ban was introduced with a view to protecting children from being taken abroad for the purpose of child marriage or Female Genital Mutilation. Equally noteworthy are the preventive measures taken by Sweden, following the reform on the criminalisation of all non-consensual sexual acts. These include: awareness-raising on the importance of consent in sexual relations targeted at young people, which are estimated to have reached 7 out of 10 young adults aged 18-25; training and a teacher's guide on the legislation; awareness raising initiatives targeting parents on the legislation and on how to talk to their children about the notion of rape as a sexual act without freely given consent; and the inclusion of this topic in the context of mandatory sexuality education. The GREVIO report equally commends the inclusion of the dangers of pornography in the mandatory curriculum and observes that school inspectorates are now required to visit schools and verify, *inter alia*, that sexuality education, gender equality and combating gender stereotypes are taught in practice.

Additionally, a particularly welcome development is the entry into force in 2022 of a provision allowing video-taped interviews of victims and witnesses to be used as evidence in courts, subject to the courts' discretion and, in 2024, the obligation for the police to film all interviews. These obligations, where implemented, have been considered to: have increased the chances of a case successfully proceeding through the criminal justice chain, particularly when victims decide not to participate in criminal proceedings; give prosecutors a better basis for their decision on whether to prosecute; reduce the burden on victims to give their statement repeatedly; and limit the risk

of intimidation by perpetrators designed to make the victim withdraw or amend their earlier statements. Finally, particularly significant are the consequences on courts' practices stemming from the 2018 reform on rape, notably leading to the successful prosecution of different typologies of rape, such as "surprise rape" and situations where the victim remained passive and which would not have been possible prior to the reform; the broadening of the type of evidence that is considered as acceptable by judges to reach a conviction and a rise in the rates of convictions.

Beyond the progress made in Sweden to implement the convention, GREVIO has identified areas which require urgent action by the authorities to comply fully with the convention's provisions. An area of particular concern remains the insufficient in-service training received by key professionals such as social workers, health-care personnel, teachers, family law professionals and members of the judiciary, as much of the training is available on a voluntary basis or is dispensed at an irregular frequency and often does not address the digital manifestations of violence against women. As regards the training of the judiciary and in light of the unique and essential role that the judiciary plays in applying the Istanbul Convention, the report underscores the need for mandatory and in-depth training on a gendered understanding of violence against women not only in the area of criminal law but also in relation to family law cases. The report, finds in this respect that judicial decisions on custody and visitation often do not offer sufficient consideration for the safety concerns and needs of women and children leaving abusive relationships, frequently ignoring allegations of domestic violence, accepting agreements despite a history of domestic violence and using or accepting the use of ill-founded concepts such as the so-called "parental alienation syndrome", or similar notions, to dismiss claims of domestic violence.

Another area of concern is the scarce presence of multi-agency cooperation structures at the local level for domestic violence cases, including multi-agency case conferences to co-ordinate around individual cases and the absence of protocols to ensure co-ordination across different public sector agencies and/or women's rights organisations. As regards shelter provision, a number of criticalities have also been identified, including an insufficient geographical distribution. Moreover, GREVIO expresses its reserve on the practice of social services increasingly referring domestic violence victims to shelters run by for-profit entities rather than to shelters run by women's specialist organisations with long-lasting expertise in the area of violence against women, thereby threatening their existence. Additionally, the minimum standards on shelter provision which have recently entered into force apply to all types of shelters and do not address requirements pertaining to the provision of victim-centred, empowering support underpinned by an understanding of violence against women as a gendered phenomenon. Finally, GREVIO underscores the importance of ensuring that all women victims of violence against women and their children are offered the possibility to access shelters through self-referrals.

GREVIO has identified a number of additional issues that require sustained action in order to effectively build trust by delivering protection, support and justice for acts of violence against women. These relate to the need to:

- ensure that a gendered understanding of violence against women is retained in policies and their implementation, all the while ensuring that such policies do not result in the stigmatisation of certain migrant communities;
- harmonise the collection of data on all forms of violence against women and domestic violence between law-enforcement agencies, prosecution and the judiciary, with the aim of tracing the progress of cases from reporting to conviction and to identify attrition rates, ensuring that the data are disaggregated by sex of both the victim and the perpetrator, the age, the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim and the geographical location as well as other factors deemed relevant;
- ensure the collection of data related to violence against women and domestic violence, disaggregated by sex, age and relationship of the perpetrator to the victim, type of violence and geographical location, as well as other factors deemed relevant in the healthcare sector and by social services and specialist support service providers, including those managed privately;

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- ensure that access to general support services for experiences of violence against women is ensured without discrimination on any ground, including on the grounds of residence status and; and pursue efforts to implement standardised care paths in the public and private healthcare sectors in order to ensure the identification of victims, their diagnosis, treatment, documentation of the type of violence and the violence suffered and referral to appropriate specialist support services in a gender-sensitive and non-judgmental manner, as well as the provision of a forensic report for victims documenting their injuries.
 - take legislative or other measures to ensure that risk assessment and management are systematically carried out in relation to all forms of violence against women using standardised, evidence based risk-assessment tools in a co-ordinated manner and involving all relevant stakeholders beyond law-enforcement authorities and social services.

GREVIO further points to steps taken by the Swedish authorities towards a more gender-neutral approach to addressing violence against women as an emerging trend, among several others.

Introduction

The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No. 210; the Istanbul Convention) is the most far-reaching international treaty to tackle violence against women and domestic violence.

It sets up a two-pillar monitoring mechanism to assess the level of implementation by its parties: the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), an independent expert body, and the Committee of the Parties, a political body composed of official representatives of the parties to the convention. In line with Article 68 of the convention, GREVIO has been providing country-based monitoring reports under its baseline evaluation procedure since 2017. Its baseline evaluation report on Sweden, offering a comprehensive assessment of the convention's implementation in its entirety, was published on 21 January 2019, following Sweden's ratification of the Istanbul Convention on 1 July 2014. Sweden's original reservation not to apply the provisions under Article 44, paragraph 3, and Article 58 of the convention, entered in accordance with Article 78, paragraph 2, of the convention, was renewed by a declaration dated 18 June 2019, providing GREVIO with the reasons for maintaining it.

This report was drawn up under GREVIO's first thematic evaluation round launched in 2023, focusing on the theme of building trust by delivering support, protection and justice. To address this overarching theme, it describes emerging trends in the areas of preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence in the country. Section two aims to identify developments in key areas such as comprehensive and co-ordinated policies, funding and data collection that have ensued following the completion of the baseline evaluation procedure. Section three sets out to provide more in-depth information on the implementation of selected provisions in the areas of prevention, protection and prosecution, in respect of which baseline evaluation procedures and the conclusions on the implementation of recommendations of the Committee of the Parties to the Istanbul Convention have revealed significant challenges and the need for further action.

In respect of Sweden, the first thematic evaluation procedure was initiated in accordance with Article 68 of the convention by letter and transmission of GREVIO's first thematic questionnaire on 26 May 2023. The Swedish authorities subsequently submitted their state report on 26 October 2023 – the deadline set by GREVIO. Following a preliminary examination of Sweden's state report, GREVIO carried out an evaluation visit to Sweden, which took place from 12 to 16 February 2024. The delegation was composed of:

- Aleid van den Brink (First Vice-President of GREVIO)
- Päivi Maarit Hirvelä, Member of GREVIO
- Francesca Montagna, Administrator at the Secretariat of the monitoring mechanism of the Istanbul Convention

During the evaluation visit, the delegation met with a wide range of governmental and non-governmental representatives working in the area of preventing and combating violence against women. GREVIO wishes to highlight its constructive exchanges with the Swedish authorities, in particular the Ministry of Employment – gender equality division, the Swedish Gender Equality Agency, the Swedish Agency for Public Management, the Swedish Agency for Participation, the Ministry for Health and Social Affairs, the National Board of Health and Welfare, the National Centre against Honour-based Violence and Oppression, the Ministry of Justice, the Crime Victim Authority, the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå), the Swedish police, the Swedish Prosecution Authority, the National Board of Forensic Medicine, the Swedish Prison and Probation Service, the Ministry of Education and Research, the Swedish Higher Education Authority, the Swedish Migration Agency, the National Centre for Knowledge on Men's Violence against Women at Uppsala University, Statistics Sweden, the Centre for Andrology, Sexual and Transgender Medicine (ANOVA), the Equality Ombudsman, the Ombudsman for Children, the National Board of Institutional Care and the Health and Social Care Inspectorate. A list of the national authorities, non-governmental organisations and others met is set out in Appendix II of this report. GREVIO is grateful for the valuable information provided by all of them. For the co-operation and support

provided throughout the entire evaluation procedure, it wishes to extend its gratitude to Caroline Hammarberg, who was appointed as contact person. The state report and the written contributions submitted by civil society are available on the country monitoring website of the Istanbul Convention¹.

The present assessment was drawn up under the exclusive responsibility of GREVIO and is based on the information collected during the various steps of the evaluation procedure. In keeping with the approach adopted in its baseline evaluation reports, the findings reflect different levels of urgency, indicated in order of priority by the following verbs: “urges”, “strongly encourages”, “encourages” and “invites”.

Resulting from a process of confidential dialogue with the aim of offering country-specific proposals and suggestions for improvement within the national context of the party under review, this report describes the situation as observed by GREVIO up until 21 June 2024. Where applicable, relevant developments up until 18 October 2024 will be taken into account.

According to the convention, national parliaments shall receive this report from the national authorities (Article 70, paragraph 2). GREVIO requests the national authorities to translate this report into their official national language(s) and to ensure that it is widely disseminated, not only to the relevant state institutions at all levels (national, regional and local), in particular to the government, the ministries and the judiciary, but also to NGOs and other civil society organisations that work in the field of violence against women.

1. See www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/sweden

I. Emerging trends in the areas of violence against women and domestic violence

1. In the period following the adoption of GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, GREVIO identified several trends in Sweden in the area of preventing and combating violence against women. Some of these trends were related to legislative developments prompted by broader societal movements, while others pertained to shifts in attitudes and approaches in addressing violence against women.

Positive legislative developments

2. Since the publication of GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, Sweden has continued on its path of legal innovation, criminalising certain conduct and introducing obligations that often go beyond the standards of the Istanbul Convention. In the area of criminal law, the minimum sentence for gross violation of a woman's integrity, Sweden's domestic violence offence, was increased from nine months to one year's imprisonment and its conduct has been widened to encompass instances of defamation and gross defamation, as well as unlawful persecution (stalking). GREVIO particularly welcomes the entry into force of the new offence "violation of a child's integrity", which punishes the commission of certain criminal acts such as assault and sexual offences committed in a domestic context, when these acts are witnessed by a child (who is a family member of the perpetrator and the victim). With this amendment, Sweden has clearly spelled out in its legal framework a key principle of the convention as interpreted by GREVIO, notably that children witnessing domestic violence are victims in their own right and must be afforded protection. Moreover, further to this legislative change, child witnesses are now entitled to compensation for the damages incurred. Provisions of the Criminal Code criminalising various forms of sexual violence have equally been amended with a view to ensuring that digital manifestations of such violence are also captured and punished.² In addition, new provisions on sexual violence against children have been introduced into the Criminal Code.

3. Additionally, new criminal provisions have been adopted with a view to strengthening victims' protection from violence committed in the name of "honour", an area that the Swedish authorities have particularly prioritised since the baseline evaluation report. Notably, the commission of an offence to preserve or restore the family's "honour" has been introduced as an aggravating factor of crimes. In parallel, the Swedish authorities have also passed legislation introducing the offence of "honour-based oppression", criminalising those who repeatedly commit certain criminal offences against a person (assault, coercion, threats, harassment/sexual harassment) to preserve or restore the "honour" of a person or of the family/other group and where such acts are "part of a repeated violation of the person's integrity and are liable to severely damage the person's self-esteem". In addition to the above developments, GREVIO notes with interest that in May 2021, in response to the worrying trend of young women attempting to commit suicide, new criminal provisions were passed to punish the conduct of encouraging suicide and negligently encouraging suicide.³ Indeed, most of these desperate acts were assessed by the authorities as having been driven by families and criminals who coerce or pressure young women to commit suicide to restore the family's or the group's "honour". The above-mentioned offences aim to give an adequate response to such grave practices and have already been applied in court on several occasions, which GREVIO commends as a way of addressing gender-based violence-related suicides. Furthermore, a new offence was introduced criminalising child forced marriages, with, in parallel, a prohibition to legally recognise a child marriage celebrated abroad or nationally.⁴ Under this new offence, inducing or allowing a child

2. More specifically, the provisions on rape and sexual violence, including those committed against children, now equally punish "those who induce another person who is not participating voluntarily to undertake or submit to such [an] act".

3. According to Section 7a of the Criminal Code, "a person who encourages, or in some other similar way exercises psychological influence on, another person to commit suicide is, if the act is liable to result in a not insignificant danger of such an action, guilty of encouraging suicide and is sentenced to imprisonment for up to two years. A person who commits such an act and does not have intent but is negligent is guilty of negligently encouraging suicide and is sentenced to a fine or imprisonment for at most six months".

4. See the Act on certain international legal relations concerning marriage and guardianship (Chapter 1, section 8, of the act 1904:26) and Bill 2017/18/288 on the Prohibition of Recognition of Foreign Child Marriages.

to enter into a marriage or a marriage-like relationship is punished with up to four years of imprisonment. Moreover, a travel ban (impeding the issue of a passport or implying its revocation) was introduced to protect children from being taken abroad for the purpose of child marriage or female genital mutilation (FGM) and is reinforced by a prohibition on taking a child abroad in violation of a travel ban.⁵ It is also noteworthy that the Swedish authorities launched an inquiry in June 2021 with a view to introducing new provisions criminalising virginity testing and virginity surgery and exploring the possibility of ordering a travel ban in cases in which there is a substantial risk that a child could be taken abroad to undergo virginity testing or surgery. Finally, worthy of note are the recent amendments to the Public Access to Information Secrecy Act, which, combined with the increase in the sanctions imposed for gross violation of a woman's integrity, now enable healthcare services and social services to breach the duty of confidentiality and inform the police in serious cases of domestic violence, notably when there is a risk that the individual will commit a serious crime and it is not considered inappropriate to disclose information "with regard to planned or ongoing operations or other reasons".⁶ Where victims do not consent to such reporting, GREVIO points to the importance of considering any such disclosures by healthcare and social services as inappropriate, unless the victim is a child or is unable to protect her/himself because of disabilities, in line with GREVIO's established position on mandatory reporting under the Istanbul Convention.⁷

Steps towards a more gender-neutral approach: a worrisome development

4. It is undisputed that combating violence against women has continued to feature prominently in Swedish policies, along with achieving gender equality. Indeed, all government offices and ministries are required to mainstream in their decisions (including those decisions concerning the national budget) considerations pertaining to gender equality and on combating violence against women. Moreover, Sweden continues to rank the highest in the European Union Gender Equality Index developed by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE).⁸ Nonetheless, GREVIO observes a number of changes in policies on violence against women and in their practical implementation that would suggest a shift towards a more gender-neutral approach that is at odds with the spirit of the Istanbul Convention. More specifically, according to indications from civil society, certain forms of violence against women appear to be increasingly addressed in a gender-neutral manner, notably as gender-based violence affecting both men and women, with less focus on the specific experience of women and girls. For example, when it comes to financial resources, despite an increase in the funding available to specialist support services for victims of violence against women, men's shelter organisations and organisations that provide assistance to the wider category of "victims of crime" can compete for some funding lines alongside women's shelter associations. It is therefore uncertain to what extent part of the foreseen dedicated funding is actually reaching women's shelter organisations. Another concerning practice is the growing tendency to refer domestic violence victims to for-profit enterprises and privately run shelters rather than to shelters managed by skilled and experienced women's specialist support services with extensive expertise in prioritising victims' needs, in line with the convention. GREVIO observes in this report that rather than increasing investment in the further development and professionalisation of such specialist support services, the authorities address the provision of shelter services from a free-market perspective. This approach focuses on providing practical support to a broad clientele, including men victims of different types of crimes and, more generally, on the provision of housing, rather than offering victims of violence against women a lifeline, notably through holistic services. Finally, the concept of "violence in young relations" introduced into policy discourse represents another example of the shift perceived by GREVIO towards a gender-neutral presentation of a form of violence that disproportionately and undisputedly affects young women aged 18 to 24.

5. Notably through amendments to the Care of Young Persons Act (1990:52). Moreover, following the entry into force of the law "Extended Travel Ban for Children" in June 2024, it is now possible to issue a travel ban if there is a tangible risk that a minor will be taken abroad and that "his or her health or development will be harmed during the stay abroad due to physical or mental abuse, undue exploitation, deficiencies in care or any other condition in the living environment or due to the young person's abuse of addictive substances, criminal activities or any other socially degrading behaviour".

6. Notably, offences under Chapters 3, 4 and 6, respectively, on offences against life and health, offences against liberty and peace, and sexual offences.

7. See GREVIO's baseline evaluation reports on Andorra, paragraph 146; and Malta, paragraph 140.

8. See <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2023/compare-countries>.

II. Changes in definitions, comprehensive and co-ordinated policies, funding and data collection in the areas of violence against women and domestic violence

5. Chapter I of the Istanbul Convention sets out general principles that apply to all the substantive articles contained in Chapters II to VII and therefore lay the foundation for a comprehensive and adequate response that ensures the delivery of support, protection and justice for all women and girls at risk of or who have experienced gender-based violence. These include, among other things, that it is a fundamental human right for everyone, particularly women, to live a life free from violence in both the public and the private sphere, that the convention must be implemented without discrimination on any ground and that the potential for, and effects of, multiple forms of discrimination should be borne in mind. They also spell out that a gender perspective must be integrated into the implementation of the convention and the evaluation of its impact. Chapter II of the Istanbul Convention sets out the core requirement for a holistic response to violence against women: the need for state-wide effective, comprehensive and co-ordinated policies, sustained by the necessary institutional, financial and organisational structures.

A. Definitions (Article 3)

6. Article 3 of the Istanbul Convention sets out key definitions of concepts that are fundamental to its implementation. “Violence against women” refers to “all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”, whereas the expression “domestic violence” is to be understood as referring to “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, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim”. The definition of “gender-based violence against women” provided in paragraph *d* of Article 3 seeks to ensure more clarity about the nature of the violence covered, by explaining that this is “violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately”.

7. In its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO had commended the authorities for framing violence against women as a gender equality issue, notably by using the concept of “men’s violence against women” in official documents and policies to point to its gendered nature. In this connection, civil society has expressed concern and alerted GREVIO to an ongoing government inquiry that is looking into replacing the concept of “men’s violence against women” used in the sixth sub-goal of the Gender Equality Strategy with “gender-based violence and oppression”. According to the authorities, this would be needed to ensure more inclusive language capable of encompassing women’s violence against men and violence in LGBTI relations. At the same time, they have reassured GREVIO that the inquiry acknowledges in its terms of reference the disproportionate impact on women and girls of men’s violence against women and that any future approach is to be based on the Istanbul Convention. Moreover, the authorities have informed GREVIO that the newly adopted 2024 – 2026 Action Plan continues to operate, as the previous Action Plan, on the basis of the concept of “men’s violence against women”. GREVIO welcomes these clarifications and recalls at the same time, in light of the above-mentioned on-going inquiry, that, while it is of essence to recognise and address all forms of gender-based violence, taking into account victims without discrimination, due recognition and attention must continue to be afforded, separately, to violence against women. Indeed, it is essential that through the terminology used and the application of concrete measures, the disproportionate incidence of violence against women, its gendered nature and specificities and historical roots are recognised so as not to lose the important gains made by Sweden thus far.

8. **GREVIO strongly encourages the Swedish authorities to ensure that policies and their practical implementation apply a gendered understanding of violence against women, recognising the disproportionate incidence of gender-based violence on women and its gendered nature, specificities and historical roots.**

B. Comprehensive and co-ordinated policies (Article 7)

9. Article 7 of the Istanbul Convention requires parties to take co-ordinated and comprehensive measures to prevent and combat all forms of violence against women. Policies must ensure effective co-operation and place the rights of victims at their centre. This includes taking into account and addressing the specific circumstances and barriers experienced by women exposed to or at risk of multiple forms of discrimination,⁹ in line with Article 4, paragraph 3, of the convention. Ensuring service delivery, effective protection and justice with a comprehensive understanding of intersecting forms of discrimination is a fundamental element in building trust among all women and girls.

