



Convention du Conseil de l'Europe
sur la prévention et la lutte
contre la violence à l'égard des femmes
et la violence domestique

Convention d'Istanbul

Foreword by the first President of GREVIO

This First General Report on the activities of the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) covers the period from September 2015 to May 2019 and provides a comprehensive summary of the results of GREVIO's first eight reports as well as the findings emerging from final draft reports adopted as of May 2019. I have served as the President of this body during this period and it is my distinct honour to present this First General Report on behalf of GREVIO.

The dynamics that led to the creation of GREVIO and the organisational environment it functioned in during this period have determined to a large extent this body's role in ensuring the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, also known as the Istanbul Convention (the convention).

The convention

The Council of Europe 2006-2008 campaign on ending violence against women highlighted the critical prevalence of such violence in member states and the absence of a uniform and consistent set of legal and policy requirements at the European level capable of effectively addressing this phenomenon. A task force was thus instituted by the Council of Europe to call for a regional treaty that would provide well-substantiated and legally binding standards in this area. As a result, the Ad Hoc Committee for preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (CAHVIO) was appointed by the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers to negotiate and draft the convention.

Following lengthy and intense deliberations, the convention's text was adopted, first by CAHVIO and then by the Committee of Ministers on 7 April 2011. The convention was opened for signature on 11 May 2011 during the 121st Session of the Committee of Ministers in Istanbul and came into force on 1 August 2014, with the ratification by the first 10 states. Clearly, one of the distinctive features of the convention is its insistence on a multi-pronged comprehensive approach encompassing prevention, protection, prosecution and integrated policies ("the 4 Ps") in order to ensure the successful eradication of violence against women and domestic violence, as well as its clearly stated premise that violence against women is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between women and men. The convention places the many forms of violence against women, ranging from female genital mutilation to domestic violence, under the banner of "gender-based violence against women", pointing to gender inequality as their common structural cause and calling for states' comprehensive response to combat all of these different manifestations of power inequality between women and men.

GREVIO and the evaluation process

GREVIO is the independent expert body mandated to monitor the implementation of the convention and has been operating since September 2015. At its inception, it included 10 independent experts originating from different countries with various professional backgrounds, nominated by their states and elected by the states parties to the convention for a four-year term, renewable once. The number of independent experts rose to 15 following the 25th ratification of the convention.

As mandated by the convention, GREVIO conducts its monitoring on the basis of the information it receives from the state authorities as responses to the baseline questionnaire¹ it formulated in the first year of its formation and sent to the states; the dialogues it holds with authorities in the states being evaluated; the observations GREVIO members make in the evaluation visits they undertake; and the information it receives from NGOs and other sources in the process of monitoring. The reports of other international monitoring bodies and processes (such as those of the Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, etc.) also feed into the process.

Such information is analysed to form the basis of GREVIO's draft baseline evaluation report for the state party under review, including specific recommendations to the state. Following the state's comments on GREVIO's draft report, GREVIO adopts its final baseline evaluation report. This text is published – along with the state's comments on it – as a public document.

The existing practice in the period covered in this First General Report has been that the Committee of the Parties, the political organ of the monitoring/evaluation

1. Please see the [Questionnaire on legislative and other measures giving effect to the provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#) for more information.

process, endorses GREVIO's report and formally communicates it to the state concerned, with the specific recommendations as prioritised by GREVIO.

From the outset, in its evaluation reports, GREVIO has been keen to highlight the extent of a state's overall adherence to the fundamental principle of the convention: the interdependence between gender inequality and violence against women. It has thus carefully upheld the convention's priority requirement for the state to adopt a comprehensive, integrated policy approach to preventing and combating all forms of gender-based violence against women. Close and careful monitoring of the "on-the-ground" existence and functioning of specific legal and other measures, services and mechanisms of prevention, protection and prosecution has complemented this approach.

GREVIO's thorough country-specific evaluation reports have been based on its meticulous evaluation of compliance with each and every one of the convention's specific provisions covered by GREVIO's questionnaire. Such analysis has resulted in the production of an all-encompassing and detailed evaluation of the state of affairs in each case. Thus, in its reports, GREVIO has been providing states not only with general, principled guidance but practical, operational and time-framed "recipes" for responding to concrete problem areas. As they elaborate on the principles of the convention, GREVIO reports have also been of significant interest and even sources of inspiration for other states and civil society organisations elsewhere.

GREVIO's own evolution to a fully functioning monitoring body in such a short time period has made it a respected and effective mechanism whose work and recommendations are closely followed and emulated by other regional and global mechanisms in women's human rights. As such, GREVIO's experience has clearly constituted a "best practice" of institution building at the international level.

GREVIO has been a productive and leading member of the platform of United Nations and regional women's human rights mechanisms, convened with the initiation of the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against Dubravka Šimonović.² Since 2017, the Istanbul Convention has been "the guiding light" for this group and GREVIO has significantly contributed to its efforts to ensure that common standards are adopted in responding to violence against women, worldwide.

