



GREVIO

Baseline Evaluation Report Latvia

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



GREVIO's (Baseline) Evaluation Report
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
(Istanbul Convention)

LATVIA

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

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Foreword

The Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) 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 (CETS No. 210, “the Istanbul Convention”) by the parties to the convention. It is composed of 15 independent and impartial experts appointed on the basis of their recognised expertise in the fields of human rights, gender equality, violence against women and/or assistance to and protection of victims.

GREVIO’s statutory activities include country-by-country monitoring of the Istanbul Convention (evaluation procedure), the initiation of inquiries into specific circumstances within a party to the convention (inquiry procedure) and the adoption of general recommendations on themes and concepts of the convention.

This report is the fruit of the first (baseline) evaluation procedure carried out in respect of Latvia. It covers the Istanbul Convention in its entirety¹ and thus assesses the level of compliance of country legislation and practice in all areas covered by the convention. In light of the scope of the convention – as set out in its Article 2, paragraph 1 – the baseline evaluation focuses on measures taken in relation to “all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence, which affects women disproportionately”. Hence, the term “victim” used throughout this report is to be understood as referring to a woman or girl victim.

Based on this assessment, the report proposes measures to strengthen the implementation of the convention. In proposing such measures, GREVIO has adopted the use of different verbs that correspond to different levels of urgency, noting that all of them are important. These are, in order of priority, “urges”, “strongly encourages”, “encourages” and “invites”. GREVIO uses the verb “urges” where it considers that immediate action is required to bring the party’s legislation or policy into compliance with the Istanbul Convention, or to ensure its implementation. “Strongly encourages” is used where GREVIO has noted shortcomings that need to be remedied in the near future in order to ensure comprehensive implementation of the convention. A third level of urgency is indicated by the use of the verb “encourages”, which is used for shortcomings that require attention though possibly at a later stage. Last, the verb “invites” points to small gaps in implementation that the party is requested to consider closing or to proposals made to provide guidance in the implementation process.

The first (baseline) evaluation procedure is made up of several steps, each of which allows GREVIO to obtain critical information upon which to base its report. It is carried out as a process of confidential dialogue with the aim of offering country-specific proposals and suggestions for improvement developed within the national context of the party under review. These include the following:

- submission, by the party, of a report drawn up on the basis of GREVIO’s baseline questionnaire (the state report);
- an evaluation visit to the party under review to meet with governmental and non-governmental representatives working in this field;
- comments by the party on GREVIO’s draft report;
- publication of GREVIO’s report after its adoption together with any comments received from the party.

In addition, GREVIO also collects additional information from various other sources, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), other members of civil society, national human rights institutions and Council of Europe bodies (Parliamentary Assembly, Human Rights Commissioner

1. With the exception of Chapter VIII of the convention, which GREVIO considered as less relevant in assessing the national situation in each contracting party.

and other pertinent bodies), as well as other international treaty bodies. Within the framework of the evaluation of country, GREVIO received written contributions from the Association MARTA Centre.

The state report and the written contributions submitted by civil society have been made public and are available on the official website of the Istanbul Convention.

The analysis, suggestions and proposals contained in this first baseline evaluation report were drawn up under the exclusive responsibility of GREVIO. It covers the situation as observed by the GREVIO delegation during its evaluation visit to Latvia. Where available, significant legislative and policy developments up until 29 June 2026 have also been 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.

Executive summary

This report provides an assessment of the measures of implementation taken by the Latvian authorities with regard to all aspects of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (hereafter “the Istanbul Convention”).

This assessment has been carried out 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 are based on the information obtained during the various steps of the first (baseline) evaluation procedure set out in Article 68 of the convention, including from written reports (a state report submitted by the Latvian authorities and additional information submitted by the Association MARTA Centre) as well as from a five-day evaluation visit to Latvia. A list of the bodies and entities with which GREVIO had exchanges with can be found in Appendix II.

The report highlights a number of positive legal and policy measures taken by the Latvian authorities, both prior to and following ratification, which demonstrate their commitment to preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. In this regard, GREVIO notes with satisfaction the adoption by the Cabinet of Ministers, on 18 December 2024, of the first national action plan, the Plan for the Prevention and Combating of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence 2024-2029. This is the first comprehensive national framework developed specifically after ratification to guide implementation of the convention's standards, structured around four main directions of action corresponding to the four pillars of the convention. Setting out a detailed breakdown of tasks that the authorities commit to achieve by 2029, its adoption places Latvia on a trajectory towards greater involvement of all relevant actors in efforts to prevent and combat violence against women.