10. Since the baseline evaluation report, the policy framework on violence against women has partly remained unchanged and comprises the sixth goal of the Gender Equality Strategy,¹⁰ the 2017-2026 National Strategy to Prevent and Combat Men's Violence Against Women and Honour-related Violence and Oppression (the Violence against Women Strategy) and the 2021-2023 Action Plan, complementing the Violence against Women Strategy. The 2021-2023 Action Plan details the actions to be undertaken, notably in the areas of prevention, protection and support to victims, law enforcement and prosecution, as well as with regard to legislation. A new Action Plan for 2024–2026 was adopted in June 2024 to prevent and combat men's violence against women, violence in close relationships and "honor-related violence and oppression", as well as prostitution and human trafficking and its implementation had just begun in the period under review. GREVIO welcomes this comprehensive framework and notes with satisfaction that it addresses most forms of violence covered by the convention¹¹ and that it currently operates on the basis of the concept of "men's violence against women". It further positively notes that the 2021-2023 Action Plan introduced the obligation for the government to report biennially to the parliament on the Violence against Women Strategy's implementation. This obligation has been introduced following specific recommendations made by the Swedish Agency for Public Management, in the context of an independent evaluation of the strategy that was carried out in 2020.

11. Within the above-mentioned policy framework, the approach taken by the Swedish authorities is to distinguish violence in the name of so-called honour from other forms of violence against women. The term is used by the Swedish authorities to cover forms of intimidation, control and deprivation of liberty employed by family or community members in relation to girls and boys and encompasses forced marriage and FGM. The authorities have increasingly focused on and prioritised this form of violence and are looking into introducing a separate, dedicated sub-goal in the Gender Equality Strategy.¹² While the Swedish authorities consider violence in the name of so-called honour to be a by-product of patriarchal structures, they also regard it as having specific characteristics that sets it apart from violence against women, and thus requires a more tailored protection of victims.¹³ To this end, the authorities, *inter alia*, set up in 2022 a dedicated National Centre against Honour-based Violence and Oppression, which carries out a wide variety of tasks,¹⁴

9. These include, but are not limited to, women from national and/or ethnic minorities, Roma women, migrant, asylum-seeking and refugee women, women with disabilities, women without a residence permit, LGBTI women, women from rural areas, women in prostitution and women with addiction issues.

10. The sixth gender equality policy sub-target provides that "men's violence against women must end and that women and men and girls and boys must have the same rights and opportunities to bodily integrity".

11. GREVIO could not find any specific reference to stalking in the relevant policy framework.

12. See the inquiry referred to in Chapter II, Definitions.

13. Notably, the authorities consider that violence and control are perpetrated by several individuals in the family or in the wider community. Moreover, while the majority of victims are women, women also perpetrate/contribute to such violence and boys and men can equally be victims.

14. These include supporting local and regional authorities to establish measures to prevent and provide support to victims of these forms of violence; supporting the co-ordination of measures for victims through regional multi-agency centres; providing training and guidance to professionals who provide support to victims (through a telephone helpline); providing direct support to victims through a dedicated helpline; conducting inquiries into the prevalence of this form of violence.

as well as regional centres. Criticism has emerged, however, questioning the discourse and policy approach on violence committed in the name of “honour” for its strong focus on being linked to specific migrant communities considered as patriarchal and misogynistic, while, in parallel, other forms of violence against women appear to be increasingly addressed in a gender-neutral manner, notably as gender-based violence affecting both men and women, with less focus on the specific experience of women and girls.¹⁵

12. With the overwhelming majority of these types of crimes committed by men against women and girls, GREVIO considers it important to also contextualise such violence in the ambit of gender-based violence against women and as an expression of patriarchal value systems. These can be found to different degrees in all societies. An exclusive focus on the underlying cultural reasons behind the commission of these types of crime and on the migrant background of victims and perpetrators diverts attention from the fact that violence against women affects women across the cultural and ethnic spectrum.¹⁶ This is not to say that the specificities of these forms of violence against women cannot be recognised and addressed from a perspective of prevention and support to victims.¹⁷ However, a clear reframing of the issue should be envisaged in order not to lose sight of the gender-based perspective and to recalibrate the attention on all forms of violence against women affecting women from all pockets of life and ethnicities.

13. Despite specific findings included in the baseline evaluation report, GREVIO observes that further efforts are required to ensure that the existing policies sufficiently take into consideration the specific needs of women victims exposed to intersectional discrimination and provide for specific measures in this regard. First, GREVIO’s attention has been drawn by civil society and women’s rights NGOs to the need to improve the mainstreaming of violence against women within broader strategies and policies targeting certain communities, in particular the 2012-2032 long-term strategy for Roma inclusion, which currently does not feature measures related to violence against women. Second, despite studies indicating that twice as many women with disabilities are subjected to violence against women than women without disabilities, GREVIO was alerted by civil society to a lack of sufficient targeted measures in the current strategies for addressing such a vulnerable group and poor implementation of the few measures foreseen.¹⁸ As regards the Sami community in particular, since the baseline evaluation report, the authorities have taken some steps to strengthen gender equality, prevention and protection efforts within this community. More specifically, they have commissioned the Sami Parliament to carry out a mapping exercise of Sami society from a gender equality perspective and to prevent and combat men’s violence against women, which GREVIO welcomes.¹⁹ However, a 2024 report commissioned by the Sami Parliament demonstrates the urgent need for redoubled action in light of the extreme exposure of Sami women to violence against women, including when compared to non-Sami women (55.5% of Sami women are reported to have been subjected to sexual violence, 68.5% have been subjected to psychological violence and 27.9% have experienced physical violence)²⁰ and in light of the distinct challenges that they

15. See the NGO submission from the Swedish Women’s Lobby, p. 3.

16. See the article “‘Honour’, ‘Honour’-based violence and ‘Honour’ killings”, Professor Aisha K. Gill, Professor of Criminology at University of Roehampton, UK: https://ehrac.org.uk/en_gb/blog/honour-honour-based-violence-and-honour-killings/.

17. These specificities include the fact that the violence is often committed by multiple family members or persons in the victim’s community and that a family and a man’s reputation is dependent on a female family member’s conservative behaviour.

18. See the NGO submission from the Forum Women and Disability in Sweden, p. 2.

19. More generally, GREVIO was informed by the Swedish authorities that the GEA was commissioned by the Government to report on the incidence of men’s violence against women and “honour-based violence and oppression” on adults and children belonging to national minorities in Sweden and to take measures to combat such forms of violence.

20. At the same time, and as a general note, GREVIO observes that results pointing to a higher incidence of violence against women among certain populations may need to be contextualised. Indeed, epidemiological research has shown that prevalence studies conducted on populations that have more interactions with state services may include certain biases. For example, it has been shown that differences in the prevalence rates of abuse and neglect on children from national and ethnic minorities compared to other sectors of the population or from populations with very low incomes and those with median incomes may be due to a higher frequency of interaction between these populations and professionals from public services (social assistance, the criminal justice system, child protection, etc.). See, for example, Hill R. B. (2007), *An analysis of racial/ethnic disproportionality and disparity at the national, state, and county levels*, Casey-CSSP Alliance for Racial Equity in Child Welfare, Washington. See also, Ards S., Myers S. L., Malkis A., Sugrue E. and Zhou L. (2003), *Racial disproportionality in reported and substantiated child abuse and neglect: An examination of systematic bias*, Children and Youth Services Review, 25, pp. 375-392.

face.²¹ The above-mentioned study thus formulates concrete and urgent policy measures for the Swedish authorities to tackle these problems comprehensively, which GREVIO considers should receive priority attention.²²

14. An additional area in which GREVIO considers that prompt specific policy action is needed concerns reports of sexual harassment, sexual violence and the use of seclusion and force against children with mental health/psycho-social issues who have been placed under state-run compulsory institutional care, which is supervised by the National Board of Institutional Care (SiS). Such instances of violence were reported in all 21 youth homes, disproportionately affected girls and were perpetrated predominantly by male staff. Reports indicate, in particular, that a very low number of reported incidents were followed up by the Health and Social Care Inspectorate (IVO)²³ or the relevant disciplinary board.²⁴ GREVIO was informed that the authorities have taken a number of measures, including increasing funds for SiS, opening an inquiry to review children's safety and to prevent violence in the youth homes,²⁵ and the development of new guidelines on collecting and handling such complaints. This notwithstanding, civil society has alerted GREVIO to persistent incidents of violence and to the need for an overhaul of the system and increased policy attention.

15. As regards more specifically the need to ensure the co-ordination of policies on violence against women, GREVIO notes that since the baseline evaluation report the related competences have evolved and shifted. The Gender Equality Agency has been identified as the entity that is competent for the co-ordination and the implementation of the Violence against Women Strategy and for supporting the County Administrative Boards, the entities that are responsible for ensuring such co-ordination efforts at regional level. Moreover, the Gender Equality Agency co-ordinates and participates in a number of networks and councils established with a view to ensuring multi-agency co-operation between the different national agencies that operate in the area of violence against women, as well as between the national and county levels.²⁶ GREVIO positively notes that the Gender Equality Agency is staffed with 230 people, 35 of whom work specifically on violence against women. The Division for Gender Equality of the Ministry of Employment, on the other hand, is now responsible for setting policies on violence against women. GREVIO has been informed by the authorities that both entities serve as co-ordinating bodies for the purpose of Article 10 of the convention, at different levels of governance.²⁷ While commending co-ordination efforts and structures at the national and regional levels, GREVIO notes the pronounced insufficiency of multi-agency co-operation structures at the local level, a shortcoming that was also identified in the baseline evaluation report and that requires urgent attention.²⁸

16. **GREVIO strongly encourages the Swedish authorities to ensure that:**

- a. the existing policies in the area of violence against women sufficiently take into consideration the specific needs of women and girl victims exposed to intersectional discrimination, notably by:**

21. See Brandén J., Nilsson L. M., Burman M., San Sebastian M. and Stoor J. P. (2024), *Våld Mot Samiska Kvinnor*, p. 20. See in particular the analysis under Article 22 and Articles 49 and 50, respectively, on Specialist support services and General obligations, immediate response, prevention and protection.

22. It recommends, in particular, to commission the County Administrative Boards and the Sami Parliament to follow up and co-ordinate the work to combat and prevent violence against Sami women; develop a national policy to combat violence against Sami women; develop support structures for Sami women and girl victims; carry out awareness-raising initiatives on violence against women experienced by Sami women.

23. The Health and Social Care Inspectorate is a Swedish government agency under the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs that controls and supervises healthcare as well as social services.

24. See Summary of Barnrättsbyrån's report "Who Will Believe in Me? A Report on Sexual Abuse Against Children in Institutional Care".

25. GREVIO has been informed by the authorities that a special investigator was appointed in the course of 2024 to make proposals on reforming state-run institutional care of children with a view to ensuring that violence is not perpetrated against children and that coercive measures are used in accordance with the law.

26. One such commission, for example, co-ordinates the work of the competent agencies dealing with FGM.

27. The Division for Gender Equality of the Ministry of Employment co-ordinates at the policy level and the Gender Equality Agency implements, co-ordinates and monitors at the operational level.

28. See Chapter III, Protection and support, General obligations.

(i) mainstreaming concerns pertaining to violence against women within broader strategies and policies targeting certain communities such as the Roma community;

(ii) developing more targeted measures within the action plan addressing the protection needs of vulnerable groups such as women with disabilities;

(iii) in light of the concerning incidence of violence against women experienced by Sami women, taking comprehensive policy action in this regard;

(iv) taking the necessary policy measures to prevent violence from occurring in youth homes, including, as a minimum, strengthening their supervision, raising staff awareness about gender-based violence and developing protocols to better identify victims and refer them to the needed support services;

b. an independent evaluation of strategies and action plans on violence against women is carried out regularly on the basis of predefined indicators in order to assess their impact and to ensure that policy making is based on reliable data.

17. GREVIO welcomes the comprehensive measures taken to combat serious forms of violence against women, including cases of violence in the name of so-called honour, and strongly encourages the Swedish authorities to ensure that a gendered understanding of these forms of violence is retained in policies and in their implementation, all the while ensuring that such policies do not result in the stigmatisation of certain migrant communities.

C. Financial resources (Article 8)

18. Article 8 of the Istanbul Convention aims to ensure the allocation of appropriate financial and human resources for activities carried out by public authorities and by relevant non-governmental and civil society organisations.²⁹

19. GREVIO welcomes the fact that, since the baseline evaluation report, the high level of government funding for measures, activities and research to prevent and combat violence against women has been maintained, if not increased. As acknowledged in the conclusions on the implementation of the Committee of the Parties recommendations adopted on 8 June 2022, additional financial resources have been earmarked, including for essential support services such as shelters.³⁰ In particular, since 2022, the sixth sub-goal of the Gender Equality Strategy on men's violence against women benefits from the permanent financing of a minimum of 300 million Swedish kronor (SEK) (around €26 million) per year. The following additional funding streams have equally been introduced and made permanent: women's rights organisations and other organisations that provide support to "victims of violence" are now allocated SEK 150 million (around €13 million) per year to fund activities other than running costs (as these should be covered by municipalities);³¹ funding has been made available by public ordinance to civil society, municipalities and regions to strengthen and evaluate preventive measures on violence against women (SEK 43 million or €3.7 million per biennium this far) and to carry out preventive measures in the area of violence committed in the name of so-called honour (around SEK 50 million or €4.3 million per year); SEK 60 million (around €5.2 million) has been made available to municipalities for the provision of preventive services for perpetrators of domestic violence; dedicated funding of SEK 100 million (around €8.7 million) is provided annually for the work of County Administrative Boards in the area of men's violence against women; and stable funding for the telephone helplines for victims of

29. Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, paragraph 66.

30. See the conclusions on the implementation of the Committee of the Parties recommendations, adopted on 8 June 2022.

31. The main funding source for the running costs of shelters is the local municipality, either on the basis of per capita funding for victims formally referred by social services or through the provision of more stable core funding.

violence against women and for perpetrators of sexual violence (to prevent offending) have been ensured. Additionally, funds have been made available to municipalities and regions in view of the implementation of the reform on shelters, which will require the meeting of minimum quality standards in order to secure a licence.³² Organisations running shelters were able to apply for a total of SEK 50 million in 2022 and 2023 (around €4.3 million) and SEK 20 million in 2024 (around €1.7 million) to undertake the needed qualitative improvements, including in relation to security requirements.

20. Despite the significant resources that have been earmarked to prevent and combat violence against women, several shortcomings have been identified that impact on the availability of such resources for women's rights organisations with extensive victim-centred expertise in the area of violence against women. First, according to indications provided by civil society, shelters for men victims of violence and other entities can now compete alongside women's specialist support organisations for some of the funds mentioned in the preceding paragraph. Indeed, some of the above-mentioned sources of funding are directed to organisations that provide assistance to the category of "victims of crime", and thus include as eligible a wide variety of organisations that do not provide support in the area of violence against women. It is therefore uncertain to what extent part of the foreseen dedicated funding is actually reaching women's shelter organisations.

21. Second, the decline in the number of referrals made by social services to shelters run by women's rights organisations, already identified in the baseline evaluation report, has been further exacerbated. Indeed, civil society and women's rights NGOs have alerted GREVIO to the widespread practice of social welfare services favouring referrals to for-profit commercial or privately run entities that do not provide victim-centred specialist support services, rather than to women's rights organisations. Given the heavy reliance of shelters on the per capita funding from municipalities, the lack of referrals from social services is threatening the financial viability and existence of these experienced organisations. GREVIO recalls in this respect that women's rights organisations, through their specific expertise, gendered understanding of violence against women and empowering approach, truly offer a lifeline to victims and enable them to rebuild trust in the delivery of support and protection for experiences of gender-based violence. At the time of the drafting of this report, the Swedish authorities were discussing quality indicators that will need to be respected in order for an entity to qualify for a licence to run a shelter, and, therefore, to qualify for funding. GREVIO understands that such quality indicators apply to all types of shelters and are not specific to violence against women shelters. GREVIO observes that while it may be important to ensure quality standards for shelters, these should reflect the specific needs of victims of violence against women and thus require extensive victim-centred expertise in the area of violence against women, in line with the standards of the Istanbul Convention. They should equally require sufficient competence to provide support in cases of digital manifestations of violence against women and the ability to respond to severe safety threats such as in cases of violence committed in the name of so-called honour. GREVIO's attention has equally been drawn to insufficient funding made available to women's rights organisations providing psycho-social counselling and trauma support to victims of sexual violence. Indeed, it appears that the public health system is ill-equipped to provide such non-emergency healthcare services and that, as a result, there are very long waiting lists to access these services as these are provided by only one women's rights organisation.³³ The authorities have clarified that such trauma treatment falls under the purview of the Healthcare Act and is the responsibility of regions. Compounding the above, civil society has also drawn GREVIO's attention to difficulties encountered in accessing funding, including because of the complexities of funding procedures and funding criteria deemed unclear. In this respect, GREVIO notes with interest that the National Agency for Public Procurement has been tasked by the government to provide support and training to civil society with a view to facilitating their participation in procurement procedures.

32. See in this respect Article 22, Specialist support services.

33. Notably, the WONSA clinic, partly funded by the Stockholm Region, is the only NGO that offers non-emergency trauma therapy to victims of sexual violence from the age of 12 and above. See the submission from the NGO the Swedish Women's Lobby, pp. 28-29.

22. **GREVIO urges the Swedish authorities to ensure sustainable funding levels for women's rights organisations that run specialist support services for women victims of all forms of violence, including those providing much needed psycho-social counselling and trauma support to victims of sexual violence, with a view to developing sufficient competence to provide support in cases of digital manifestations of violence against women and to provide safe premises where there are more severe safety threats. Such suitable funding opportunities should be guaranteed through dedicated, long-term grants based on transparent and clear procurement procedures that give due weight to professional and technical experience, including a comprehensive understanding of violence against women as a gendered phenomenon.**

D. Data collection (Article 11)

23. Preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence requires evidence-based policy making. The collection of systematic and comparable data from all relevant administrative sources is crucial in this regard, as is information on the prevalence of all forms of violence against women.

1. Law-enforcement agencies and the justice sector

24. GREVIO welcomes the fact that in response to findings made in its baseline evaluation report, the authorities have taken steps to improve data-collection efforts by law-enforcement agencies and prosecution services, a development also recognised by the Committee of the Parties in its conclusions on the implementation of recommendations issued in respect of Sweden.³⁴ Indeed, new data categories specifying the age and sex of the victim and, for victims aged 18 or older, the relationship between victim and perpetrator were introduced in 2019 for several crimes,³⁵ including for attempted murder or manslaughter, harassment, threat, violation of privacy, rape and sexual assault and covering reported offences, those investigated and those brought to indictment. GREVIO commends these efforts, noting that it allows the more accurate identification of the percentage of offences committed by intimate partners or within the domestic unit, while recognising at the same time a number of shortcomings that need to be addressed. First, data on the perpetrator does not appear to be disaggregated by sex. Second, disaggregation according to the relationship between victim and perpetrator is not available for victims under 18 years old and would be extremely important to capture the rise in sexual violence among teenagers. Third, while Sweden has been collecting administrative data on homicides of female victims since 2014 and data on intimate-partner homicides since 2017, the available data detail information about the sex and age of the victim but data on the sex of the perpetrator is either not collected or, in the case of intimate-partner homicides, not made public. GREVIO underlines the importance of bridging this gap so that accurate data on gender-related killings can emerge.³⁶ As regards the more practical implementation of data-collection efforts, GREVIO notes that a study commissioned by the authorities and carried out by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå), covering the period 2019-2021, revealed that the statistics on the number of reported/recorded assault offences committed against women by an intimate partner were inaccurate and had been underestimated by the police.³⁷ GREVIO was informed by the authorities that in response to this identified shortcoming specific training on recording data in a reliable and consistent manner was carried out, which GREVIO welcomes and considers should be standard practice. As regards statistics on restraining and protection orders, GREVIO welcomes the new capacity of the authorities to disaggregate "breaches of non-contact orders"³⁸ according to the age and sex of the victim and,

34. See the conclusions on the implementation of the Committee of the Parties recommendations in respect of Sweden, adopted on 8 June 2022.

35. Notably whether they are an intimate partner, a family member, a perpetrator known to the victim or perpetrator unknown to the victim.

36. See also the EIGE fact sheet "Measuring femicide in Sweden", 2021, p. 6.

37. See the Brå study "On the quality of the relationship between victim and perpetrator in recorded abuse cases in the years 2019-2021".