2. The platform is an initiative launched by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, and is aimed at further enhancing co-operation between international and regional mechanisms on violence and discrimination against women and girls, as well as encouraging all international organisations, United Nations entities, governments, national institutions and stakeholders to take more advantage of the tools that the participating mechanisms have at their disposal. The platform brings together the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences; the Chairperson of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; the Chair of the UN Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice; the President of the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence of the Council of Europe; the Inter-American Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women; the Special Rapporteur on Rights of Women in Africa; and the President of the Committee of Experts of the Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention. More information is available at: www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/SRWomen/Pages/CooperationGlobalRegionalMechanisms.aspx.

GREVIO's work is based on the mandate it received from the convention in its relevant articles (Articles 66 to 69). Thus, from the very beginning, the convention's well-defined scope and comprehensive approach to addressing the issues at hand has been the basic guiding light for GREVIO. The history of the making of the convention, including the long and critical negotiations among member states on many of its provisions, has also given direction to GREVIO, helping it define priorities and impacting its working methods. While remaining fiercely loyal to the convention's standards as yardsticks against which existing conditions in the parties under evaluation were gauged, GREVIO adopted a flexible, constructive as well as a country-specific and nuanced approach to its country evaluations.

Results and impact

The reader of this report will find a detailed account of the state of affairs in the implementation of the convention and the challenges existing in the parties that have been evaluated by GREVIO in the period covered.

The conclusions of GREVIO's monitoring of the implementation of the convention in these eight states illustrate the successful functioning of a brand-new regional monitoring mechanism of an ambitious legal instrument in the area of women's human rights. As such, it is a testimony to the Council of Europe's commitment to women's human rights and to member states' willingness to protect these rights in the face of violence against women.

While a detailed description and analysis of the situation is to be found in the ensuing baseline evaluation report itself, it is important to highlight here that in the period covered, in all cases, GREVIO reports have been very well-received by states and civil society alike.

The extent to which GREVIO's recommendations are effectively implemented will only be fully judged in time. However, there is initial evidence of progress on the ground particularly with respect to improvements in the laws and policy documents, with many states expanding their legal norms of violence against women and domestic violence in line with the provisions of the convention and adopting required action plans.

It is also clear that there are efforts to create national co-ordination mechanisms in line with Article 10 of the convention, as a first essential step for developing accurate data and information and informed responses. However, the picture is less encouraging with regards to ensuring the necessary political and financial support for making these mechanisms effective.

Similarly, in almost all states reviewed, some improvements – albeit limited in scope – in the support structures for the victims and in the area of public awareness raising and training of professionals have been taking place.

In general, in the countries monitored, GREVIO has observed strong support, particularly in respect of the need to protect women from violence. Yet, recognising the structural link between gender inequality and violence against women remains a fundamental challenge, thereby limiting the extent and effectiveness of measures

to counter violence against women. In some societies, lack of awareness and/or outright denial of this structural connection impedes effective implementation or is even the reason for failing to develop comprehensive policies.

Overcoming resistance of this nature requires a change of attitudes, mindsets and gender stereotypes. This, in itself, is admittedly a difficult and lengthy process in virtually all societies. Lately, the overall progress in gender equality and women's rights has provoked a "backlash" in many societies. It is no surprise that the convention, as the most advanced and promising text on the matter – a "gold standard" – has been facing the brunt of this retrogressive impulse. The deliberate spreading of false narratives about the aims of the convention has been spearheading these efforts in Europe. Unfortunately, such movements in some member states that in reality target women's equality with men have unhinged the discussion from facts and truths about the roots and nature of violence against women. They distort the aims of the convention, making it a hostage to irrational fears and particular domestic political agendas. Regrettably, such reactions tend to impede or slow down the convention's ratification and implementation.

However, history has shown time and again that values and principles of equality, inclusiveness, diversity, tolerance, and promotion and protection of human rights have always outlived very strong reactionary currents that have tried to repress these values, including women's human rights.

I believe the Istanbul Convention and the work of GREVIO in the first four years of its existence are notable efforts that will take their due place in history and will pave the way for further efforts and improvements in women's human rights in the future.

The sincere commitment in these early years of the members of GREVIO, and everyone that has contributed her or his knowledge, experience and expertise in a most selfless manner to ensure that the goals and standards of the convention become reality in the states parties, will be remembered as a momentous achievement.

The approval and reinforcement received from states parties to the convention as reflected by the decisions of the Committee of the Parties during these early years has also been a strong influence behind GREVIO's dedicated work in this period.

The Secretariat of the Council of Europe, at all levels, has been an unwavering source of support all along. Much of what has been accomplished in these first four years of GREVIO's life and the solid foundation that has been built has largely been possible because of the excellent work of the GREVIO Secretariat.

I present this First General Report of GREVIO, expressing my sentiments of gratitude to all who contributed to what is contained in it and with the hope that GREVIO's experience and output during its formative years will prove valuable for all combating violence against women.

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(June 2015 to May 2019)