GREVIO further notes with satisfaction that Latvia's legal framework has undergone notable reform, both in the lead-up to and following ratification, in order to bring it into closer alignment with the requirements of the Istanbul Convention. Ahead of ratification, the authorities introduced criminal liability for stalking, established qualifying circumstances for forms of violence in close relationships, strengthened the applicable sanctions and shifted to prosecution *ex officio* for such offences, meaning that criminal proceedings may be initiated in the public interest regardless of whether the victim reports the offence. GREVIO also welcomes the introduction in 2014 of a framework for emergency barring orders, which has significantly strengthened the capacity of law enforcement authorities to provide immediate protection to victims of domestic violence. Since ratification, GREVIO commends in particular the introduction of a new offence of “cruelty towards and violence against a relative,” which criminalises psychological violence, as well as the expansion in the Criminal Code of the definition of crimes against persons in close relationships to include former spouses and intimate partners. Other notable developments include the introduction of the administrative offence of sexual harassment in 2024, the abolition of community service and fines as penalties for crimes committed in close-relationship contexts, the introduction of electronic monitoring in high-risk cases. Alignment of Latvia legislation with the requirements of the convention have continued after GREVIO’s evaluation visit, and the Criminal Law now expressly includes forced marriage within the definition of exploitation in the context of trafficking in human beings. Amendments to Section 112 of the Administrative Liability Law, adopted on 5 February 2026, grant officials the right to request subscriber identity data and IP address identification from electronic communications providers in administrative proceedings.

GREVIO also notes positive documentation practices at the State Centre for Forensic Medical Examination, which, if further developed to enable the systematic linkage of recorded instances of violence with health administrative data, could support the establishment of a more integrated and comprehensive data collection system, in line with the requirements of the Convention.

While acknowledging the positive developments in the area of criminal legislation, GREVIO notes that Latvia's Criminal Code still does not anchor its provisions on sexual violence in the principle of freely given consent. Although Section 159 refers to sexual intercourse committed against the will of the victim, the offence is qualified by requiring the perpetrator's use of violence or threats, the exploitation of the victim's helplessness, or the abuse of a position of trust, authority or other influence — a construction that falls short of the convention's standard, which encompasses all situations in which consent was absent. The report therefore stresses the need to incorporate the notion of freely given consent into Sections 159 and 160 of the Criminal Law, in line with Article 36 of the Istanbul Convention, and to align the Criminal Law with Article 42 so that the victim's alleged immoral behaviour can no longer be treated as a mitigating factor.

Further, GREVIO stresses that the definitions adopted in the National Action Plan must be operationalised and effectively implemented if it is to deliver on its objectives, including the understanding of violence against women as a form of gender-based violence directed against women because they are women or that affect them disproportionately. At present, the coherent implementation of the Plan across the country is hampered by the absence of mandatory guidelines and protocols for relevant professionals on responding to domestic violence as a form of violence that women suffer at the hands of their male partners and which, while it may be accompanied by broader family violence or violence against children, is grounded in specific gendered dynamics, so that an effective response requires an understanding of its root causes and targeted action on the basis of multi-agency co-operation. Such standards form the basis of a consistent, victim-centred response, and their development should be accompanied by systematic monitoring, the exchange of good practice between municipalities and the formalised involvement of specialist women's rights organisations.

The report also draws attention to areas where the protection and support available to victims should be strengthened. The availability of specialist support services for women victims of all forms of violence covered by the convention remains uneven across the country, and there is a need to develop a sustainably funded nationwide network of dedicated shelters offering immediate, round-the-clock access to safe accommodation and multidisciplinary support for women and their children. Health-care services, too, are not yet consistently equipped to respond to violence against women, and the report points to the value of gender-sensitive protocols in the public and private health-care sectors establishing standardised care pathways, from the screening and identification of victims and the documentation of injuries to risk assessment and referral to specialist services. The report further encourages the development of a standardised, nationwide risk-assessment instrument applied consistently across regions and authorities and capable of capturing psychological, sexual and economic violence, coercive control and children's exposure to violence. In the same vein, GREVIO points to the importance of establishing mechanisms for homicide reviews to analyse gender-related killings and gender-based violence-related suicides of women and girls, with a view to identifying protection failures and preventing them in future.

A further area of concern relates to the determination of custody and visitation rights. GREVIO stresses the need to ensure that all judicial and administrative bodies systematically and effectively take incidents of violence against women into account in such proceedings, including situations where children are exposed to that violence, notably through the screening of cases, the appointment of professionals with specialised expertise, the avoidance of concepts that obscure power imbalances or minimise violence, and the effective use of provisions allowing custody and visitation rights to be restricted or made subject to safeguards.