38. See section 24 of the Non-contact Order Act (1988:688) on the violation of a restraining order without electronic monitoring.

for victims above 18 years old, the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator, noting however that some of the shortcomings referred to above apply *mutatis mutandis*. At the same time, GREVIO was informed by the authorities that statistics on the number of breaches of non-contact orders and on the sanctions applied are not collected systematically.

25. On the other hand, data on convictions and sanctions disaggregated by the sex and age of the victim and the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator for all forms of violence against women offences are not available at the level of the courts, despite a finding issued by GREVIO in this connection in the baseline evaluation report. GREVIO thus regrets that it is still not possible to trace the progress of cases from reporting to conviction and to identify attrition rates and their causes. This notwithstanding, the enactment in 2019 of a regulation on the digitalisation of the judiciary and the issue of the 2023-2027 Strategic Plan can be seen as a positive first step forward as they lay the foundations for improved data exchange with law-enforcement authorities and improved tracking of cases across the criminal justice system. Moreover, in 2023, Brå initiated a feasibility study to explore the possibility of developing new data categories that will enable tracking a case from prosecution to conviction.

2. Healthcare sector

26. In its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO had observed that recording obligations existed only in cases of injuries resulting from assault and concerned contacts with providers of inpatient and specialist care. Therefore, most contact with primary healthcare providers for reasons of domestic violence were not recorded given the exemption of general practitioners and all other providers of primary care from data-recording obligations. Equally, contact made for reasons of sexual violence and rape were not covered by reporting obligations. At the same time, GREVIO had welcomed the recording of the annual number of instances of contact with healthcare providers made by women in relation to FGM in the National Patient Register.

27. GREVIO notes with regret that despite assigning the National Board of Health and Welfare with the task of proposing legal amendments to obligations on the collection/recording of data in the National Patient Register, no substantial progress has been made in this area since the baseline evaluation report.

3. Social services

28. Although efforts are underway to reform data collection in the area of social services, GREVIO notes with concern that information on the number of women and girls who contact social services for help as a result of experiences of all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence, broken down by the victims' sex, age and relationship with the perpetrator, is not collected at the national or regional/municipal level. Moreover, data from women's rights organisations and for-profit entities that provide support services and shelter to victims are not captured, thus detracting from a complete and representative view of prevention and protection efforts. Indeed, social services, including those offices providing direct support to victims of violence against women or providing assistance in the area of housing and employment, for example, may be the first points of contact for those victims who are afraid or are unwilling to report the related offences to the police. The collection of such data is therefore essential to form an accurate picture of the scale of the problem and to find a means to address it effectively and comprehensively.

29. **While acknowledging the progress made since the baseline evaluation report, GREVIO strongly encourages the Swedish authorities to take measures to:**

- a. harmonise the collection of data on all forms of violence against women and domestic violence, including homicide, between law-enforcement agencies, prosecution and the judiciary, with the aim of tracing the progress of cases from reporting to conviction and to identify attrition rates and their causes and ensure that disaggregated data on convictions is collected by courts;**
- b. diligently enter such data into the relevant databases;**

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- c. ensure that the data are disaggregated by sex of both the victim and the perpetrator, the age, the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim and the geographical location, as well as other factors deemed relevant;**
 - d. systematically collect information on the number of breaches of non-contact orders and the sanctions applied;**
 - e. ensure the collection of data related to violence against women and domestic violence, disaggregated by sex, age and relationship of the perpetrator to the victim, type of violence and geographical location, in the healthcare sector and by social services and specialist support service providers, including those managed privately. Data collected by public and private healthcare providers should encompass all contact made by victims of violence against women with primary healthcare providers, including for experiences of violence beyond physical violence.**

III. Analysis of the implementation of selected provisions in the priority areas in the fields of prevention, protection and prosecution

A. Prevention

30. Chapter III of the Istanbul Convention contains a number of general and more specific obligations in the area of prevention. This section analyses the progress made since the baseline evaluation monitoring procedure on the implementation of early preventive measures. It also covers the progress made on implementing the more specific preventive measures provided for under this chapter in the area of education, training of all relevant professionals and perpetrator programmes. Ensuring the effective prevention of all forms of violence against women and domestic violence is an important step in rendering it unacceptable and reducing levels of perpetration.³⁹ In turn, effective prevention empowers women and girls to speak out about their experiences and seek support and protection.

1. General obligations (Article 12)

31. Article 12 sets out a number of general preventive measures that represent the overarching principles of the parties' duty to prevent violence against women. These include the requirement 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 based on the idea of the inferiority of women or on stereotyped roles for women and men. A positive contribution to achieving such change can be made by men and boys acting as role models and advocating equality between women and men and mutual respect, including by speaking out against violence, engaging other men in ending violence against women or actively taking on caring responsibilities. Moreover, flowing from the premise that violence against women is a cause as much as a consequence of gender inequality, Article 12 further requires that parties adopt specific measures to empower women in order to enable them to recognise and reject discrimination, unequal power relations and, ultimately, reduce women's vulnerability to violence and achieve greater gender equality.

32. As was the case in its baseline evaluation report, which noted that preventive action had been strongly embedded in the overarching gender equality policy goal, GREVIO welcomes the continued emphasis placed on prevention as demonstrated by the Violence against Women Strategy and its Action Plans and the development, in 2022, of a dedicated National Violence Prevention Programme. These four policy documents detail interventions targeting the population as a whole and the specific groups that are at an increased risk of committing or being subject to violence.⁴⁰ GREVIO further welcomes the reform of the criminalisation of all non-consensual sexual acts (described in the baseline evaluation report), complemented by awareness-raising and training initiatives on the importance of consent in sexual relations, targeting different pockets of society. Notably, the Swedish Crime Victim Authority introduced a web-based training programme and an accompanying teacher's guide on the legislation, carried out awareness raising targeted at young people aged 13 to 25 and at professionals that interact with them, and developed a website providing information on this topic, which benefited from significant visibility.⁴¹ GREVIO notes with satisfaction that such awareness-raising efforts are estimated by the authorities to have reached approximately 7 out of 10 young adults aged 18 to 25. Finally, the authority also reached out to

39. The importance of this endeavour has been reiterated and strengthened through the Dublin Declaration on the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, adopted in Dublin, Ireland, by 38 member states of the Council of Europe.

40. Some of the preventive actions include the development of a handbook on domestic violence to support the relevant authorities; awareness-raising initiatives carried out by the GEA and the development of material for employers to improve the identification of and support for victims of violence against women; the development of a dedicated action plan by the GEA on FGM, providing extensive training to professionals; various initiatives in the area of education and perpetrator programmes; and a study on preventive work on violence against women in sport.

41. See <https://frivilligtsex.se>, which translates to "voluntary sex" and in 2022 had been visited/consulted around 91 000 times.

parents through a leaflet providing information on the legislation and on how to talk to their children about the notion of rape being understood as a sexual act without freely given consent.

33. In reviewing the preventive measures and programmes carried out since the baseline evaluation report, GREVIO observes that a large proportion of such activities either target migrants and asylum seekers and/or pertain to violence committed in the name of so-called honour. These include awareness-raising activities carried out by the Crime Victim Authority on “honour-based violence”; training/awareness raising on FGM and forced marriage carried out by the Agency for Youth and Civil Society and aimed at professionals who interact with young people with a migrant background and asylum seekers; awareness-raising initiatives carried out by the Agency for Support to Faith Communities for religious leaders to change attitudes towards FGM and other “honour-based violence”, as well as mentoring and leadership programmes aimed at stimulating women’s empowerment in faith communities; and the provision of a “mandatory social introduction” on gender equality, consent legislation, FGM and domestic violence to asylum seekers and migrants who have been granted a residence permit with temporary protection. GREVIO commends these initiatives. It notes, however, that it is equally important not to lose sight of the fact that violence against women is a pervasive phenomenon that concerns the whole population. Prevention efforts must therefore also address all other forms of violence against women and all pockets of society as the struggle against this violation of human rights and gender inequality is still far from having been won. GREVIO considers that more could be done to address societal attitudes, cultural norms and gender stereotypes rooted in the perceived inferiority of women. In this respect, GREVIO draws the attention of the Swedish authorities to Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on preventing and combating sexism, which can provide guidance on raising awareness of gender-based prejudices and stereotypes.

34. Preventive action has equally focused on “violence in young relations” and has encompassed a study on measures that can be taken to prevent such violence (carried out by Brå); a mapping exercise on how public authorities can raise awareness of this phenomenon (carried out by GEA); the development of a school programme called “Safe dates and dating matters”; and dedicated research and a survey (commissioned by the authorities and carried out by Stockholm University). While welcoming preventive action in the area of intimate-partner violence experienced by young people, GREVIO notes that, with the exception of the awareness-raising campaign and the website “Jealousy is not romantic”, which draws attention to boy’s violence against girls, the terminology used by the authorities – violence in young relations – risks masking the undisputed and disproportionate incidence of intimate-partner violence committed against young women and does little to challenge social norms, attitudes and gender stereotypes.

35. As regards preventive measures to address the heightened exposure of women at risk of intersectional discrimination, which the baseline evaluation report required action on, GREVIO notes that some work that has addressed, more broadly, violence experienced by persons and children with disabilities also touches upon violence committed in the name of so-called honour.⁴² It observes, however, that more preventive measures would need to be developed to specifically address experiences of gender-based violence against women and girls with disabilities. Moreover, in light of the extreme exposure of Sami women to violence against women and the findings and recommendations made by the recent study issued by the Sami Parliament, GREVIO underscores the importance of carrying out awareness-raising initiatives on violence against women experienced by this group among professionals that provide support and protection, as well as among the victims themselves. The above-mentioned study and information obtained during the visit, in fact, point to very low reporting rates and help-seeking behaviour among Sami women, partly because of geographical isolation, distrust in the authorities and the fact that leaving their region of birth and separating from the perpetrator can lead to the loss of Sami identity and connected land rights for the victim and her children. For all these reasons, domestic violence and violence against women is often dealt with within the community/family.

42. For example, the Agency for Participation carried out a study on violence perpetrated against persons with disabilities that encompassed a survey on measures taken to detect and prevent such violence and various awareness-raising activities. Moreover, the National Board of Health and Welfare has been tasked with developing information material and raising awareness of violence against children with disabilities. See the 2022 National Violence Prevention Programme.

36. **GREVIO strongly encourages the Swedish authorities to:**

- a. **ensure wider preventive measures for all forms of violence against women that address it as a pervasive phenomenon affecting all pockets of society in order to challenge societal attitudes, cultural norms and gender stereotypes rooted in the perceived inferiority of women;**
- b. **ensure that more preventive work is carried out that specifically addresses gender-based violence against women and girls experienced by women with disabilities and other women at risk of intersectional discrimination, including, in particular, Sami women;**
- c. **regularly carry out impact assessments of any awareness-raising campaigns and primary prevention measures taken.**

2. Education (Article 14)

37. The drafters of the convention recognised the important role that formal and informal educational settings play in addressing the root causes of violence against women and girls. Article 14 therefore requires the design of teaching material that promotes equality between women and men, non-stereotyped gender roles, mutual respect, non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships and the right to personal integrity and informs learners of the different forms of gender-based violence against women, adapted to the age and capacity of learners and where parties deem appropriate. The obligation to promote these principles extends to informal educational facilities as well as any sports, cultural and leisure facilities. In this context, GREVIO underlines the importance of informing parents on the content of related courses, the qualifications of the persons providing the courses; and to whom any questions can be directed.

38. In its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO had observed that gender equality, the countering of gender stereotypes, the prevention of degrading treatment and harassment, sex and intimate relationships and consent to such acts had been addressed in the national curriculum and head teachers were responsible for ensuring their teaching. GREVIO had expressed reservations, however, about the extent to which these concepts had been addressed, in practice, in classes. It had also found that particular emphasis had been placed on “honour-related violence” and that this had been done in way that may stigmatise certain communities.

39. Since then, a new curriculum has been introduced, requiring schools to regularly teach pupils about gender equality, sexuality, consent and relationships, combating gender stereotypes and “honour-related violence and oppression” in a transversal manner. GREVIO further welcomes the inclusion of the dangers of pornography and the topic of digital literacy in the curriculum. In addition, comprehensive sexuality education is mandatory in secondary and upper secondary school and addresses, *inter alia*, the new legislation on rape based on the lack of consent and “honour-related violence and oppression”. As regards training, although it is decided upon and funded by municipalities, some training on the above-mentioned topics and material has been made available to teachers by the National Agency for Education. GREVIO equally notes with interest that the National Agency for Education has been tasked with mapping and analysing schools’ activities in preventing, detecting, and addressing men’s violence against women, including intimate-partner violence committed by youth and violence committed in the name of so-called honour. Moreover, this authority has been requested to analyse students’ exposure to digital dimensions of violence and to propose measures to prevent and combat this insidious form of violence by 2026, which GREVIO welcomes.

40. GREVIO commends these developments, noting however the concerns expressed by civil society regarding the reluctance of certain teachers to teach the above-mentioned topics, leading to uneven knowledge and outcomes among pupils in Sweden. The responsibility to ensure such teaching still lies with head teachers, and, since 2022, the School Inspectorate has been required to visit schools to verify that these topics are indeed being addressed. The need to ensure the teaching in practice of the topics covered under Article 14 of the convention is all the more topical and urgent

in light of the 2023 report from the Equality Ombudsman, which found a high incidence of sexual harassment in schools.⁴³

41. Moreover, GREVIO notes certain gaps in the forms of violence against women currently addressed in the curriculum. For example, the subject of digital literacy does not address directly digital forms of violence against women but focuses more broadly on giving pupils the skills to critically assess online content so that they can understand risks and evaluate information. Moreover, domestic violence, stalking and FGM are not covered by the curriculum other than in the context of so-called honour-related violence. GREVIO considers it important to provide a comprehensive overview of all forms of violence against women, by articulating the underpinning principles that they all share. This is particularly important for highly prevalent forms of violence such as domestic violence, which pupils may be exposed to in their own homes.

42. As regards the promotion of gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence in informal educational facilities, GREVIO has been informed of some information material having been developed and disseminated by the authorities to professionals working with youth in sports and cultural facilities focusing on violence in the name of “honour”, sexual violence and sexual harassment.

43. **GREVIO urges the Swedish authorities to:**

- a. **ensure that the compulsory school curriculum provides a comprehensive overview of the concept of violence against women by articulating the underpinning principles that all forms of violence against women share, and that it addresses all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence, stalking, FGM and digital forms of violence against women;**
- b. **strengthen efforts to ensure the practical implementation of the requirement to impart knowledge on the elements listed in Article 14 of the Istanbul Convention;**
- c. **increase their efforts to promote the principles of equality between women and men, non-stereotyped gender roles, mutual respect and non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships in non-formal education, as well as in sports, cultural and leisure activities.**

3. Training of professionals (Article 15)

44. Building society’s trust by delivering support, protection and justice to women and girls with experiences of gender-based violence requires well-trained professionals across a wide spectrum of fields. The standard set by the Istanbul Convention in its Article 15 is that of systematic initial and in-service training of all those who deal with victims or perpetrators of all acts of violence. The training that is required must cover the prevention and detection of such violence, equality between women and men, the needs and rights of victims and the prevention of secondary victimisation.

45. Recalling the important steps taken in Sweden towards ensuring comprehensive knowledge on violence against women through higher education, as described in its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO welcomes the continuous emphasis placed on training incoming professionals in Sweden. This is in particular noteworthy as the degree courses that require mandatory teaching on violence against women range from legal studies to various medical studies, including psychology, nursing and surgery, but include also studies in the field of social work. Moreover, GREVIO notes with interest that a mapping exercise has been carried out by the GEA aimed at identifying any knowledge gaps across professional groups that interact with victims.

46. While the results of this exercise are not yet available and will hopefully shed light on the extent to which tertiary education is contributing to a higher level of knowledge on violence against women, GREVIO wishes to draw attention to the gaps in knowledge it has observed during this evaluation procedure. These seem to be a result of insufficient in-service training of key professional

43. See “The State of Discrimination 2023”, annual report from the Equality Ombudsman, pp. 52-53.

groups such as social workers, healthcare personnel, teachers, family law professionals and members of the judiciary. Although training efforts exist and are undertaken in various ways, GREVIO notes that much in-service training remains voluntary or is dispensed with irregular frequency, leaving many individual professionals without the level of knowledge on the different forms of violence against women that is required for an effective, empowering, gender-sensitive and safety-oriented case management. Reports of inadequate responses from social services to victims of forced marriage are recurrent,⁴⁴ as are reports on unsafe visitation and custody decisions after domestic violence.

47. This is despite the training on domestic violence and violence in the name of so-called honour, including forced marriage and FGM, which case workers responsible for social welfare investigations receive, but which GREVIO had already assessed as insufficient in its baseline evaluation report.⁴⁵ Such training does not extend to social workers who provide assistance, including to victims, in other areas of social services.⁴⁶ More generally, such training appears to depend on the priorities/funds of municipalities and is not mandatory. GREVIO points to the importance of in-service training not only for those social workers who have already benefited from initial training but also, and especially, for those who had obtained their degree prior to 2019 when mandatory course modules were introduced into higher education on social work. In this connection, GREVIO welcomes the efforts of the National Board of Health and Welfare (NBHW), which has developed guidelines for social services and healthcare staff on “honour-related violence” and offers training intermittently. It underlines, however, the importance of ensuring that in-service training covers all forms of violence against women, is made mandatory and is carried out regularly.

48. When it comes to the training of judges, the growing corpus of baseline and thematic evaluation reports have consistently pointed to persistent shortcomings at the level of the courts, including in Sweden. This is notably due to insufficient knowledge on the nature and dynamics of violence against women among many judges and, as a result, low conviction rates for all forms of violence against women.

49. This notwithstanding, GREVIO notes that in-service training of Swedish judges continues to be available on a voluntary basis. This means that judges, newly appointed and longer-serving, may attend training on several topics, including on domestic violence, sexual offences and violence committed in the name of “honour”, but are not in any way obliged to, as explained by the authorities, for reasons of their independence and autonomy. While GREVIO underscores its full respect for this essential principle, as well as for judicial autonomy in the organisation of training, it notes, at the same time, the unique and essential role the judiciary plays in applying the Istanbul Convention and its principles incorporated into national legislation. By virtue of this essential role, their decisions may directly engage states’ responsibility.⁴⁷ It is therefore of paramount importance that, when adjudicating cases in criminal and civil law pertaining to violence against women, such decisions are informed and based on appropriate, specialist knowledge, addressing, *inter alia*, gender stereotyping. Indeed, this requires expertise on very complex phenomena such as trauma-induced victim behaviour; the “freeze, flop and befriend” reactions of victims of rape; and the long-term harm and consequences of witnessing domestic violence on children, as well as in-depth knowledge on the standards of the Istanbul Convention. Such training needs cannot be sufficiently addressed by

44. See in this respect Article 20, General support services, notably with reference to social services’ practice of contacting parents in cases of forced marriage, which can lead to the removal of such children from Sweden and their travel abroad for the purpose of FGM and forced marriage.

45. Notably, the authorities have drawn GREVIO’s attention to data indicating that 96% of municipalities in Sweden have completed training for social services staff that “investigate” cases of domestic violence and 91% have ensured training for those social workers who “investigate” cases in which children have been exposed to or have witnessed domestic violence.

46. For example, the Stockholm County’s report, “Insatser för personer som utövat våld i nära relation – en kartläggning i Stockholms län” (Support for individuals who have perpetrated violence in intimate relationships – an assessment in Stockholm County), highlights that all social workers, particularly those that work in child and family units, should be trained on domestic violence and on motivating perpetrators to attend perpetrator programmes as the issue of domestic violence is frequently present in cases they follow.

47. The following are examples among many cases in the area of violence against women where the decisions of judge(s) engaged states’ responsibility under the European Convention on Human Rights and led to a violation: *Vuckovic v. Croatia* (Application No. 15798/20, 12 December 2023), *J.L. v. Italy* (Application No. 5671/16, 27 May 2021) and *Carvalho Pinto de Sousa Morais v. Portugal* (Application No. 17484/15, 25 July 2017).

ad hoc, optional courses, but require mandatory and in-depth training of judges on relevant issues. It is encouraging that this is increasingly being recognised and that judicial training academies are moving towards mandatory training on violence against women to address the complex nature of these offences.⁴⁸ This is supported by the information collected by the Council of Europe European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ) in 2020 showing that 24 member states of the Council of Europe require some form of compulsory in-service training for judges,⁴⁹ and the complex nature of violence against women would merit inclusion of these topics. Ways must be found, therefore, to ensure that members of the judiciary are equipped with the necessary knowledge to respond to women victims of violence and their children in a manner that instils their trust in the judiciary and provides an adequate sense of justice. This is of acute relevance not only in the context of criminal proceedings but also in relation to family law cases, where judicial decisions on custody and visitation often do not offer sufficient consideration for the safety concerns and needs of women and children leaving abusive relationships, frequently ignoring allegations of domestic violence and/or accepting agreements despite a history of domestic violence.

50. In-service training on violence against women for healthcare providers is also carried out on a voluntary basis – decided on in terms of scope and range and offered at the level of municipalities. Training on “honour-related violence” (including forced marriage and FGM) and related guidelines have been made available by the NBHW. Guidelines exist on providing care to victims of sexual assault and on how to identify victims of domestic violence and child witnesses. This notwithstanding, civil society has brought to GREVIO’s attention a very low awareness among healthcare providers of domestic violence and of FGM and the existing national guidelines. Equally, the absence of standardised protocols at local level to identify, treat and further refer victims has been recognised as one cause of an uneven response by healthcare staff.

51. Teaching as a higher education degree is not a degree that has violence against women embedded into its curriculum, meaning there is currently no mandatory initial or in-service training for teachers on the matter. In-service training is dependent on municipalities’ priorities and funding choices, resulting in uneven levels of knowledge among teachers in Sweden. GREVIO recalls the web-based training on the new legislation on rape for teachers developed by the authorities and the policy objective requiring the National Agency for Education to raise the awareness and capacity of school personnel to detect “honour-based violence and oppression”, but is concerned that the current situation seriously impacts on teachers’ ability to teach the topics required under Article 14 of the convention, as well as their ability to identify potential victims in their classes.

52. Law-enforcement officers, on the other hand, receive training on domestic violence, gender equality and the prevention of secondary victimisation in their initial training. While up to 2024 only those police officers involved in investigations related to domestic violence and sexual violence could receive, on a voluntary basis, in-service training on domestic violence and on sexual violence, since February 2024 training on violence against women, trauma and risk assessments is available to all those who investigate reports. GREVIO notes with satisfaction that this is further supported by detailed methodologies and checklists on investigations into domestic violence, stalking, “honour-related crime” and sexual violence. It does not appear, however, that such training is mandatory or that it covers all forms of violence against women (including FGM, forced marriage, sexual harassment and stalking). Moreover, mandatory in-service training on violence against women should extend to all police officers, including those that receive reports but do not investigate them. Furthermore, in light of the growing phenomenon and deleterious impact of digital forms of violence against women,⁵⁰ GREVIO notes that the police’s knowledge and ability to respond to the digital dimension of violence against women is extremely limited and requires dedicated training.

53. In a development seeking to enable employers to better address intimate-partner violence and violence related to “honour”, the GEA has developed an online course for managers, employers

48. See the first thematic evaluation report on Montenegro, paragraph 68.

49. Council of Europe European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ), *Qualitative Data on European Judicial Systems*, 2020, available at: <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/cepej/viz/QualitativeDataEN/QualitativeData>.

50. See in this respect Articles 49 and 50, Reporting to and immediate response and investigations by law-enforcement agencies.

and staff on how these forms of violence impact working life, with a view to improving the detection and prevention of such violence, which GREVIO welcomes. Moreover, in the context of the dedicated action plan the agency has developed on FGM, it has provided extensive training to various professionals on this form of violence, including to staff that assess asylum claims or that work in reception centres, among others.

54. In view of the persistent gaps in ensuring mandatory training of professionals whose contribution to a trust-based system of support, protection and justice is vital, GREVIO urges the Swedish authorities to:

- a. introduce systematic and mandatory initial and in-service training on all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention, including its digital dimensions, and on the cultural specificities of women belonging to vulnerable groups for all social services staff, law-enforcement agencies, judges, healthcare providers and teachers, supported by standardised protocols aimed at identifying, providing support to and further referring victims to other services;**
- b. ensure that such mandatory training equally aims to enhance the skills and capacity of all relevant professionals to collect data on violence against women in line with the standards of the Istanbul Convention;**
- c. ensure that such training programmes are evaluated.**

55. GREVIO further urges the Swedish authorities to ensure the mandatory training of judges presiding over cases involving custody and visitation on:

- a. the negative effects that witnessing violence against women has on children, the importance that victims' safety has on children's ability to recover from trauma and the need to take such circumstances into account when reaching a decision and/or when promoting mediation or validating an agreement on mediation in such cases;**
- b. the nature and dynamics of domestic violence, including the unequal power relations between the parties, as opposed to a mere conflictual relationship between spouses.**

4. Preventive intervention and treatment programmes (Article 16)

56. Perpetrator programmes are important elements of an integrated and comprehensive approach to preventing and combating violence against women. Under Article 16 of the Istanbul Convention, parties are required to set up or support programmes that prevent perpetrators of domestic violence and of sexual violence from reoffending and support them in adopting non-violent behavioural strategies. Making the safety of, support for and the human rights of victims a primary concern, these programmes are key elements for ensuring women's safety from known perpetrators. The convention requires their close co-ordination with specialist support services for victims.

a. Programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence

57. Since the baseline evaluation report, the provision of perpetrator programmes run by the Swedish Prison and Probation Service (SPPS) and by the municipalities has evolved and expanded. Nonetheless, the principal shortcoming identified at the time, notably the need to ensure more uniform standards across all perpetrator programmes available in the country, is still topical. More specifically, further to recommendations made by the NBHW, the SPPS no longer runs the Integrated Domestic Abuse Programme for groups of convicted perpetrators of domestic violence and has adopted instead the Relationsvåldsprogrammet programme (RVP programme) and the Preventing Domestic Violence programme (PREDOV programme), which target individuals and cater the programmes to the specific risk of the perpetrator. According to the authorities, they are based on cognitive behavioural therapy, adopt a gendered understanding of violence against women and aim to change perpetrators' attitudes and behaviour towards women. GREVIO notes that the completion rates of the programmes have risen when compared to the rates observed in

the baseline evaluation report and that the programmes are in the course of being evaluated.⁵¹ GREVIO was further appraised that the authorities have mandated the SPSS to provide training to municipalities and regions during 2024 so that they can adopt the PREDOV programme. There are also plans to evaluate such programmes once they have been rolled out in municipalities. Pending these developments, the provision of perpetrator programmes for domestic violence at the municipal level reveals a mixed picture.

58. Since 2021, under the Social Services Act, municipalities are required to promote change in the behaviour of perpetrators of domestic violence and must do so while giving special consideration to the safety of the victim (and children). With a view to assessing the extent to which municipalities are meeting this requirement and identifying the number of perpetrator programmes available in the country, the authorities have commissioned a mapping exercise, which is expected to be completed in 2024. In the meantime, a study commissioned by the authorities shows that all municipalities can offer perpetrators of violence, on a voluntary basis, either programmes run directly by social services and/or counselling or can refer them to civil society organisations that run perpetrator programmes. As regards more specifically the former, perpetrators can attend for free five sessions in an anonymous manner but are required to provide their names and register with social services in order to attend additional sessions at a cost. In this respect, it has been brought to GREVIO's attention that the registration requirement, and possibly the applicable fee, discourages perpetrators from completing the programme. On a more general note, civil society has drawn GREVIO's attention to the absence of existing best practice standards that would ensure a consistent and gender-sensitive approach to all perpetrator programmes. Concern has been expressed, in particular, in relation to the types of programmes that are run,⁵² as they do not apply a gendered understanding of violence against women or address men's attitudes and behaviour towards women but focus solely on how to manage emotions and conflicts,⁵³ an approach that GREVIO considers to be entirely inadequate and far from the spirit and the letter of the convention.

59. As regards the referral pathways to the different perpetrator programmes, all operate on a voluntary basis but can impact positively on decisions around early release from custody or can be one of the measures foreseen in the context of a probational sentence. It is entirely at the discretion of the court to propose such attendance, but it is not clear to what extent courts in practice order it. In addition to the above, GREVIO welcomes the running of the helpline "Choose to Stop", providing support to men who fear they may perpetrate intimate-partner violence and referring them to where they can seek professional help. It is currently run at the national level by the foundation Manscentrum, with the support of the NBHW.

60. **While acknowledging the many steps taken to strengthen the provision of perpetrator programmes across the country, GREVIO strongly encourages the Swedish authorities to:**

- a. **develop common minimum standards for perpetrator programmes, in line with the principles of the Istanbul Convention, taking account of the need for a gender-sensitive approach and for perpetrators to examine and identify the patriarchal and misogynist nature of their values and attitudes, take full responsibility for their actions and modify their behaviour;**
- b. **ensure that perpetrator programmes are widely attended, including by incorporating them into the criminal justice system as a tool to reduce recidivism;**
- c. **ensure the external evaluation of all perpetrator programmes, in line with recognised best international practices and principles, in order to assess whether the programmes serve their intended preventive aims.**

51. Between 2021 and 2023, 507, 462 and 561 offenders, respectively, completed the programme.

52. The most common methods used are "Alternatives to violence" (ATV), termed non-violence groups, a form of group therapy, and an approach called "Talk about violence".

53. See the shadow report submitted by the Swedish Women's Lobby, p. 8.

b. Programmes for perpetrators of sexual violence

61. Since the baseline evaluation procedure, two new programmes tailored to the risk profile of the offender are being run for sexual violence perpetrators in correctional facilities (the Seif programme, for high-risk perpetrators, and the CONSENT programme, for medium-risk offenders). The authorities have informed GREVIO that these programmes are based on cognitive behavioural therapy, address attitudes towards women and adopt a gendered understanding of violence against women. GREVIO notes with satisfaction that the completion rates of the programmes have risen when compared to the rates observed in the baseline evaluation report and that the programmes are in the process of being evaluated.

62. GREVIO welcomes the permanent funding by the government of the national telephone helpline “Preventell”, described in the baseline evaluation report. This helpline aims to provide support and prevent the commission of sexual offences by individuals with risky and/or compulsive sexual behaviour.

B. Protection and support

63. Chapter IV of the Istanbul Convention requires a multifaceted, professional and victim-oriented support structure for any woman or girl who has experienced any of the forms of violence covered by the convention. General and specialist support services that are victim-oriented, accessible to all and adequate in numbers greatly facilitate recovery by offering support, protection and assistance to overcome the multiple consequences of such violence. As such, they play a key role in offering a comprehensive and adequate response to the different forms of violence covered by the convention.

1. General obligations (Article 18)

64. Article 18 of the Istanbul Convention sets out a number of general principles to be respected in the provision of both general and specialist protective and supportive services for women victims of violence. One of these principles is the need for services to act in a concerted and co-ordinated manner, with the involvement of all the agencies concerned. More specifically, Article 18, paragraph 2, of the convention requires parties to put in place appropriate co-ordination mechanisms that can ensure effective co-operation among, *inter alia*, the judiciary, public prosecutors, law-enforcement agencies, local and regional authorities, NGOs and other relevant entities and organisations. In this regard, women’s rights NGOs and specialist women’s support services play an important role in guaranteeing that the rights of victims are safeguarded in multi-agency co-operation. Other general principles established under this article include the need for measures of protection and support to be based on a gendered understanding of violence against women and to focus on women’s safety and human rights, taking into account the relationship between victims, perpetrators, children and their wider environment and addressing their needs holistically. Specialist support services must aim to ensure the empowerment and economic independence of women victims of violence and avoid their secondary victimisation. This provision equally stresses the importance of ensuring that access to services is not subject to the victim’s willingness to press charges or testify against the perpetrator.

65. In the area of violence in the name of so-called honour, GREVIO welcomes the setting up of multi-agency co-operation mechanisms in 11 out of 22 counties, through regional multi-agency centres on “honour-based violence and oppression”.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, despite the existence of

54. The authorities have also referred to the National Task Force against Honour-based Crime and Oppression at the County Administrative Board of Östergötland, which has worked together with a range of other authorities, including the Swedish Crime Victims Authority, the National Board of Health and Welfare, the Police Authority and the Prosecution Authority, to develop joint guidance for professionals in social services, healthcare, schools and the police to prevent and stop children from leaving the country to be married or be subjected to genital mutilation or various forms of violence or oppression based on “honour”.

examples of best practice that can serve as inspiration, since the baseline evaluation report, Sweden has not made significant progress towards ensuring support services for many other forms of violence against women in a concerted and co-ordinated manner throughout the country. Notwithstanding the promising development of setting as a priority measure in the Violence against Women Strategy the strengthening of inter-agency co-operation on violence against women at a national and local level setting, GREVIO notes that multi-agency co-operation structures at the local level are still lacking, in particular for domestic violence cases, including multi-agency case conferences to co-ordinate action around individual cases. It equally notes with concern the absence of protocols to ensure co-operation across different public-sector agencies and/or women's rights organisations. By way of example, only 34% of municipalities are reported to have a co-operation agreement with shelters for women. A few promising practices do though exist in the country, including the Barnahus model and the work carried out by the rape crisis centre at Sodersjukhuset public hospital, which offers holistic support services to rape victims on a one-stop-shop basis. GREVIO notes with satisfaction that the authorities appear to be aware of the need to improve inter-agency cooperation as they formally requested the police, prosecutors, prison and probation services, social services and health and medical care services, in the course of 2024, to strengthen inter-agency cooperation with a view to preventing and combating violence against women, including violence in the name of "honour".

66. GREVIO is particularly concerned by social services' practice of referring domestic violence victims to private businesses providing emergency shelter on account of the higher levels of security they purportedly offer victims.⁵⁵ It is not clear whether such entities offer specialist support services for victims of violence against women based on a gendered understanding of such violence or to what extent they co-ordinate with and refer them to women's rights organisations that offer such specialist support. GREVIO considers that such an approach risks depriving victims of the holistic, victim-centred and empowering support that they require to recover from violence, as enshrined in Article 18 of the convention.

67. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Swedish authorities to adopt mechanisms of co-ordination and co-operation among the different governmental and non-governmental agencies that provide support and protection to victims of all forms of violence against women. In particular, it urges the Swedish authorities to:

- a. develop formal protocols detailing co-ordination measures to be taken by all agencies, entities and organisations providing support to victims of all forms of violence against women;**
- b. introduce multi-agency risk-assessment conferences (MARACs) to co-ordinate action on individual cases of violence against women;**
- c. ensure that protection and support services are made available as far as possible on the same premises;**
- d. ensure that any service provision is based on a gendered understanding of violence against women, aims at the empowerment of victims and avoids secondary victimisation.**

2. General support services (Article 20)

68. General support services, such as social services, health services and housing or employment services, must be equipped to offer support and protection to women victims of gender-based violence of all ages and backgrounds. Article 20 of the Istanbul Convention requires states parties to ensure that these services are adequately resourced and that the staff are adequately trained on the different forms of violence against women and are able to respond to victims in a supportive manner, in particular those that women and girls turn to first (health and social

55. See Article 22, Specialist support services.

services).⁵⁶ Their interventions are often decisive for victims' onward journey towards a life free from violence and thus a core element of a trust-based system of protection and support.

a. Social services

69. In its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO had observed that despite the obligation under the Social Services Act requiring municipal social services to provide support and assistance to victims of violence against women, the quality and efficiency of such assistance varied greatly between municipalities.

70. It regrets that this continues to be the case, noting a persistent fragmented approach, given that a victim needs to interact with several social services sections and case workers. Moreover, despite their role as a first point of contact for a victim, social services staff regularly display a lack of expertise in handling cases of domestic violence, FGM and forced marriage, resulting in negative outcomes for women and girls. For example, where social services are contacted because of a suspicion that a child is at risk of forced marriage, reports and information provided by civil society indicate that insufficient training in this regard has led staff to contact the very parents who are suspected as being the perpetrators, without taking any other precautionary measures. This, in turn, has resulted in the removal of children from Sweden to another country for the purpose of forcing them into marriage.⁵⁷ Moreover, the "serious case review" carried out by the NBHW for the period 2018-2021 to establish failures in the system where women and children have died as the result of domestic violence found that in all these cases social services had failed to identify exposure to domestic violence and/or carry out a risk assessment and safety planning; and that safety planning regulations and guidelines were lacking.⁵⁸ All these elements point to the urgent need to redouble efforts to provide in-service training to all social services staff.

71. As regards awareness of the cultural specificities of women belonging to vulnerable groups such as the Roma and Sami highlighted by GREVIO in its baseline evaluation report, no specific progress has been identified. GREVIO is hopeful that the report on violence against Sami women commissioned by the Sami Parliament will pave the way to dedicated measures being put in place to build trust in the authorities and provide support services in way that is relevant and addresses cultural specificities.

72. When it comes to assistance in finding employment, victims of domestic violence can benefit from the same assistance provided to those who depend on social welfare, with no specific measures foreseen. As regards access to financial assistance, reports indicate difficulties for victims of domestic violence who are married to their perpetrator and suffer from economic violence in obtaining financial assistance from social services in light of their marital status. In the area of victims' access to permanent housing, this is marred, on the one hand, by an acute housing crisis and, on the other hand, by varying practices and levels of support provided by the municipalities.⁵⁹ In the absence of provisions at the national level requiring that victims are given priority access to permanent housing, only some municipalities have issued local guidelines to this effect and prioritise victims of violence against women. In all other cases, victims often have no other choice than to remain in a shelter for protracted periods or, due to a fear of becoming homeless, remain at home in abusive relationships. The authorities have informed GREVIO that some County Administrative

56. Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, paragraph 127.

57. See the 2022 report by the Swedish Equality Authority on abducted children, which highlights that the majority of children who were taken abroad for the purpose of forced marriage had already been in contact with social services, who had failed to properly assess the risk and provide protection. See also the report issued by the County Administrative Board in Östergötland, "Nationell kartläggning Bortförda personer i en hederskontext samt barn som uppges vara gifta – under 2019", p. 10.

58. See the NGO submission by Amnesty International, p. 7.

59. In the Swedish National Housing Market Survey for 2023, 180 out of the country's 290 municipalities reported a shortage of housing, with 80% of Sweden's population residing in those municipalities facing a housing crisis. See the shadow report submitted by Victim Support Sweden, p. 11. The written submission by Amnesty International reports that a 2022 survey on municipalities' efforts to help victims of violence and arrange permanent housing after a stay at a shelter showed that efforts varied between municipalities. See the County Administrative Board of Västerbotten, "Towards permanent housing. Mapping of municipalities' efforts to help victims of violence, with or without children, to arrange permanent accommodation after a stay in sheltered accommodation or other temporary accommodation", 2022, available at: <https://catalog.lansstyrelsen.se/store/34/resource/85>, and the written submission by Amnesty International p. 9.

Boards try to motivate perpetrators to move from the shared home so that the victim can live in the dwelling. GREVIO notes that while well intentioned this approach is not suitable in many cases due to the power and control dynamics that are typical in domestic violence cases and should, therefore, only be considered after a proper risk assessment involving the victim. GREVIO has been equally informed by the authorities that the draft bill on sheltered accommodation proposes spelling out more clearly that victims of domestic violence are a group in need of special protection under the Social Services Act and that they therefore require more specific support in the areas of employment, housing and training.⁶⁰ Additionally, a 2022 government inquiry proposed enabling municipalities to apply priority criteria in the area of housing to a greater extent than is currently possible and to provide rent supplements to families with children.

73. GREVIO strongly encourages the Swedish authorities to:

- a. ensure social services adequately discharge their duty to provide support and assistance to victims of all forms of violence against women, in particular by equipping them with the knowledge, tools and cultural awareness to do so effectively in relation to all women and girls, in particular those at risk of domestic violence, forced marriage and FGM and those from Sami and Roma communities;**
- b. embed assistance with financial support, housing and employment support for women victims of domestic violence in the duty to provide support and assistance to victims of violence against women, by establishing guidance and protocols as well as specific programmes.**

b. Healthcare services

74. Major hospitals in Sweden continue to provide high-quality care for victims of sexual violence, including rape, as well as for victims of FGM (in Stockholm and Gothenburg). Additionally, all healthcare providers can make use of the “Guidelines on Care Following Sexual Assault” developed and updated by the National Centre for Knowledge on Men’s Violence against Women (NCK), as well as the guidelines made available by the NBHW on how to identify victims of domestic violence and child witnesses and on violence in the name of so-called honour (including forced marriage and FGM). The authorities have also informed GREVIO that funding has been made available to strengthen the identification and treatment by healthcare services of victims of sexual violence and FGM, including by appointing a co-ordinator in all counties to strengthen capacity building and update guidelines in this area.