Finally, the report highlights a number of urgent shortcomings that cut across all forms of violence. Systematic and mandatory training — both initial and in-service — on all forms of violence covered by the convention is not consistently ensured across the relevant sectors, and existing programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence require consolidation on the basis of common minimum standards, in systematic co-ordination with services for victims and subject to independent evaluation. More attention is also needed to the situation of women and girls facing multiple forms of discrimination — such as women with disabilities, Roma women, and LGBTI women and girls — whose perspective and distinct needs should be integrated into the design, implementation and

evaluation of policies. Lastly, recalling the principle of women's empowerment that runs throughout the convention, the report stresses the need to review the system of reporting by professionals so that any duty to report is tempered by full and sensitive information being provided to the victim, allowing her to make an informed decision, save where there is a reasonable suspicion of imminent danger or where the victim is a child or otherwise unable to protect herself.

While GREVIO welcomes Latvia's ratification of the Istanbul Convention and the efforts taken in its implementation, it has identified a number of issues that require urgent action by the authorities to comply fully with the convention's provisions. These relate to the need to:

- ensure the systematic collection of comparable data on all forms of violence against women from all relevant administrative sources, notably the police, justice, health and social services, disaggregated by the sex and age of victim and perpetrator, type of violence, the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim and the geographical location;
- provide the co-ordinating body with clear mandates, powers and competences, supported by sufficient human and financial resources, and maintain a clear separation between the co-ordination and implementation of policies, on the one hand, and their independent monitoring and evaluation, on the other;
- ensure sustainable, coherent and sufficient funding for measures to prevent and combat violence against women, as well as appropriate, long-term funding for women's rights organisations delivering specialist support services throughout the country;
- strengthen primary prevention efforts by challenging the harmful stereotypes and bias that perpetuate violence against women, engaging men and boys, and ensuring that these issues — and their links to mutual respect, non-violent conflict resolution and equality between women and men — are addressed in school curricula;
- pursue the establishment of dedicated rape crisis and/or sexual violence referral centres throughout the country, in line with the benchmark of one centre per 200,000 inhabitants, operating on a victim-centred, integrated basis and providing immediate medical care, trauma support, forensic examinations and psychological and legal counselling, irrespective of the victim's willingness to report and free of charge;
- ensure a timely, consistent and specialised responses from law-enforcement agencies and prosecution service to all forms of violence against women across the country, including in rural areas, by reducing secondary victimisation, addressing the factors that contribute to attrition, and making full use of measures such as electronic monitoring in high-risk cases in line with risk assessments.

Furthermore, GREVIO has identified a number of additional areas in which improvements are required in order to comply fully with the obligations of the convention. These relate, among other things, to the establishment of a state-wide telephone helpline serving as a single, round-the-clock and free first point of contact for women victims of all forms of violence; to the effective implementation of the newly introduced provisions on sexual harassment, including in institutional and digital contexts, accompanied by systematic data collection to monitor their application; and to ensuring that the sentences imposed for domestic violence offences are effective, proportionate and dissuasive, including through the review of sentencing practices in line with Article 45 of the Istanbul Convention.

Introduction

Latvia ratified the Istanbul Convention on 10 January 2024. In accordance with Article 78, paragraph 2, of the convention, Latvia reserves the right not to apply the provisions under Article 55, paragraph 1, in respect of Article 35 regarding minor offences. This reservation is valid for a period of five years from the day of the entry into force of the convention in respect of Latvia and may be renewed.

The Istanbul Convention is the most far-reaching international treaty to tackle violence against women and domestic violence. Its comprehensive set of provisions spans far-ranging preventive and protective measures as well as a number of obligations to ensure an adequate criminal justice response to such serious violations of human rights. It covers new ground by asking that root causes of violence against women (such as gender stereotyping, traditions harmful to women and general manifestations of gender inequality) be addressed.

The convention sets up a monitoring mechanism to assess the level of implementation by its parties. This monitoring mechanism consists of two pillars: 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 accordance with Article 68 of the convention, GREVIO initiated the baseline evaluation in respect of Latvia by letter and transmission of its questionnaire on 19 September 2024. The order of reporting to GREVIO is based on a combination of regional groupings and order of ratification. The Latvian authorities subsequently submitted their state report on 25 March 2025 – the deadline set by GREVIO. Following a preliminary examination of the country state report, GREVIO carried out an evaluation visit to Latvia, which took place from 3 to 7 November 2025. The delegation was composed of:

- Laura Albu, Member of GREVIO;
- Guillaume Barbe, Member of GREVIO;
- Maria Moodie, Barrister, United Kingdom;
- Johanna Nelles, Executive Secretary of the Istanbul Convention monitoring mechanism;
- Ivo Gruev, Legal Adviser 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. 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.