75. Despite these measures, civil society has brought to GREVIO’s attention the fact that healthcare providers have a very low awareness of domestic violence, sexual violence and FGM, as well as of the related national guidelines. An additional shortcoming that has been pinpointed is the absence, at the local level, of standardised protocols to identify, treat and further refer victims of violence against women. Concerning more specifically the availability of psycho-social/trauma counselling, reports indicate that access to such care is still acutely lacking.⁶¹ This is despite an agreement with the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKR) to earmark SEK 1.6 billion (around €138 million) in 2023 to develop psychiatric trauma care, including for victims of violence against women.⁶²

76. As regards access to healthcare for women victims of violence without health insurance, notably asylum-seeking women and women with an irregular migration status, under the law they are offered medical care “that cannot be deferred”. This includes, in addition to emergency care, all essential care that if postponed would lead to serious health conditions, including psychiatric care and treatment in cases of violence. While GREVIO welcomes the availability of such healthcare, it notes that this provision does not seem to be interpreted consistently by all healthcare providers,

60. See the report submitted by Sweden pursuant to Article 68, paragraph 4, of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, p. 42 (the state report).

61. See the NGO submission by Victim Support Sweden, p. 12.

62. SKR is the largest employers’ organisation in the country and represents and advocates local government in Sweden. All of Sweden’s municipalities and regions are members of SKR.

creating challenges to accessing psychiatric care, for example.⁶³ Moreover, GREVIO notes with grave concern that the authorities have proposed to introduce a legal obligation for public-sector employees, including social services and certain healthcare staff, to report to the authorities migrants who are in an irregular situation. This was done in the context of a public inquiry launched by the authorities with a view to strengthening the enforcement of return decisions of persons without leave to remain in the country. Although the authorities have informed GREVIO that the inquiry acknowledges that certain situations may need to be exempted from such reporting obligations, pending the outcome of the inquiry, GREVIO underscores that, an obligation of this nature would discourage victims of violence against women from seeking protection and support from the authorities and would, thus, be at odds with the letter and spirit of the convention, including its Articles 4 and 18.⁶⁴

77. GREVIO strongly encourages the Swedish authorities to:

- a. ensure that access to general support services for experiences of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention is ensured without discrimination on any ground, including on the grounds of residence status;**
- b. pursue their efforts to implement standardised care paths in the public and private healthcare sectors in order to ensure the identification of victims, their diagnosis, treatment, documentation of the type of violence and the violence suffered and referral to appropriate specialist support services in a gender-sensitive and non-judgmental manner, as well as the provision of a forensic report for victims documenting their injuries.**

3. Specialist support services (Article 22)

78. Specialist support services ensure the complex task of empowering victims through optimal support and assistance catered to their specific needs and are an equally important cornerstone of a trust-based system of protection and support. 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. They need to be able to address the different types of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention and to provide support to all groups of victims, including hard-to-reach groups.

79. As regards shelter provision, which GREVIO notes is available to victims of both domestic violence and "honour-related violence", progress appears to have been made in terms of availability. However, GREVIO also notes that the figures made available encompass both shelters for victims of violence against women and shelters for men.⁶⁵ According to the 2020 mapping of shelters carried out by the NBHW, there were 282 such shelters for victims, compared to 200 referred to in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report. Over half (54%) were run by NGOs, while 37% were operated by private firms and 9% by municipalities. Out of the total number of shelters, 22% could receive women with addiction issues and 62% could receive women with physical disabilities.⁶⁶

80. Despite such progress, reports indicate that around half of Swedish municipalities are not serviced with a shelter.⁶⁷ GREVIO notes with regret that this is particularly worrying in the context of Sami women's experiences of domestic violence, who display very low reporting rates and help-seeking behaviour. GREVIO notes that since the baseline evaluation report no dedicated service has been set up for Sami women in the north, such as a Sami-run hotline, a counselling service or shelter for Sami women victims of domestic violence and sexual assault/rape.

63. See the NGO submission by the Swedish Women's Lobby, p. 11.

64. These require, *inter alia*, that provisions of the convention are implemented without discrimination on any ground; the protection of all victims from any further violence; and the prevention of secondary victimisation.

65. It is therefore unclear what the exact number is of specialist shelters available for women only.

66. See the state report, p. 47.

67. See the NGO submission by Amnesty International, p. 8.

81. In a similar same vein, GREVIO notes with regret that asylum-seeking women and women with illegal migration status in Sweden appear to have difficulty seeking protection in safe accommodation for experiences of domestic or “honour-related violence” because of persisting confusion as to which public authority is responsible for funding their accommodation in a shelter – whether it is social services or the Migration Agency.⁶⁸

82. Moreover, GREVIO notes the significant increase in the number of shelters run by for-profit entities and privately run shelters. Its attention has been drawn to the practice of social services to increasingly refer domestic violence victims to such shelters rather than those run by women’s specialist support services on account of the higher levels of security they purport to offer victims. It is not clear, however, whether such entities offer specialist support services for victims of violence against women based on a gendered understanding of such violence or to what extent they co-ordinate with and refer them to women’s rights organisations that offer such specialist support. Reports indicate that their aim is to admit a wide range of clientele, including men, and provide them with various services and types of support on practical issues rather than support addressing victims’ experience of gender-based violence.⁶⁹ GREVIO recalls in this respect the importance of providing victims with the holistic, victim-centred and empowering support they require to recover from their experiences of violence. GREVIO further notes that not making use of women’s specialist organisations providing shelter threatens their existence and results in the loss of long-standing expertise in providing support to violence against women victims.⁷⁰

83. Another significant development is the entry into force in April 2024 of a new law qualifying the provision of shelter to victims as a service regulated by the Social Services Act. This law appears to require all types of shelters (beyond those for violence against women victims) to comply with certain requirements and have secured a licence from the Health and Social Care Inspectorate in order to operate. These requirements pertain, *inter alia*, to the quality of services, the need to ensure the security of victims and accessibility by women with disabilities. GREVIO was informed that regulations detailing the specific requirements will be developed in due time, in co-operation with civil society, including shelters and NGOs representing women with disabilities, which GREVIO welcomes.

84. GREVIO notes that the above-mentioned regulations will be applicable to all types of shelters and thus have not been developed to cater specifically to the needs of victims of violence against women. Accordingly, GREVIO considers it imperative that minimum quality standards be developed specifically for shelters offering support to victims of violence against women. Such standards should require shelters to have the necessary expertise in the provision of victim-centred and empowering support to victims of violence against women, underpinned by an understanding of violence against women as a gendered phenomenon. It further considers it essential that the authorities ensure that funds be made available to municipalities and NGOs to meet the quality standards.

85. Another key feature of the reform is that children accompanying a mother in a shelter will be appointed a social worker who will assess the needs of the child, including specialist support, provide a health check-up and ensure that s/he continues school, which GREVIO welcomes as important progress since its baseline evaluation report. Social services will equally be able to restrict contact with the violent parent and keep the location of the shelter secret, a possibility not previously available. At the same time, women’s rights NGOs have drawn GREVIO’s attention to the fact that under the law, social services must carry out a risk assessment for the child (and the mother) and authorise the placement of the child in the shelter – a referral/authorisation from social services is thus necessary and could, potentially, be denied or be overruled by a court, as in a recent case

68. See the NGO submission by the Swedish Women's Lobby, p. 9.

69. See Lauri M., Lauri J. and Linander I., “Women’s shelters and private shelters discursive struggle: separatism, security and social change”, *Nordic Social Welfare Research*, published online 21 December 2023, 2023, pp. 8 and 11. See also Lauri M. and Lauri J. (2023) “In the business of gendered violence: the private shelter discourse in Sweden”, *Critical and Radical Social Work*, 2023, p. 9.

70. GREVIO was informed by women’s rights organisations that as a result of these practices several shelters run by specialist women’s NGOs have closed down. See also the NGO submission by the Swedish Women’s Lobby, p. 12.

in 2024.⁷¹ Bearing in mind that even before the above-mentioned reform, the referral of a victim to a shelter by social services was already necessary, GREVIO is concerned that mandatory referrals of a victim to a shelter by public bodies might prevent some women from seeking help due to possible lack of trust in the authorities and that self-referrals should always be possible. Where the mandatory referral concerns their children, this may add an additional barrier to the difficult step of leaving an abusive relationship for fear of being asked to leave their children behind. Currently, pending the application of the above-mentioned law, children can also be provided with crisis support and psychological counselling in Children's Houses (Barnahus); however, these are not present in all municipalities in Sweden.

86. As regards support services for forms of violence against women such as sexual harassment and stalking, many shelters offer non-residential counselling services for victims that seek help but that do not reside in the shelter, which GREVIO welcomes. GREVIO is concerned, however, that such support does not extend to the digital dimension of violence against women. Moreover, it does not appear to be provided by the state through other means, a gap that requires bridging in light of the growing digital dimension of violence against women.

87. GREVIO notes positively that Sweden continues to comply with its obligation to provide telephone helplines for all forms of violence, in line with the requirements of Article 24 of the convention. On the other hand, a service that continues to be lacking is long-term psychological counselling and trauma care for victims of sexual assault and domestic violence.

88. **GREVIO urges the Swedish authorities to take measures to:**

- a. **increase the level of appropriate specialist shelter provision by closing the gaps in underserved municipalities in order to ensure safe accommodation for women victims of violence irrespective of their residence status and place of residence, in particular by catering to the needs of Sami women;**
- b. **ensure that all women victims of gender-based violence and their children have access to shelters and are offered the possibility to self-refer;**
- c. **ensure that minimum quality standards imposed on shelters for victims of violence against women include specific expertise in the provision of victim-centred and empowering support to victims of violence against women, underpinned by an understanding of violence against women as a gendered phenomenon;**
- d. **ensure that the specialist support services available to victims include the digital dimensions of violence against women.**

4. Support for victims of sexual violence (Article 25)

89. Under Article 25 of the Istanbul Convention, parties are required to provide a set of holistic services to victims of sexual violence, including immediate medical care and trauma support, combined with forensic examinations, and short and long-term psychological counselling and therapy to ensure the victim's recovery. Such services should be provided by trained and specialised staff in an appropriate manner to respond to the victims' needs, preferably within rape crisis or sexual violence referral centres established in sufficient number throughout the country to ensure their easy access. The recommendation is to set up one of the above-mentioned centres for every 200 000 inhabitants.⁷²

90. As described in the baseline evaluation report, there are two sexual violence referral centres in Sweden, one at the Sodertjukhuset public hospital in Stockholm and the other in Uppsala, with a third facility in Malmo offering more limited support services. As regards the Sodertjukhuset public hospital, support services are provided on a 24/7, one-stop-shop basis, free of charge, if the sexual assault has taken place within one month. The support provided encompasses medical visits,

71. See the judgment of the Court of Chamber in Sundvall, Measure No. 1128-24 of 17 May 2024 overruling a decision issued by the Administrative Court to place a child in a shelter with her mother on account of insufficient proof of domestic violence and of risk to the child's safety.

72. Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, paragraph 142.

psychological counselling and the taking of forensic evidence. Victims can also report the violence to a police officer present on the premises if they so wish, which GREVIO commends. Support services provided to victims of sexual violence in other parts of the country, however, primarily consist in the use of rape kits by healthcare professionals and the gathering and storing of forensic evidence. Despite the fact that guidelines for emergency healthcare for victims of sexual violence have been drawn up by the NCK and updated in 2022, low levels of awareness of and training on the identification and treatment of sexual violence have been reported among healthcare professionals.⁷³ Moreover, as referred to earlier in this report, the provision of non-emergency healthcare for victims of sexual violence, such as psycho-social/trauma counselling, is acutely lacking in Sweden.⁷⁴ While some NGOs such as the WONSA clinic and Storasyster strive to provide such services in the Stockholm region to victims residing in different parts of the country, insufficient government funding has had a bearing on their capacity to do so.⁷⁵ Moreover, given the growing estimated number of rape victims per year, the clinics have an outreach capacity of at most 0.4%.⁷⁶

91. As regards more specifically the taking and storage of forensic evidence, GREVIO notes with concern that under section 5 of the Law on Legal Certificates in connection with Crimes, a forensic certificate may be shared with the police, without the victim's consent, if a serious criminal offence has been committed, including domestic violence, rape and FGM.⁷⁷ In line with GREVIO's findings, parties should, as far as possible, make the obligation contingent on the prior consent of the victim even in these cases, unless the victim is a minor or is unable to protect him/herself due to physical or mental disabilities. GREVIO recalls that the purpose of Article 25 is to ensure the provision of easily accessible support services for victims of rape and sexual violence that cater to their various needs, including the gathering of forensic evidence, in a victim-centred and empowering manner. It further recalls that Article 18 of the convention requires the provision of services irrespective of the victim's willingness to press charges or testify against the perpetrator.

92. **GREVIO strongly encourages the Swedish authorities to:**

- a. **set up rape crisis and/or sexual violence centres offering medical care, forensic examination and immediate, short and long-term trauma counselling delivered by trained professionals. These specialist services should be available in sufficient numbers and their geographical spread should make them accessible to victims living in rural areas and in cities;**
- b. **ensure that the obligation to share a forensic certificate with the police where a serious criminal offence has been committed is contingent, as far as possible, on the prior consent of the victim, unless the victim is a child or is unable to protect her/himself because of disabilities.**

73. See Article 20, General support services. See also the shadow report to the Committee of the Parties by Swedish civil society, 2022 p. 32, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/shadow-report-by-swedish-civil-society-2022/1680a64ae4>.

74. See the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, "Healthcare in cases of sexual violence. Current situation and ways forward", 2020. See also the shadow report submitted by Amnesty International p. 20.

75. Despite funding provided to WONSA by the government between August 2023 and December 2024, the funding is time-bound and does not fully cover the costs of the clinic. See the shadow report submitted by the Swedish Women's Lobby, p. 29.

76. Brå has reported 9 635 cases of rape, including 4 272 cases of child rape (on children aged 17 and under). It also estimated that the number of unreported cases are much higher (up to 90% higher). See the shadow report submitted by the Swedish Women's Lobby, p. 29.

77. Healthcare staff can store forensic evidence gathered from the victim for a period of two years with her consent, should the victim decide at a later time to report the violence.

C. Substantive law

93. Chapter V of the Istanbul Convention covers a range of provisions related to substantive law, in the area of both civil and criminal law, which aim to create the necessary legislative framework to prevent further victimisation of women and girls and to ensure robust intervention and prosecution by law-enforcement agencies. This section focuses on progress made with respect to selected provisions of the convention in the area of substantive law, notably Article 31 on custody, visitation rights and safety and Article 48 on the prohibition of mandatory alternative dispute resolution processes or sentencing in cases of violence against women.

1. Custody, visitation rights and safety (Article 31)

94. 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 Istanbul 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. This provision contributes directly to their trust in the authorities because it offers essential protection from post-separation abuse.⁷⁸

95. As regards the legal framework governing custody and visitation decisions, GREVIO had welcomed in its baseline evaluation report the fact that Section 2a of the Parental Code made an explicit reference to “the need to pay particular attention to “the risk of the child or another member of the family being subjected to abuse”.⁷⁹ GREVIO was informed by the authorities that to further strengthen these provisions a legislative proposal was submitted in July 2024, *inter alia*, removing the reference in Section 2a to “the child’s need for close and good contact with both parents” and specifying that “the child’s best interests precede its right to contact with a parent with whom the child does not reside”. Pending a decision to approve the law, GREVIO welcomes this legislative proposal as a means to further strengthen the obligation to take into account incidents of violence against women when deciding on custody and visitation rights.

96. This notwithstanding, as regards the effective implementation of such legal obligation, GREVIO had observed in its baseline evaluation report that it was undermined by serious shortcomings. These included, *inter alia*, the use by courts and social services of risk assessments that were not evidence-based; judges’ insufficient training and knowledge on domestic violence and violence against women; and the problematic practice of imposing visitation with a violent father when the child resides at a shelter or a “protected address”.

97. GREVIO notes that, regrettably, these serious shortcomings have yet to be addressed. These lacunae have been documented through a mapping exercise commissioned by the government and carried out by the GEA in 2022, which looks into the incidence of domestic violence in cases on custody and visitation and the extent to which such violence is taken into account by courts in reaching a decision.⁸⁰ Out of a total of 814 cases on custody and visitation reviewed in the report, 64% included allegations of intimate-partner violence and of violence against a child,

78. It is noteworthy that in the case of *Bizdiga v. the Republic of Moldova* (Application No. 15646/18, 17 October 2023), the European Court of Human Rights held that in proceedings concerning the custody and visitation rights regarding children in a domestic violence context, the primary focus must be on the best interests of the child, and an assessment of any risks of violence or other forms of ill-treatment therefore has to form an integral part of such proceedings. For this reason, it found that an alleged history of domestic violence was a relevant and even mandatory factor to be considered in the assessment made by the domestic authorities when deciding on contact rights (§ 62). In the recent case of *Luca v. the Republic of Moldova* (Application No. 55351/17, 17 October 2023), the Court found a violation of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights on account of the failure of the Moldovan authorities to take into account incidents of domestic violence in the determination of child contact rights.

79. Chapter 6 Section 2 a of the Parental Code provides that “the best interests of the child shall be the primary consideration in all matters regarding custody, residence and contact. When assessing the best interest of the child, particular attention shall be paid to the risk that the child or another member of the family being subjected to abuse or of the child being unlawfully removed or retained or otherwise suffering harm, and the child’s need for close and good contact with both parents”.

80. See “[Information about violence is no exception – reporting of the mapping of data on violence or other abuse in custody, accommodation and access cases](#)”, Gender Equality Agency.

with 24% of the relevant judgments not describing the level of violence or the negative consequences on children. What is more, the study shows that in a large number of these cases the judgment does not refer at all to the alleged domestic violence incident(s). Equally concerning is the observed widespread perception that parents make false allegations about violence to gain strategic advantages in custody proceedings and the practice of qualifying instances of violence against women as a conflict between equal parties or of requiring high levels of violence for it to influence a decision to restrict custody or visitation rights. It is thus not surprising that this report and its 2023 follow-up report recommend the authorities consider introducing mandatory training for judges on domestic violence and violence against women.⁸¹

98. On a similar note, academia, lawyers and representatives of civil society have reported on and denounced to the Ministry of Justice the use by courts of ill-founded concepts such as the so-called “parental alienation syndrome”, or similar notions, to dismiss claims of domestic violence in parental separation cases. According to these reports, while the terminology employed by judges and court experts may vary, when these concepts have been referred to, the underlying premise is the victim’s misrepresentation and manipulation of facts to secure a favorable verdict and to break the child’s ties with the perpetrator. This has led, in turn, to the imposition of forced visitation with the perpetrator or, in some cases, to the granting of sole custody to the latter with a view to re-establishing the previously severed ties.⁸²

99. As GREVIO has had the opportunity to note, “parental alienation syndrome” has been denounced by the scientific community as well as several national courts as a scientifically unfounded concept which shifts the attention away from the alleged abuse towards a supposedly “alienating” behaviour of a domestic violence victim. Such concepts are often invoked without a proper understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence against women and its effects on children and in the absence of a thorough risk assessment and case-by-case examination of the specifics of each situation at hand.

100. An additional area of concern to GREVIO is the insufficient consultation and co-ordination between courts and other relevant bodies and/or professionals, including, but not limited to, criminal courts, law-enforcement agencies and health and specialist women’s support services when taking decisions on custody and visitation, as well as the insufficient screening of these cases for a history of domestic violence and to assess the relevant risk to children and victims. The authorities have clarified that, in pursuance of Section 19 of the Parental Code,⁸³ courts rely on information provided by social welfare committees, which investigate the specific case and carry out a risk assessment and investigation. Information on previous convictions, police reports and other elements will therefore reach the courts only if the social welfare committee and/or the victim provides this information. Courts will then apprise the situation on the basis of the information available. While this process is sometimes referred to as a “risk assessment”, such assessments are not standardised or evidence-based.⁸⁴ GREVIO is concerned, however, by information relayed by women’s rights organisations indicating that in practice social services do not always carry out risk assessments in cases of domestic violence and do not sufficiently identify factors of risk. With a view to improving the screening of cases on custody and visitation for a history of domestic violence and ensuring that such a history of violence is effectively taken into account, GREVIO considers that a number of measures are warranted. These include the systematic screening of all cases for instances of domestic violence, by means of a standard questionnaire submitted to the parties or otherwise. An additional priority measure to be taken is to ensure courts’ consultation with all relevant bodies, such as law-enforcement agencies, specialist support services and health authorities, including

81. See Satt Barnen I Centrum For Deras Liv, 2023, “Reporting of assignments to follow up on how information about violence or other abuse is taken into account in cases about custody, accommodation and access”, 2023, p. 22, Gender Equality Agency.

82. See the NGO submission by Josefine Hjalmskog, lic Psychologist, lic Psychotherapist, Specialized in Psychological treatment and Karin Lavén, Attorney Specialized in Family Law and Violence Against Women and Children, p. 2.

83. Which clarifies that courts must ensure that questions concerning custody, residence and access are sufficiently investigated.

84. See “Information about violence is no exception – reporting of the mapping of data on violence or other abuse in custody, accommodation and access cases”, Gender Equality Agency, which reports that a risk was identified in only 26% of the cases in which allegations of domestic violence/violence against women were made.

on whether criminal proceedings are pending against the father of the victims' children or have been brought in the past. Moreover, courts should systematically request the disclosure of risk assessments and safety plans drawn up by the police and social services (and other relevant bodies). Finally, appropriate training should be ensured for social services, including on the importance of carrying out a risk assessment in cases of domestic violence.

101. On another point, several interlocutors GREVIO met with during the evaluation and research conducted by the Gender Equality Agency refer to the need to strengthen children's rights in cases of custody and visitation. Despite a reform carried out in July 2021 of the provisions of various laws, including the Parental Code, with a view to strengthening the children's rights perspective, children do not benefit from legal representation in cases on custody and visitation and hearing their perspective appears to be optional.⁸⁵

102. GREVIO notes with concern that supervised visitation arrangements have also been assessed as critical in the previously cited reports, as well as by the authorities and women's rights NGOs. More specifically, the authorities have acknowledged that while a few municipalities have the necessary premises for supervised visitation, most do not. This is compounded by a lack of training in domestic violence and violence against women of personnel who supervise these visits. In this connection, it was brought to GREVIO's attention that it is not uncommon for personnel to leave the child alone with the perpetrator, resulting in the latter asking questions that reveal the place of residence of the child and in incidents of violence, including, in one case in 2023, the murder of a child.⁸⁶

103. In conclusion, GREVIO observes that despite the legal framework, instances of violence against women are infrequently taken into account in decisions over custody and visitation and that in these cases mediation prevails, notwithstanding the unequal power relations that are typical in domestic violence contexts. This court practice is difficult to reconcile with the Swedish legislator's recognition of the harm that witnessing domestic violence has on a child through its criminalisation. It is equally at odds with the legal possibility of placing a child in a shelter with his mother in the absence of the perpetrator's consent and to restrict visitation with the perpetrator during that time. It is therefore urgent that such understanding is fully reflected in judges' decisions on custody and visitation.

104. **GREVIO urges the Swedish authorities to take the following priority action in the area of custody and visitation rights to ensure the safety of victims and their children, including by:**

- a. systematically screening all pending cases on custody and visitation for instances of domestic violence, consulting with all relevant bodies, including on whether criminal proceedings are pending against the perpetrator or have been brought in the past, and requesting the disclosure of risk assessments and safety plans drawn up by the police and social services (and other relevant bodies);**
- b. taking all appropriate measures to ensure that all relevant professionals, including social workers, members of the judiciary, court experts and child psychologists are aware of the lack of a scientific basis for so-called "parental alienation" and similar concepts and banning the use by courts of such concepts.**
- c. ensuring that any voluntary mediation procedure carried out in the context of divorce and or custody and visitation proceedings incorporates safeguards to ensure the full and free consent of the victim and a risk-assessment procedure;**

85. GREVIO notes that under Section 2b of the Parental Code "the child shall receive information and be given the opportunity to express his or her views in matters regarding custody, residence and access and the child's views shall be given due weight in accordance with his or her age and maturity. Nonetheless, Section 19 of the Parental Code, which describes the need to sufficiently investigate cases involving custody, residence and access, provides that "if it is not inappropriate, the person carrying out the investigation shall hear the child and report the child's views to the court ... The child may be heard by the court if there are special reasons for doing so and it is manifest that it cannot harm the child to be heard".

86. More specifically on 8 January 2023 an 8-year-old boy (Tintin) was murdered during a two-hour visit with his father, a meeting that both the child and his mother strongly opposed because of the violence they were exposed to. See <https://lexintin.se/>.

- d. providing safe premises where supervised visits can take place and measures to safeguard both the child's and victim's safety, along with a sufficient number of professionals trained in violence against women to accompany the supervised visits.**

105. **GREVIO encourages the Swedish authorities to strengthen children's rights in cases on custody and visitation by requiring their legal representation in these cases and ensuring they are heard.**

2. Prohibition of mandatory alternative dispute resolution processes or sentencing (Article 48)

106. Article 48, paragraph 1, of the Istanbul Convention requires parties to prohibit the mandatory participation in any alternative dispute resolution processes, including mediation and conciliation, in relation to cases of all forms of violence against women covered by the convention. This provision stems from the principle that violence against women is a manifestation of unequal power relations and that victims of such violence can never enter the alternative dispute resolution processes on an equal footing with the perpetrator. To avoid the re-privatisation of such violence and to enable the victim to seek justice, it is the responsibility of the state to provide access to adversarial court proceedings on the basis of robust criminal and civil law provisions.

107. Under section 5 of the Mediation Act, mediation is possible in criminal cases only if both parties agree, provided the crime has been reported to the police and the perpetrator has admitted to the commission of or participation in the act. Moreover, mediation is possible only if it appears appropriate, taking into account all the circumstances. The authorities have clarified that in court practice mediation is not deemed appropriate for cases of sexual violence or domestic violence. As regards perpetrators under the age of 21, the Social Services Act requires municipalities to systematically offer mediation; however, it is still subject to the agreement of both parties.

108. As regards compliance with the requirements of the convention on mediation in the area of civil law, according to the state report and indications from women's rights organisations, widespread use is made of mediated agreements in cases of custody and visitation where allegations of domestic violence are made.⁸⁷ The Swedish authorities have clarified in this respect that under the Code of Judicial Procedure courts must promote reaching a consensual solution through settlement, agreement or mediation if it is not inappropriate, taking into account the nature of the case and other circumstances – with domestic violence being considered one such inappropriate circumstance. By contrast, reports find that in 61% of the cases reviewed, the courts promoted or accepted agreements between spouses despite allegations of domestic violence having been made. Experts and lawyers in the field of violence against women have drawn GREVIO's attention to victims' acceptance of such agreements out of fear of being seen as unco-operative by courts should they refuse to mediate and the fear of eventually losing their children.

109. **GREVIO urges the Swedish authorities to ensure that any voluntary mediation procedure carried out in the context of divorce and/or custody and visitation proceedings incorporates safeguards to ensure the freely given and informed consent of the victim and a risk-assessment procedure.**

87. See the state report, p. 87, and the NGO submission by the Swedish Women's Lobby, p. 21.

D. Investigation, prosecution, procedural law and protective measures

110. Full accountability for all acts of violence against women requires an adequate response from law-enforcement agencies and the criminal justice sector. Chapter VI of the Istanbul Convention establishes a set of measures to ensure criminal investigations, prosecutions and convictions in a manner that validates women's and girls' experiences of violence, that avoids their secondary victimisation and that offers protection throughout the different stages of proceedings. The provisions covered in this section are fundamental to the delivery of protection and justice for all women and girls at risk of or who have experienced gender-based violence.

1. General obligations (Article 49) and Immediate response, prevention and protection (Article 50)

111. A key principle of an adequate response to violence against women is that of swift and effective investigations and judicial proceedings that are based on a gendered understanding of these types of offences and that take into consideration the rights of the victim during all stages. Those in law enforcement or the judiciary often do not prioritise incidents of violence against women and domestic violence, thereby contributing to the impunity of perpetrators and reinforcing the misconception that this type of violence is "acceptable" in society.⁸⁸ A consequence of assigning low priority to incidents of violence against women and domestic violence are delays in initiating investigations and judicial processes, which in turn may lead to the loss of vital evidence and to an increased risk for the victim of repeated violence. For these reasons, Article 49 of the convention requires parties to ensure that investigations and judicial proceedings are conducted without undue delay, while at the same time respecting the rights of victims during each stage of these processes. Article 50 further reinforces these obligations by requiring that law-enforcement agencies react promptly and appropriately in cases of violence against women, including by offering victims immediate protection and by engaging in the prevention of violence. GREVIO reports focus on the application of Article 50 at key stages of the criminal justice process, notably reporting, investigation, prosecution and conviction, all of which are key contributors to victims' sense of support, protection and justice.

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

112. Since the baseline evaluation report, the Swedish authorities have taken steps to make good on their pledge to increase the number of law-enforcement officers, which GREVIO had found to be very low, and to recruit more women, increasing the percentage of female police officers to 46% in 2020 compared to 44% in 2018. It is particularly noteworthy that since December 2023 Sweden's police force has been led by a female National Police Commissioner. Moreover, following a rise in reporting of domestic violence and rape, the Swedish authorities in 2020 hired 314 new staff – of which the majority were female civilian investigators – and redeployed 130 police officers from other units to investigate these offences.⁸⁹ Reports indicate, however, that due to high staff turnover and a failure to replace those investigators/police officers that have moved on to other areas of crime prevention, the increase in staff is not as significant as was initially planned, with 28 additional investigators in the area of domestic violence and 453 new "serious crime investigators" having been recruited.

113. Another important development concerns the units that are entrusted with the investigation of violence against women offences. Competences have in fact evolved and vary depending on the specific region/police district. Units "for crimes in close relationships", staffed by trained police officers on violence against women, generally carry out investigations into domestic violence offences but can also be responsible for crimes committed in the name of "honour" as well as rape/sexual violence. In this last respect, since 2019 some regions have set up specialist "sex crime

88. Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, paragraph 255.

89. See the NGO submission by Amnesty International, p. 15. See also the Swedish Police Authority, "Crimes against particularly vulnerable crime victims", Internal audit, 2023: <https://polisen.se/om-polisen/organisation/tillsynsfunktionen/>.

teams”, which have reportedly increased the quality of investigations, reduced the length of investigations and overall ensured a more prompt response to rape victims’ reports.⁹⁰ GREVIO commends the establishment of the above-mentioned specialist teams as a significant step in improving victims’ trust in the justice system as it sends out the message that their experience of violence is being treated with the needed urgency and care that it requires. Nevertheless, rape can also be investigated by units “for serious crimes”. Where this is the case, as was observed in the baseline evaluation report, GREVIO notes with concern that these units continue to prioritise gang-related violent crimes over the investigation of rapes, delegating these investigations to local police forces that lack the necessary specialist training.

114. As regards the police’s ability to respond to the digital dimension of violence against women, the authorities have acknowledged police officials’ limited knowledge and training in investigating these types of crimes. As a result, digital dimensions of violence against women may be classified as breaches of privacy or as defamation and their investigation may be delegated to local police stations, which in turn prioritise other crimes deemed more urgent. The police’s lack of competence in this area is of particular concern in light of the recent phenomenon of “exposed accounts” and the insufficient follow-up that has been given by law-enforcement authorities in this respect. More specifically, according to indications provided by civil society, intimate pictures of girls that were shared voluntarily with a person of trust have been uploaded, without the girls’ consent, on social media platforms or on cloud storage services along with their personal information (such as their name, address, school and usernames on social media) so that they can be identified in their local community and shamed.⁹¹ GREVIO notes how the growing challenges posed by digital manifestations of violence against women require the development of new competences within the police, guided by GREVIO’s General Recommendation No. 1 on the digital dimension of violence against women.

115. Taking into account the widespread distribution of specialist units that investigate violence against women offences across the country and the initial training received by all police officers on certain forms of violence against women, as well as the increased provision of in-service training, victims of violence against women are generally heard and interviewed by trained police officers. The authorities have informed GREVIO that such interviews take place in separate rooms, where possible, with adaptations made to cater to victims’ trauma.⁹² It is not clear, however, to what extent victims can be assisted and interviewed by female law-enforcement officers, including in emergency situations, as this possibility is only explicitly foreseen in cases of human trafficking.

116. While some measures have been taken by the police to encourage women, girls and bystanders to report incidents of domestic violence to the authorities,⁹³ none have been taken to address the very low reporting rates of Sami women. Other than the use of interpreters and the adaptation of newly constructed police stations to make them accessible for people with disabilities, no other specific measures have been signalled to GREVIO by the authorities to address procedural difficulties encountered when lodging complaints, in particular by women with disabilities.

117. **GREVIO strongly encourages the Swedish authorities to:**

- a. reinforce the capacity of the police to respond to and investigate all forms of violence against women, including digital manifestations of violence against women and domestic violence, in line with GREVIO’s General Recommendation No. 1 on the digital dimension of violence against women, by increasing the number of trained investigators beyond the specialist units;**

90. See the reporting form on the implementation of the recommendations addressed to states parties, submitted by the Swedish Authorities in the context of Committee of the Parties Supervision Procedure, p. 16. See the Evaluation of the Sexual Crimes Group at the Stockholm North police area, Brå, 2021.

91. See the NGO submission by the Swedish Women’s Lobby, p. 16.

92. Such special rooms have been set up in Malmo and Bollnas. See the state report, p. 60.

93. For example, the police have run campaigns together with other authorities, including the initiative “Come to us” and “Jealousy is not romantic”, aimed at encouraging the reporting of intimate-partner violence by young people, and the “Christmas break, Easter break” campaign in which police officers knocked on people’s doors to increase the awareness of the population about what they should do if they become aware of cases of domestic violence in their neighbourhood.

- b. take measures, including measures aimed at addressing any challenges victims encounter when lodging complaints, to encourage reporting of all forms of violence against women by women who are at risk of or subject to intersectional discrimination, including Sami women, migrant women, women with disabilities and women with addiction issues.**

b. Effective investigation and prosecution

118. At the outset, GREVIO commends the authorities for having taken, since the baseline evaluation report, significant steps to identify trends and shortcomings in the handling of investigations and prosecutions of violence against women offences, along with other measures aimed at improving prosecution and conviction rates. Notably, significant research has been commissioned by the government and has been carried out by Brå with a view to: studying the impact of the new rape legislation on prosecutions and convictions for these types of crimes,⁹⁴ and the factors that can improve the relevant investigations and prosecutions;⁹⁵ and assessing the reasons behind the low conviction rates for the crimes of gross violation of women's and children's integrity.⁹⁶ Beyond the research undertaken, GREVIO commends the creation in most prosecutor's offices of specialist teams with expertise in violence against women, which meet up to four times a year to discuss best practices. Moreover, GREVIO notes positively the use and updating, since the baseline evaluation report, of the existing guidelines and checklists that standardise investigations into domestic violence, stalking, "honour-related violence" and sexual violence/rape and that set the standards for robust case building.⁹⁷ Notably, the prosecutors' guidelines on "crimes against particularly vulnerable victims" were updated in 2023 with a view to shortening the processing time of preliminary investigations and improving the chances of an indictment. Both the law enforcement and the prosecutors' guidelines, in particular, underscore the importance of the interview with the victim taking place as soon as possible and for it to be recorded. In this connection, a particularly welcome development is the entry into force in 2022 of a provision allowing videotaped interviews of victims and witnesses to be used as evidence in court, subject to the court's discretion.⁹⁸ This includes incidents where the victim has withdrawn her statement or does not participate in proceedings. Moreover, as of January 2024, it is mandatory to film all interviews.⁹⁹ Indeed, police officers in Sweden are now equipped with body cameras, which they are instructed to use, with the victim's consent, to film interviews with a victim, including at the scene of the crime. The development of a smartphone application in 2022 has further facilitated the police in carrying out this task. These obligations and developments, where implemented, have been adjudged to increase the chances of a case successfully proceeding through the criminal justice chain, particularly when victims decide not to participate in criminal proceedings. They have equally been considered to give prosecutors a better basis for their decision on whether to prosecute the perpetrator, to reduce the burden on victims to give their statement repeatedly and to limit the risk of intimidation by perpetrators designed to make the victim withdraw or amend their earlier statements. Nonetheless, reports indicate that the videotaping of the victims' statements is not yet a sufficiently generalised practice and must be further reinforced.¹⁰⁰

119. Equally significant are the consequences stemming from the entry into force in 2018 of the new definition of rape based on lack of consent and the offence of negligent rape. Reports have found that as a result of the reform different typologies of rape, such as "surprise rape" and situations where the victim remained passive, are now being successfully prosecuted, whereas this would not

94. See "The new consent law in practice – an updated review of the changes in 2018 to the legal rules concerning rape", 2020, Brå. An updated study on the impact of the new consent legislation is expected in 2025.

95. See "Rape – from report to conviction., A study of the criminal justice system's work in rape cases", 2019, Brå.

96. See the report "Grovt kvinnofridskränkning. Brottsens hantering och utveckling i rättskedjan 1998-2017", Brå, 2019, and "Grovt fridskränkning mot barn", Brå, 2023.

97. These guidelines include, for law enforcement, the "Checklist for initial investigative measures in the event of crimes against particularly vulnerable victims", the "Method support for honour-related crime" and the "Domestic violence method support". Prosecutors are guided by the "Best practice investigation method for crimes against particularly vulnerable victims".

98. See the Code of Criminal Procedure (35:14).

99. See the NGO submission by Amnesty International, p. 17.

100. See the NGO submission by Amnesty International, p. 16.

have been possible prior to the reform.¹⁰¹ This fundamental reform has equally led to a significant broadening of the type of evidence that is considered as acceptable by judges to reach a conviction (such as a recording of the event, calls to the emergency services, a confession or eyewitness testimony) and to an increase in convictions in which the only evidence used was the testimony of a person to whom the injured person had confided. Moreover, the reform has led to a greater awareness in society of the importance of consent in sexual relationships, which GREVIO welcomes.¹⁰²

120. GREVIO considers that all the above-mentioned measures indicate a strong willingness to identify and remove the obstacles hindering effective prosecution of violence against women offences and are instrumental in building victims' trust in the system.

121. The data available, however, continue to show a mixed picture as regards reporting, investigations, prosecutions and convictions, and persisting attrition rates. Statistics provided by the authorities indicate that between 2019 and 2023 there was 6% increase in reporting for all violence against women offences. On the other hand, there has been a continuous decrease (by 34%) in the reporting of gross violation of a woman's integrity.¹⁰³ At the same time, for the latter offence, an investigation was opened in 82% of the cases and prosecution was ordered in 30% of such cases, but only 11% led to a conviction. For the new crime of gross violation of a child's integrity, on the other hand, since 2021, a little over 10 000 reports were registered per year, with almost all leading to the opening of an investigation but with a prosecution rate of 17%.

122. As regards rape, following the 2018 amendments to the criminal definition of rape, the number of reported cases of rape and prosecutions increased, with a 75% increase in conviction rates between 2017 and 2019, a positive outcome that cannot be underestimated.¹⁰⁴ Since then and up to 2023, the reporting rates have increased by 5% and 11% for rape and sexual violence respectively,¹⁰⁵ and the prosecution rate for rape has risen by 1%. However, experts and lawyers in the field of violence against women have alerted GREVIO to persisting low levels of reporting and convictions in the case of rapes, despite the improvements brought about by the legislative reform.¹⁰⁶ As regards FGM, the data made available by the authorities indicate that between 2021 and 2023 145 cases were investigated but only 3 were prosecuted. GREVIO further notes that no disaggregated data are available on reports, investigations, prosecutions and convictions for other serious forms of violence against women such as forced marriage, sexual harassment, forced abortion and forced sterilisation, making it difficult to assess the quality of prosecutions and the efforts of the criminal justice sector in holding perpetrators of violence against women to account for these acts.

123. GREVIO strongly encourages the Swedish authorities to redouble efforts to ensure that existing investigative guidelines on violence against women, prescribing, *inter alia*, the systematic recording of interviews with the victim, are systematically applied in practice.

101. See "The new consent law in practice – an updated review of the changes in 2018 to the legal rules concerning rape", 2020, Brå, p. 5.

102. Ibid.

103. Information provided by the authorities during the evaluation visit. This has been attributed to the tendency of the police to register such crimes as the underlying offence rather than as the domestic violence offence.

104. See "The new consent law in practice – an updated review of the changes in 2018 to the legal rules concerning rape", 2020, Brå, summary.