The evaluation visit was prepared in close co-operation with Ilze Bērziņa and Veronika Sproģe-Saksone, Senior Experts at the Social Policy Planning and Development Department of the Ministry of Welfare, who were appointed as contact persons for the evaluation by GREVIO. GREVIO wishes to extend its gratitude for the co-operation and support provided throughout the entire evaluation procedure and for the constructive approach adopted by the Latvian authorities.

As part of this first baseline evaluation, GREVIO examined the implementation measures taken by the Latvian authorities concerning all aspects of the convention. For the sake of brevity, this report gives priority to some provisions over others. While it covers all chapters of the convention (with the exception of Chapter VIII), it does not present detailed assessments and conclusions for each provision.

I. Purposes, definitions, equality and non-discrimination, general obligations

A. General principles of the convention

1. Chapter I of the Istanbul Convention sets out general principles that apply to all the substantive articles contained in Chapters II to VII. 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.

2. Since its entry into force, and even prior to ratification, the Latvian authorities have taken a number of steps to implement the Istanbul Convention. The most prominent example is the introduction of the first National Action Plan for the Prevention and Combating of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence 2024-2029 (“National Action Plan” or “NAP”), adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers on 18 December 2024.²

3. This plan constitutes the first comprehensive national framework developed specifically after ratification of the Istanbul Convention to guide implementation of its standards. Its stated objective is to ensure an integrated, targeted and effective set of policies to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence, reflecting the convention’s scope and purposes, which GREVIO notes with satisfaction.

4. At the same time, Latvia’s legal framework has also undergone notable reform both in the lead-up to and following ratification in order to bring it into closer alignment with the requirements of the Istanbul Convention, demonstrating strong commitment to the principles of the convention. In the lead-up to ratification, Latvia introduced criminal liability for stalking while, following ratification, it criminalised cruelty and violence against a relative through amendments adopted in 2024, which comes close to a specific domestic violence offence. Also worthy of mention is the introduction of electronic monitoring as a security measure in high-risk cases involving violent individuals and the amendments made to the system of emergency barring and protection orders.

B. Scope of application of the convention and definitions (Articles 2 and 3)

5. In light of the scope of the Istanbul Convention set out in its Article 2, paragraph 1, the first baseline evaluation focuses on measures taken in relation to all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence, which affects women disproportionately. Article 3 of the Istanbul Convention sets out key definitions of concepts that are fundamental to its implementation. According to paragraph a, the term “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” offered in paragraph d of Article 3 seeks to ensure more clarity regarding 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”.

2. Cabinet Order No. 1221 of 19 December 2024 (“NAP”), available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/id/357535-vardarbibas-pret-sievieti-un-vardarbibas-gimene-noversanas-un-apkarosanas-plans-20242029-gadam.

6. Hence, the violence addressed by the Istanbul Convention differs from other types of violence in that the victim's gender is the primary motive. It is violence that is perpetrated against a woman that is both the cause and consequence of unequal power relations based on perceived differences between women and men that lead to women's subordinate status in the public and private spheres. In accordance with the definition given in Article 3, paragraph *b*, Chapter V of the convention specifies the forms of violence against women that are to be criminalised (or, where applicable, otherwise sanctioned). These are psychological violence, stalking, physical violence, sexual violence, including rape, forced marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), forced abortion, forced sterilisation and sexual harassment. Owing to the seriousness of domestic violence, Article 46 of the convention requires ensuring that the circumstance in which the offence was committed against a former or current spouse or partner, by a member of the family, a person cohabiting with the victim or a person having abused her or his authority, may entail a harsher sentence either as an aggravating circumstance or a constituent element of the offence.