105. Information provided by the authorities to GREVIO.

106. Notably, according to the 2023 Brå Crime Survey, it was estimated that around 64 000 women had been subject to sexual violence/rape in 2022. Available data, however, indicate that in 2022 only 9 635 rapes were reported. While data on convictions are not available, the Brå study on the impact of the new rape legislation based on lack of consent indicates that in 2019 there were 333 convictions for rape. See the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, Brå, Swedish Crime Survey 2023, Summary report, 2023, <https://bra.se/bra-in-english/home/publications/archive/publications/2023-10-11-swedish-crime-survey-2023.html>, and the NGO submission by Amnesty International, pp. 10-11.

c. Conviction rates

124. As is referred to in the above sub-section and earlier in this report,¹⁰⁷ data on convictions for all forms of violence against women are currently not collected by the authorities. While the research that has been commissioned by the authorities into certain forms of violence against women such as rape, sexual violence and violation of a woman's and children's integrity partly fill the existing gap in information and provide insight into the causes of attrition for these forms of violence against women, no information is available for other equally harmful forms of violence against women such as forced marriage, FGM, sexual harassment, stalking, forced abortion and forced sterilisation. GREVIO, therefore, recalls the importance of collecting data at all stages of criminal proceedings, including at the level of the courts, in order to form a complete picture of the gaps in the institutional response to violence against women.

125. As regards the offences of gross violation of a woman's and child's integrity and rape more specifically, research nevertheless points to persisting low levels of convictions, despite the improvements brought about by the legislative reform. In particular, the following factors have been identified as contributing to attrition for cases of rape and domestic violence:¹⁰⁸ the investigation by local police officers without the necessary experience;¹⁰⁹ the insufficient number of law-enforcement staff trained on violence against women, which in turn leads to high processing times for investigations and negatively impacts the ability to secure evidence;¹¹⁰ the prioritisation by the serious crimes unit/other units of other violent crimes; the lack of use/application of agreed guidelines and checklists; and lack of recording of interviews.¹¹¹ In addition, for the offence of violation of a woman's integrity, other factors were identified, such as the requirement, in practice, for an assault to have taken place to secure a conviction.¹¹²

126. With the exception of sanctions imposed by courts for the crime gross violation of a woman's integrity, the absence of data on the sanctions imposed by courts for all other forms of violence against women also makes it difficult to assess the judicial response and infer whether proportionate and dissuasive sanctions are applied. Moreover, it is not clear to what extent courts propose that offenders attend perpetrator programmes in the context of a probation sentence. While case law is available to guide judges' decisions, GREVIO notes that no guidelines have been developed to assist judges with cases of violence against women.

127. In light of the above-mentioned analysis, GREVIO considers that much of the groundwork has been done to improve the criminal justice response to violence against women but greater effort must be made to effectively implement the important investigative tools developed in Sweden for violence against women offences and to ensure much needed training for judges and all law-enforcement authorities that may investigate these crimes.

128. GREVIO strongly encourages the Swedish authorities to strengthen measures to increase conviction rates for all forms of violence against women.

2. Risk assessment and risk management (Article 51)

129. Many perpetrators of domestic violence, rape, stalking, sexual harassment, forced marriage and other forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention threaten their victims with serious violence, including death, and have subjected their victims to serious violence in the past, including non-fatal strangulation. The growing digital dimension of such violence further exacerbates women's

107. See Article 11, Data collection.

108. See "Violent crimes in close relationships and sexual crimes against adults – A joint review of the police and the prosecutor's handling", the Swedish Police Authority and Prosecution Authority, 2019.

109. This finding emerged in one third of the cases analysed in the sample.

110. The "Crimes against particularly vulnerable crime victims" internal audit of the police carried out in 2023 found that following the increase in staff in 2020 a rise in investigations and prosecutions had been recorded. However, this rate stalled and decreased subsequently.

111. The report indicates that recording the first interview was carried out only in 7.5% of the cases reviewed.

112. See the report on the follow-up to the crime of gross violation of integrity, 2022, Brå.

and girls' sense of fear. Article 51 thus places concern for their safety at the heart of any intervention in such cases by requiring the establishment of a multi-agency network of professionals to protect high-risk victims without aggravating the harm experienced. It sets out the obligation to ensure that all relevant authorities, not just law-enforcement authorities, effectively assess and devise a plan to manage the safety risks a victim faces, on a case-by-case basis, according to standardised procedures and in co-operation with each other.

130. In its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO had observed the use of various risk-assessment tools by the Swedish police, notably the Spousal Assault Risk Assessment (SARA) for domestic violence, the Stalking Assessment and Management (SAM) for stalking, the Assessment of Risk for Honour-Based Violence (PATRIARCH) for violence related to "honour" and the danger assessment tool used by social services (FREDA). It had noted, however, various shortcomings in their practical implementation, calling for improved multi-agency co-operation in the execution of risk assessments and for a more generalised use of standardised and evidence-based tools.

131. Since the baseline evaluation report, GREVIO notes with satisfaction the inclusion in the revised checklist "for initial investigative measures in the event of crimes against particularly vulnerable victims for cases of domestic violence" of a non-exhaustive list of factors that must be considered as increase a victim's risk, including non-fatal strangulation.¹¹³ It equally welcomes the specification that such risk is dynamic, can quickly change and thus requires in these circumstances a reassessment. Moreover, since the baseline evaluation report, the retrospective fatalities reviews carried out by the NHBW to identify shortcomings in all the relevant authorities' responses to victims' requests for support and in their assessment of the victims' risk have been further strengthened. Such reviews now also include in their remit, in addition to murder and attempted murder of a victim of domestic violence (or her child), injuries and manslaughter.¹¹⁴ GREVIO notes, however, that they do not appear to cover gender-based violence-related suicides, despite the welcome recent criminalisation of "encouraging suicide" and "negligently encouraging suicide" by the authorities. GREVIO considers that the inclusion of gender-based violence-related suicide would be the logical next step for a truly comprehensive review of gender-based deaths of women.

132. Despite these positive developments, however, GREVIO notes that the implementation of risk assessments both by the police and social welfare services remains uneven and shortcomings in multi-agency co-ordination persist.

133. As regards the police, GREVIO understands that in practice police officers do not systematically carry out a risk assessment in a standardised manner, often assessing such risks in a more informal way.¹¹⁵ Moreover, even where this is ensured, it is not carried out in a co-ordinated manner with other bodies, including health authorities, specialist support services or social services. GREVIO recalls in this respect that when risk assessments are carried out based on information from one source only, key information from stakeholders that may have had contact with the victim may be missed. GREVIO further notes with concern that children's risks are not assessed in parallel with those of their mother's. As was observed by GREVIO in its third-party intervention before the European Court of Human Rights in the case of *Kurt v. Austria*, perpetrators are often also violent towards children with whom they cohabit. Children may be exposed to direct and/or indirect violence, including after the end of an abusive relationship. With fewer opportunities available to subjugate their former partners after separation, many domestic abusers retaliate by abusing their children, leading, in some tragic cases, to their murder. The importance of carrying out a risk assessment for all victims, including children, cannot therefore be overemphasised.

113. These include: controlling behaviour/jealousy, serious and/or escalated violence, suspected access to weapons, occurrence of strangulation, violation of a non-contact order, threats of suicide made by the perpetrator of violence, mental illness/substance abuse, ongoing separation/breakup/custody dispute, standards of honour, criminal charges, the plaintiff's fear and pregnancy.

114. Between 2018 and 2021, 57 such case reviews were published, out of which 43 concerned the murder of women. The NHBW identified various shortcomings on the part of the authorities, including the social services, in particular: questions about exposure to violence were not routinely asked; failure to carry out a risk assessment; safety planning for the protection of victims of violence was inadequate; failure to assist victims in securing permanent housing to escape the perpetrator; and failure to follow up and verify the victim's safety. See the NGO submission by Amnesty International, p. 7.

115. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

134. As regards more specifically social services, women's rights NGOs have drawn GREVIO's attention to the fact that they do not always carry out a formal risk assessment, including in cases in which they have been asked to provide information to courts presiding over cases on custody and visitation. Moreover, their frequent use of different risk-assessment tools to those used by the police has been considered to lead to inconsistent results.¹¹⁶

135. Finally, it is unclear to what extent the police and other competent authorities devise a plan to manage the safety risks of a victim. GREVIO points to the importance of multi-agency co-operation during the risk-management stage. While the measures provided by the police contribute to immediate security, the sustained safety and well-being of the victim depend equally on information provided by other stakeholders that are in contact with the victim and her children and that can promptly identify changes in the risk level or indicate any breaches of protection orders.

136. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, GREVIO strongly encourages the Swedish authorities to take legislative or other measures to ensure that risk assessment and management are systematically carried out in relation to all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention, using standardised, evidence-based risk-assessment tools in a co-ordinated manner and involving all relevant stakeholders beyond law-enforcement authorities and social services. It further strongly encourages the Swedish authorities to:

- a. ensure that risk assessments are systematically carried out for the victims' children and take into account any threat made directly to them;**
- b. ensure that risk assessments lead to the development of a safety plan for victims;**
- c. consider including in the remit of the "fatalities review" instances of gender-based violence-related suicides.**

3. Emergency barring orders (Article 52)

137. Under Article 52 of the Istanbul Convention, in situations of immediate danger, the authorities are granted the power to issue an emergency barring order, ordering the perpetrator to leave the residence of the victim or person at risk for a specific period of time, and to prohibit the perpetrator from entering the residence or contacting the victim or person at risk. Emergency barring orders are tools intended to prevent a crime and to put safety first.¹¹⁷ They should therefore be time-bound and incident-based, with the possibility of renewal in the case of continued danger. Longer-term protection should, however, be granted by a court by means of a protection order, upon application by the victim. An emergency barring order should in principle extend to children in need of protection and should have immediate effect.

138. In its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO had noted with concern that none of the available protection and barring orders qualified as an emergency barring order (EBO), as required under Article 52. The Non-contact Order Act, in fact, did not envisage these orders as emergency measures to be taken within 24 hours, requiring instead the prosecutor to issue them within a longer time frame, notably within four days for non-contact orders on the joint home, with a review by a court within a maximum of four days.¹¹⁸ Such time-frame had been assessed as too long and fraught with danger for a victim and her children. Moreover, GREVIO had observed that prosecutors required evidence of the commission of a crime or of the abuser's intention to commit a serious crime in order to issue a non-contact order on the joint home or other non-contact orders and that they could only be issued if the grounds for such an order significantly outweighed the intrusion or detriment for the perpetrator. GREVIO had noted that the authorities ordered pretrial detention instead, which

116. GREVIO was informed by the authorities that in June 2024, the Family Law and Parental Support Authority and the National Board of Health and Welfare were tasked with strengthening social services' work, including in relation to cases regarding the custody, residence and contact of the child as well as their duty to carry out risk assessments where there is a risk of violence to the child or a family member.

117. See GREVIO's baseline evaluation reports on Denmark, paragraph 207, and Malta, paragraph 218.

118. See section 19 of the Non-contact Order Act.

required similarly high levels of evidence and risk of further crime but offered greater protection to the victim. Alternatively, they also opted for the removal of victims and their children from the joint residence with the abuser and their relocation to a protected address. These findings were supported by the statistics available at the time, which showed a low level of use of non-contact orders on the joint home. GREVIO had equally found that the issue of non-contact orders on the joint home required an application by the victim, instead of being ordered *ex officio*, as foreseen by Article 5, paragraph 2, of the convention. Equally, children were generally not included in any bans on contact and, despite the option to make a separate application for a child by a legal guardian, the threshold applied for its issue was considered too high for GREVIO. Finally, GREVIO had expressed reservations about the possibility of allowing for exceptions to protection orders for communication around common children if contact is clearly justified in light of particular circumstances.

139. GREVIO welcomes the inquiry launched by the government following the publication of the GREVIO baseline evaluation report to assess whether amendments to the non-contact order should be made to comply with GREVIO's findings, as well as a second inquiry launched in July 2022 that also looked into this issue. The first resulted in a number of amendments that entered into force in January 2022, which made one of the conditions for issuing a non-contact order for the joint home (and extended non-contact orders) slightly less stringent and increased the sanctions for breaches of non-contact orders to a term of imprisonment of up to one year, removing the option of a fine.¹¹⁹ The second inquiry has made a number of promising proposals, including the requirement for the police to appoint a contact person for both the victim and the perpetrator to ensure a better enforcement of non-contact orders and clarifying that non-contact orders can be issued to prohibit a perpetrator from digitally tracking the victim. Consideration of these proposals is currently pending.

140. This notwithstanding, GREVIO notes with concern that despite the serious findings in the baseline evaluation report the legislative framework has remained broadly unchanged and continues to not meet the standards for EBOs required under Article 52. GREVIO in particular regrets that, further to the above-mentioned inquiries, the Swedish authorities have concluded that the legislation on non-contact orders, as complemented by the possibility of ordering detention on remand, effectively enables the removal of a perpetrator from a joint residence. The Swedish authorities have provided GREVIO with additional arguments to support their position, as outlined below.

141. As regards GREVIO's finding on the high evidentiary requirements imposed for the issue of a non-contact order on the joint home, the authorities have clarified that, in view of the restriction of rights that this entails, it would be too far-reaching to enable the issue of such an order if there is no risk of a crime against a person's life, health, freedom or peace. GREVIO notes in this respect that the drafters of the convention clarified that EBOs should be available in cases of immediate danger, notably any situation of domestic violence in which harm is imminent or has already materialised and is likely to happen again but that this does not require the risk of death or other serious violence, which would represent an unacceptably high threshold.¹²⁰ As GREVIO has had opportunity to note, EBOs should equally be available and issued for cases of less serious but nonetheless harmful violence and where the threshold for arrest has not been met. Moreover, GREVIO reiterates that EBOs are short-term measures that are much less restrictive than other types of measures separating the victim and the perpetrator, such as arrest and detention, and in many jurisdictions the legitimacy of such measures is usually reviewed by courts, ensuring a more just balancing of the victim's and perpetrator's rights. EBOs in line with the requirements of the convention should therefore form an integral part of the toolkit available to the criminal justice system to protect victims. The competent authorities must be mandated to issue such orders either as an independent measure in the above-mentioned situations or in combination with pretrial detention.

142. This is, however, not the case in Sweden, as preference continues to be given to arrest and detention, with a low use of non-contact orders on the joint home. Indeed, the number of such orders

119. Prior to the amendments, extended non-contact orders and a non-contact order related to a joint residence could only be issued if the grounds for such an order significantly outweighed the intrusion or detriment for the intended subject of the order. The amendments removed the intensifier "significantly", so the assessment must now verify whether the grounds for such an order outweigh the intrusion or detriment for the perpetrator.

120. See the Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, paragraph 265.

issued in 2022 and 2023 (151 and 61, respectively) are extremely low when compared to the number of reports and investigations for violation of a woman's integrity and other underlying offences committed against women by intimate partners that did not proceed along the criminal justice chain.¹²¹ Moreover, information obtained from women's rights NGOs also points to the prevailing practice of having the victim and her children relocate to a protected address/shelter.

143. As regards GREVIO's finding on the excessively long time frame for issuing a non-contact order on the joint home, according to the authorities this has now been reduced to one day. In the absence of data illustrating that this is a generalised practice, GREVIO points to the need to ensure, for reasons of legal certainty and with a view to consistently serving all victims, that such time frames/deadlines are enshrined in the law.

144. On a different point, while the authorities have informed GREVIO that the newly introduced criminal provision on violation of a child's integrity will increase the likelihood of the child being considered as in need of protection when his/her mother is a victim of intimate-partner violence, the law continues not to require children to be automatically included in non-contact orders on the joint home and a separate application by a legal guardian must be made. Furthermore, as regards the possibility of allowing for exceptions to protection orders for communication around common children when contact is clearly justified in light of particular circumstances, the authorities have informed GREVIO that this is to be interpreted restrictively and would apply, for example, if the child is gravely ill, but would not be applicable to regular visitation.

145. GREVIO was informed by the authorities that statistics on the number of breaches of non-contact orders on the joint home and on the sanctions applied are not collected systematically by the police. Moreover, the statistics that were made available did not provide a breakdown of the number of breaches per type of non-contact order, nor did they specify the applied sanctions, allowing no conclusions to be drawn with regard to the level of enforcement by the authorities in cases of breaches of non-contact orders on the joint home. GREVIO notes with concern that reports indicate that the current sanctions for breach of a non-contact order are insufficient to serve as a deterrent and that the sanctioning of such violations are not prioritised by the authorities.¹²²

146. Recalling the findings made by GREVIO in its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Swedish authorities to take legislative or other measures to ensure that:

- a. non-contact orders for the joint home are issued swiftly with immediate effect, pending the approval of the competent court, in situations of immediate danger, without lengthy proceedings or high evidentiary requirements, and that they are extended to children in need of protection with a view to ensuring their safety in their own home;**
- b. they carry out effective monitoring of compliance with all types of non-contact orders and enforce sanctions for any breaches of these orders.**

4. Restraining or protection orders (Article 53)

147. Restraining and protection orders are designed to prolong the protection afforded to the victim and her children by emergency barring orders and may be considered complementary to the protection offered by EBOs. Under Article 53 of the Istanbul Convention, victims of all forms of violence against women should be able to obtain a protection order available for immediate protection – without undue financial or administrative burden being placed on the victim and irrespective of whether or not they choose to set in motion any other legal proceedings.

121. By way of example, in 2021 and 2022 there were 1 391 reports of gross violation of a woman's integrity, leading to 1 253 investigations, of which only 276 cases led to prosecution. In addition, in the same time frame the police received 13 583 reports of assault committed by an intimate partner, out of which 13 464 led to the opening of an investigation, which resulted to 2 044 prosecutions. See the state report, Appendix B.

122. See the NGO submission by the Swedish Women's Lobby, p. 16

148. The developments regarding the Non-contact Order Act described in the preceding section¹²³ are equally pertinent and apply to all other non-contact orders.¹²⁴ As regards in particular the second inquiry launched by the government in July 2022, some of its proposals aimed to strengthen the efficacy of non-contact orders, for example by increasing their geographical remit, expanding the use of special extended non-contact orders and clarifying that non-contact orders can be issued to prohibit a perpetrator from digitally tracking the victim. In this connection, the authorities have clarified that it is currently already possible to issue non-contact orders with respect to digital forms of violence against women. Notwithstanding these proposals, the legislative framework on protection orders, like the one on EBOs, has remained unchanged since the baseline evaluation report.¹²⁵ In this context, GREVIO points to the importance of no gaps in protection arising after a non-contact order on the joint home expires and before another non-contact order can be issued.

149. As regards the annual number of non-contact orders issued by the authorities, although significantly higher than the number of non-contact orders issued for the joint home, their numbers still appear to be low when compared to the number of reports made for violation of a woman's integrity and other underlying offences committed against women by intimate partners in the same time frame.¹²⁶ As regards issues related to the monitoring of non-contact orders and breaches thereof, as well as whether children who are victims or witnesses of violence are included in the same protection order as their mothers and whether any exceptions are allowed in terms of prohibiting contact where common children are involved, GREVIO refers to its analysis under Article 52 of this report.

150. **GREVIO strongly encourages the Swedish authorities to ensure that:**

- a. no gap in the protection of the victim arises between the expiry of any non-contact order on the joint home and the imposition of another non-contact order;**
- b. children can be included in the same non-contact order as their mothers, in cases where the children are direct victims or have witnessed the violence;**
- c. non-contact orders can be issued with respect to digital forms of violence against women;**
- d. there is effective monitoring of compliance with all types of non-contact orders and enforcement of sanctions for any breaches of these orders.**

5. Measures of protection (Article 56)

151. Article 56 of the Istanbul Convention is a key provision for building trust at the level of judicial proceedings for women and girls who have experienced or who are witness to any of the forms of violence covered by the convention. It sets forth a non-exhaustive list of procedures designed to protect victims of violence from intimidation, retaliation and secondary victimisation at all stages of proceedings, during investigations and at trial. The drafters intended this list to be indicative, and parties may adopt additional protection measures that are more favourable than those provided in the convention. Moreover, intimidation and secondary victimisation can occur not only at the hands of perpetrators but also when investigations and judicial proceedings are not based on a gendered understanding of violence against women, which is why the practical application of measures of protection should be firmly anchored in such an understanding.

123. See paragraph 140 of this report.

124. GREVIO recalls that the Non-contact Order Act foresees three types of non-contact orders (protection orders) in addition to the non-contact order on the joint home. These are: ordinary non-contact orders, which prohibit the perpetrator from visiting and contacting the victim; extended non-contact orders, which expand on ordinary non-contact orders and prohibit the perpetrator from being in proximity of the victim's home, workplace or other place; specially extended non-contact orders for perpetrators who have breached an extended non-contact order, prohibiting them from staying within a larger area.

125. The only other avenue for requesting a non-contact order is in the course of divorce proceedings.

126. Notably, according to data provided by the authorities, a total of 2 237 non-contact orders (other than those issued for the joint home) were issued by the authorities, whereas in 2023, 940 non-contact orders were issued.

152. GREVIO recalls the newly introduced requirement for the police to film interviews with the victim/witnesses in cases of domestic violence, sexual violence and crimes committed in the name of so-called honour and the ability to use such recording in court even when the victim has withdrawn her statement or does not participate in proceedings. Where the victim does participate in proceedings, such a practice allows the victim to be spared extensive questioning in the courtroom and allows her to respond to a more limited set of questions and be cross-examined. GREVIO welcomes this as a crucial initiative to enhance the trust of victims of violence against women in the justice system.

153. A number of additional protective measures are available to victims of violence against women under the Notice on Preliminary Investigations Act, as amended following the transposition by Sweden of the EU Victims of Crime Directive, as well as under the Code of Judicial Procedure and the Prison Ordinance. These measures cover many of the requirements of the Istanbul Convention, notably the possibility of avoiding direct contact through extensive use of an audio link in court proceedings and the possibility to inform the victim when the perpetrator is transferred to another prison, is released or otherwise escapes.

154. While many of the protective measures foreseen under Article 56 of the convention appear to be generally available in practice, some others are unevenly implemented across the territory of Sweden. For example, while some efforts are made in certain courts to ensure that contact between the victim and the perpetrator is avoided, by arranging in advance separate entrances, court practices vary considerably, with most not being able to offer separate waiting rooms and entrances. Another shortcoming that has been pinpointed by women rights NGOs is the practice of judges of deciding on the use of an audio/video link enabling the victim to follow the trial and give evidence remotely the same day as the trial, causing secondary victimisation, fear and anxiety in victims. Moreover, where the victim follows the trial and gives testimony remotely, it appears that insufficient information is provided to victims on the support that is available to them before and during the trial, irrespective of the place in which they testify.¹²⁷ Finally, it has also been acknowledged by the authorities that more must be done to improve the accessibility of police and court premises for women with disabilities and to adapt questioning and proceedings to the needs of women with learning disabilities.

155. **GREVIO encourages the Swedish authorities to take measures to:**

- a. limit as far as possible contact between a victim and the perpetrator during a trial, by ensuring separate entrances and waiting rooms;**
- b. ensure that decisions on the use of technology to avoid the secondary victimisation of a victim during a trial are made sufficiently ahead of the trial and communicated promptly to victims, along with information on the support available before and during a trial;**
- c. improve the accessibility of police and court premises for women with disabilities and adapt questioning and proceedings to the needs of women with learning disabilities.**

127. See the NGO submission by Victim Support Sweden, p. 15.

Appendix I

List of proposals and suggestions by GREVIO

II. Changes in definitions, comprehensive and co-ordinated policies, funding and data collection in the areas of violence against women and domestic violence

A. Definitions (Article 3)

1. GREVIO strongly encourages the Swedish authorities to ensure that policies and their practical implementation apply a gendered understanding of violence against women, recognising the disproportionate incidence of gender-based violence on women and its gendered nature, specificities and historical roots. (paragraph 8)

B. Comprehensive and co-ordinated policies (Article 7)

2. GREVIO strongly encourages the Swedish authorities to ensure that:

a. the existing policies in the area of violence against women sufficiently take into consideration the specific needs of women and girl victims exposed to intersectional discrimination, notably by:

- i) mainstreaming concerns pertaining to violence against women within broader strategies and policies targeting certain communities such as the Roma community;
- ii) developing more targeted measures within the action plan addressing the protection needs of vulnerable groups such as women with disabilities;
- iii) in light of the concerning incidence of violence against women experienced by Sami women, taking comprehensive policy action in this regard;
- iv) taking the necessary policy measures to prevent violence from occurring in youth homes, including, as a minimum, strengthening their supervision, raising staff awareness about gender-based violence and developing protocols to better identify victims and refer them to the needed support services;

b. an independent evaluation of strategies and action plans on violence against women is carried out regularly on the basis of predefined indicators in order to assess their impact and to ensure that policy making is based on reliable data. (paragraph 16)

3. GREVIO welcomes the comprehensive measures taken to combat serious forms of violence against women, including cases of violence in the name of so-called honour, and strongly encourages the Swedish authorities to ensure that a gendered understanding of these forms of violence is retained in policies and in their implementation, all the while ensuring that such policies do not result in the stigmatisation of certain migrant communities. (paragraph 17)

C. Financial resources (Article 8)

4. GREVIO urges the Swedish authorities to ensure sustainable funding levels for women's rights organisations that run specialist support services for women victims of all forms of violence, including those providing much needed psycho-social counselling and trauma support to victims of sexual violence, with a view to developing sufficient competence to provide support in cases of digital manifestations of violence against women and to provide safe premises where there are more severe safety threats. Such suitable funding opportunities should be guaranteed through dedicated, long-term grants based on transparent and clear procurement procedures that give due weight to

professional and technical experience, including a comprehensive understanding of violence against women as a gendered phenomenon. (paragraph 22)

D. Data collection (Article 11)

3. Social services

5. While acknowledging the progress made since the baseline evaluation report, GREVIO strongly encourages the Swedish authorities to take measures to:

- a. harmonise the collection of data on all forms of violence against women and domestic violence, including homicide, between law-enforcement agencies, prosecution and the judiciary, with the aim of tracing the progress of cases from reporting to conviction and to identify attrition rates and their causes and ensure that disaggregated data on convictions is collected by courts;
- b. diligently enter such data into the relevant databases;
- c. ensure that the data are disaggregated by sex of both the victim and the perpetrator, the age, the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim and the geographical location, as well as other factors deemed relevant;
- d. systematically collect information on the number of breaches of non-contact orders and the sanctions applied;
- e. ensure the collection of data related to violence against women and domestic violence, disaggregated by sex, age and relationship of the perpetrator to the victim, type of violence and geographical location, in the healthcare sector and by social services and specialist support service providers, including those managed privately. Data collected by public and private healthcare providers should encompass all contact made by victims of violence against women with primary healthcare providers, including for experiences of violence beyond physical violence. (paragraph 29)

III. Analysis of the implementation of selected provisions in the priority areas in the fields of prevention, protection and prosecution

A. Prevention

1. General obligations (Article 12)

6. GREVIO strongly encourages the Swedish authorities to:

- a. ensure wider preventive measures for all forms of violence against women that address it as a pervasive phenomenon affecting all pockets of society in order to challenge societal attitudes, cultural norms and gender stereotypes rooted in the perceived inferiority of women;
- b. ensure that more preventive work is carried out that specifically addresses gender-based violence against women and girls experienced by women with disabilities and other women at risk of intersectional discrimination, including, in particular, Sami women;
- c. regularly carry out impact assessments of any awareness-raising campaigns and primary prevention measures taken. (paragraph 36)

2. Education (Article 14)

7. GREVIO urges the Swedish authorities to:

- a. ensure that the compulsory school curriculum provides a comprehensive overview of the concept of violence against women by articulating the underpinning principles that all forms of violence against women share, and that it addresses all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence, stalking, FGM and digital forms of violence against women;

- b. strengthen efforts to ensure the practical implementation of the requirement to impart knowledge on the elements listed in Article 14 of the Istanbul Convention;
- c. increase their efforts to promote the principles of equality between women and men, non-stereotyped gender roles, mutual respect and non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships in non-formal education, as well as in sports, cultural and leisure activities. (paragraph 43)

3. Training of professionals (Article 15)

8. In view of the persistent gaps in ensuring mandatory training of professionals whose contribution to a trust-based system of support, protection and justice is vital, GREVIO urges the Swedish authorities to:

- a. introduce systematic and mandatory initial and in-service training on all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention, including its digital dimensions, and on the cultural specificities of women belonging to vulnerable groups for all social services staff, law-enforcement agencies, judges, healthcare providers and teachers, supported by standardised protocols aimed at identifying, providing support to and further referring victims to other services;
- b. ensure that such mandatory training equally aims to enhance the skills and capacity of all relevant professionals to collect data on violence against women in line with the standards of the Istanbul Convention;
- c. ensure that such training programmes are evaluated. (paragraph 54)

9. GREVIO further urges the Swedish authorities to ensure the mandatory training of judges presiding over cases involving custody and visitation on:

- a. the negative effects that witnessing violence against women has on children, the importance that victims' safety has on children's ability to recover from trauma and the need to take such circumstances into account when reaching a decision and/or when promoting mediation or validating an agreement on mediation in such cases;
- b. the nature and dynamics of domestic violence, including the unequal power relations between the parties, as opposed to a mere conflictual relationship between spouses. (paragraph 55)

4. Preventive intervention and treatment programmes (Article 16)

a. Programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence

10. While acknowledging the many steps taken to strengthen the provision of perpetrator programmes across the country, GREVIO strongly encourages the Swedish authorities to:

- a. develop common minimum standards for perpetrator programmes, in line with the principles of the Istanbul Convention, taking account of the need for a gender-sensitive approach and for perpetrators to examine and identify the patriarchal and misogynist nature of their values and attitudes, take full responsibility for their actions and modify their behaviour;
- b. ensure that perpetrator programmes are widely attended, including by incorporating them into the criminal justice system as a tool to reduce recidivism;
- c. ensure the external evaluation of all perpetrator programmes, in line with recognised best international practices and principles, in order to assess whether the programmes serve their intended preventive aims. (paragraph 60)

B. Protection and support**1. General obligations (Article 18)**

11. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Swedish authorities to adopt mechanisms of co-ordination and co-operation among the different governmental and non-governmental agencies that provide support and protection to victims of all forms of violence against women. In particular, it urges the Swedish authorities to:

- a. develop formal protocols detailing co-ordination measures to be taken by all agencies, entities and organisations providing support to victims of all forms of violence against women;
- b. introduce multi-agency risk-assessment conferences (MARACs) to co-ordinate action on individual cases of violence against women;
- c. ensure that protection and support services are made available as far as possible on the same premises;
- d. ensure that any service provision is based on a gendered understanding of violence against women, aims at the empowerment of victims and avoids secondary victimisation. (paragraph 67)

2. General support services (Article 20)**a. Social services**

12. GREVIO strongly encourages the Swedish authorities to:

- a. ensure social services adequately discharge their duty to provide support and assistance to victims of all forms of violence against women, in particular by equipping them with the knowledge, tools and cultural awareness to do so effectively in relation to all women and girls, in particular those at risk of domestic violence, forced marriage and FGM and those from Sami and Roma communities;
- b. embed assistance with financial support, housing and employment support for women victims of domestic violence in the duty to provide support and assistance to victims of violence against women, by establishing guidance and protocols as well as specific programmes. (paragraph 73)

b. Healthcare services

13. GREVIO strongly encourages the Swedish authorities to:

- a. ensure that access to general support services for experiences of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention is ensured without discrimination on any ground, including on the grounds of residence status;
- b. pursue their efforts to implement standardised care paths in the public and private healthcare sectors in order to ensure the identification of victims, their diagnosis, treatment, documentation of the type of violence and the violence suffered and referral to appropriate specialist support services in a gender-sensitive and non-judgmental manner, as well as the provision of a forensic report for victims documenting their injuries. (paragraph 77)

3. Specialist support services (Article 22)

14. GREVIO urges the Swedish authorities to take measures to:

- a. increase the level of appropriate specialist shelter provision by closing the gaps in underserved municipalities in order to ensure safe accommodation for women victims of violence irrespective of their residence status and place of residence, in particular by catering to the needs of Sami women;

- b. ensure that all women victims of gender-based violence and their children have access to shelters and are offered the possibility to self-refer;
- c. ensure that minimum quality standards imposed on shelters for victims of violence against women include specific expertise in the provision of victim-centred and empowering support to victims of violence against women, underpinned by an understanding of violence against women as a gendered phenomenon;
- d. ensure that the specialist support services available to victims include the digital dimensions of violence against women. (paragraph 88)

4. Support for victims of sexual violence (Article 25)

15. GREVIO strongly encourages the Swedish authorities to:

- a. set up rape crisis and/or sexual violence centres offering medical care, forensic examination and immediate, short and long-term trauma counselling delivered by trained professionals. These specialist services should be available in sufficient numbers and their geographical spread should make them accessible to victims living in rural areas and in cities;
- b. ensure that the obligation to share a forensic certificate with the police where a serious criminal offence has been committed is contingent, as far as possible, on the prior consent of the victim, unless the victim is a child or is unable to protect her/himself because of disabilities. (paragraph 92)

C. Substantive law

1. Custody, visitation rights and safety (Article 31)

16. GREVIO urges the Swedish authorities to take the following priority action in the area of custody and visitation rights to ensure the safety of victims and their children, including by:

- a. systematically screening all pending cases on custody and visitation for instances of domestic violence, consulting with all relevant bodies, including on whether criminal proceedings are pending against the perpetrator or have been brought in the past, and requesting the disclosure of risk assessments and safety plans drawn up by the police and social services (and other relevant bodies);
- b. taking all appropriate measures to ensure that all relevant professionals, including social workers, members of the judiciary, court experts and child psychologists are aware of the lack of a scientific basis for so-called “parental alienation” and similar concepts and banning the use by courts of such concepts.
- c. ensuring that any voluntary mediation procedure carried out in the context of divorce and or custody and visitation proceedings incorporates safeguards to ensure the full and free consent of the victim and a risk-assessment procedure;
- d. providing safe premises where supervised visits can take place and measures to safeguard both the child’s and victim’s safety, along with a sufficient number of professionals trained in violence against women to accompany the supervised visits. (paragraph 104)

17. GREVIO encourages the Swedish authorities to strengthen children’s rights in cases on custody and visitation by requiring their legal representation in these cases and ensuring they are heard. (paragraph 105)

2. Prohibition of mandatory alternative dispute resolution processes or sentencing (Article 48)

18. GREVIO urges the Swedish authorities to ensure that any voluntary mediation procedure carried out in the context of divorce and/or custody and visitation proceedings incorporates safeguards to ensure the freely given and informed consent of the victim and a risk-assessment procedure. (paragraph 109)

D. Investigation, prosecution, procedural law and protective measures

1. General obligations (Article 49) and Immediate response, prevention and protection (Article 50)

a. Reporting to and immediate response and investigations by law-enforcement agencies

19. GREVIO strongly encourages the Swedish authorities to:

- a. reinforce the capacity of the police to respond to and investigate all forms of violence against women, including digital manifestations of violence against women and domestic violence, in line with GREVIO's General Recommendation No. 1 on the digital dimension of violence against women, by increasing the number of trained investigators beyond the specialist units;
- b. take measures, including measures aimed at addressing any challenges victims encounter when lodging complaints, to encourage reporting of all forms of violence against women by women who are at risk of or subject to intersectional discrimination, including Sami women, migrant women, women with disabilities and women with addiction issues. (paragraph 117)

b. Effective investigation and prosecution

20. GREVIO strongly encourages the Swedish authorities to redouble efforts to ensure that existing investigative guidelines on violence against women, prescribing, inter alia, the systematic recording of interviews with the victim, are systematically applied in practice. (paragraph 123)

c. Conviction rates

21. GREVIO strongly encourages the Swedish authorities to strengthen measures to increase conviction rates for all forms of violence against women. (paragraph 128)

2. Risk assessment and risk management (Article 51)

22. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, GREVIO strongly encourages the Swedish authorities to take legislative or other measures to ensure that risk assessment and management are systematically carried out in relation to all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention, using standardised, evidence based risk-assessment tools in a co-ordinated manner and involving all relevant stakeholders beyond law-enforcement authorities and social services. It further strongly encourages the Swedish authorities to:

- a. ensure that risk assessments are systematically carried out for the victims' children and take into account any threat made directly to them;
- b. ensure that risk assessments lead to the development of a safety plan for victims;
- c. consider including in the remit of the "fatalities review" instances of gender-based violence-related suicides. (paragraph 136)

3. Emergency barring orders (Article 52)

23. Recalling the findings made by GREVIO in its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Swedish authorities to take legislative or other measures to ensure that:

- a. non-contact orders for the joint home are issued swiftly with immediate effect, pending the approval of the competent court, in situations of immediate danger, without lengthy proceedings or high evidentiary requirements, and that they are extended to children in need of protection with a view to ensuring their safety in their own home;

- b. they carry out effective monitoring of compliance with all types of non-contact orders and enforce sanctions for any breaches of these orders. (paragraph 146)

4. Restraining or protection orders (Article 53)

24. GREVIO strongly encourages the Swedish authorities to ensure that:

- a. no gap in the protection of the victim arises between the expiry of any non-contact order on the joint home and the imposition of another non-contact order;
- b. children can be included in the same non-contact order as their mothers, in cases where the children are direct victims or have witnessed the violence;
- c. non-contact orders can be issued with respect to digital forms of violence against women;
- d. there is effective monitoring of compliance with all types of non-contact orders and enforcement of sanctions for any breaches of these orders. (paragraph 150)

5. Measures of protection (Article 56)

25. GREVIO encourages the Swedish authorities to take measures to:

- a. limit as far as possible contact between a victim and the perpetrator during a trial, by ensuring separate entrances and waiting rooms;
- b. ensure that decisions on the use of technology to avoid the secondary victimisation of a victim during a trial are made sufficiently ahead of the trial and communicated promptly to victims, along with information on the support available before and during a trial;
- c. improve the accessibility of police and court premises for women with disabilities and adapt questioning and proceedings to the needs of women with learning disabilities. (paragraph 155)

Appendix II

List of the national authorities, other public bodies, non-governmental organisations and civil society organisations with which GREVIO held consultations

National authorities and public bodies

The Ministry of Employment
 The Swedish Gender Equality Agency
 The Swedish Agency for Public Management
 Swedish Agency for Participation
 Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR)
 The Ministry for Health and Social Affairs
 The National Board of Health and Welfare
 National Centre against Honour-based violence and oppression
 The Ministry of Justice
 Crime Victim Authority
 The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå)
 The Swedish Police
 The Swedish Prosecution Authority
 National Board of Forensic Medicine
 The Swedish Prison and Probation Service
 The Ministry of Education and Research
 The Swedish Higher Education Authority
 The Swedish Migration Agency
 The National Centre for Knowledge on Men's Violence against Women at Uppsala University
 Statistics Sweden
 Centre for Andrology, Sexual and Transgender Medicine
 The Equality Ombudsman
 Ombudsman for children
 National Board of Institutional Care SIS
 Health and Social Care inspectorate
 Rise - Research Institute of Sweden

Non-Governmental Organisations

Föreningen Tillsammans – women's specialist support services
 Roks - women's specialist support services
 WONSA - women's specialist support services
 MÅN – civil society organisation
 Terrafem - women's specialist support services
 RFSL - the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex Right
 Botkyrka Kvinno - women's specialist support services
 Sveriges Kvinnoorganisationer - Swedish Women's Lobby
 Kvinnofronten - the Women's front in Sweden
 Unizon - women's specialist support services
 Storasyster - women's specialist support services
 Amnesty International
 Riksorganisationen GAPF – civil society organisation on violence committed in the name of "honour"
 Caritas Sweden
 The Swedish Disability Rights Federation
 Women and Disability Sweden
 Brottsofferjouren Sverige - Victim Support Sweden
 Barnrättsbyrå - Children's Rights Bureau

Swedish Platform Civil Society against human trafficking
Paraply / nxtME - Civil society organisation protecting children victims of incest
ECPAT Sweden - network against child sexual exploitation
Swedish Refugee Law Center
Trajosko Drom - Roma Women's Rights
Somaya - women's specialist support services

GREVIO, the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, is an independent human rights monitoring body mandated to monitor the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) by the parties.

Following the comprehensive stocktaking exercise set out in its baseline evaluation reports, GREVIO's first thematic evaluation round identifies progress made in building trust among women and girls by delivering support, protection and justice for any of the forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention. This report contains an analysis of developments in law and policy in respect of provisions of the convention relating to victim support and protection, criminal investigation and prosecution of acts of violence. It also covers developments in the determination of child custody and visitation rights in cases with a history of violence and wider preventive measures.

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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.