7. GREVIO notes with satisfaction that the recently adopted NAP comprehensively reflects the convention's understanding of violence against women and domestic violence by framing policy action around comprehensive measures aimed at preventing harm, protecting victims, holding perpetrators accountable and strengthening institutional co-ordination. Its definitions are fully aligned with those of the Istanbul Convention set out in Article 3, paragraphs *a* and *b*, of the convention. Violence against women is defined as any act of gender-based violence directed against a woman or girl because she is a woman or girl, or which disproportionately affects women or girls, and that thereby causes or is likely to cause physical injury, or sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering.³ This includes threats to commit such acts, coercion or the arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. Domestic violence is defined as any act of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occurs within a family or household, regardless of biological or legal family ties, or between former or current spouses or partners, irrespective of whether the perpetrator lives or has lived with the victim.⁴

8. As the adoption of the National Action Plan is a recent development, it has yet to be implemented and its impact assessed as implementation progresses.⁵ In this regard, GREVIO points to the importance of ensuring that these definitions are operationalised and inform institutional, legal, judicial and professional practice across all relevant sectors. This is particularly important in view of the fact that criminal law covers offences involving violence or threats of violence, as well as offences against morality and sexual inviolability, when committed against persons in the first or second degree of kinship, spouses or former spouses, persons with whom the perpetrator is or has been in a permanent intimate relationship, or persons sharing a joint household. While this approach largely aligns with the requirements of the Istanbul Convention, GREVIO notes that the protection afforded under the convention is not contingent upon the relationship being permanent or involving continuous cohabitation.⁶

9. GREVIO also notes discrepancies between the definition of domestic violence in the NAP and professional practice across a wide range of relevant professional groups. While the NAP's definition is sufficiently broad to encompass the gender-based dimension of violence against women in all its forms – violence directed against a woman because she is a woman or violence that affects women disproportionately – domestic violence in practice is often viewed as family violence, affecting women, children and elderly persons alike, with inadequate recognition of the unequal power dynamics between men and women in intimate relationships resulting from stereotypes and biases. As a result, it is often addressed either within the framework of general violence prevention, where acts of self-defence or opposition to a regime of control, manipulation and abuse are frequently considered “mutual violence”, or as an adjunct to the prevention of violence against children and, by

3. Ibid. According to the NAP, both the definition of domestic violence and of violence against women are based on those set out in Directive (EU) 2024/1385 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on combating violence against women and domestic violence, Article 2, available at: www.eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/LV/TXT/?uri=OJ:L_202401385.

4. Ibid.

5. According to information provided by the authorities, a mid-term review of the NAP is planned in 2027.

6. See further notes under Chapter V, Psychological violence (Article 33).

extension, against their mothers and families. While violence against women frequently occurs within such contexts, the Istanbul Convention requires that specific attention be paid to women's victimisation by their male partners irrespective of their family status and whether they have children. GREVIO therefore points to the need for greater emphasis to be placed on examining and addressing the root causes and underlying power dynamics in abusive relationships, the assumptions and expectations about women's appropriate behaviour in intimate partnerships of any duration that may contribute to violence, the need to recognise and tackle harmful attitudes and biases that can be difficult to identify and change, and to systematically apply primary aggressor analysis in order to distinguish between predominant patterns of coercive control and reactive behaviours. Such an approach would support a more accurate understanding of and place the focus on women's predominant exposure to domestic violence as a manifestation of power and control. This is why specific measures for women victims of violence are not viewed as constituting discrimination but rather serve to ensure the effective protection of their human rights.

10. GREVIO urges the Latvian authorities to operationalise the definitions contained in the National Action Plan for the Prevention and Combating of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence 2024-2029 and to ensure their effective implementation, including the understanding of violence against women and domestic violence as forms of gender-based violence directed against women because they are women or that affect them disproportionately, in accordance with Article 3, paragraph d, of the Istanbul Convention.

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

1. Gender equality and non-discrimination

11. Latvia's legal and policy framework on gender equality and non-discrimination is grounded in national constitutional principles and ordinary legislation, and shaped by its obligations under European Union law and international human rights treaties.⁷ The principle of equality and the prohibition of discrimination are enshrined in Article 91 of the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia, which provides that "all human beings in Latvia shall be equal before the law and the courts" and that human rights shall be realised "without discrimination of any kind".⁸ While the constitution does not include an exhaustive list of protected characteristics, Article 89 affirms that the state shall recognise and protect fundamental human rights in accordance with the constitution, laws and international agreements binding on Latvia. Both the constitution and Latvia's international human rights obligations are generally regarded as directly applicable in judicial practice.⁹

12. In addition to the constitution, multiple ordinary legislation instruments contain provisions on equal treatment and the prohibition of discrimination on various grounds, including sex, and key EU equality directives have been transposed into national law.¹⁰ The Labour Law and the Law on Labour Protection include norms prohibiting workplace discrimination based on sex and contain provisions on equal pay for equal work, equal access to employment, vocational training and promotion, working conditions, parental leave, the burden of proof in discrimination cases, protection of pregnant workers, protection against harassment and sexual harassment, and the promotion of work-life balance. Victims of discrimination in the workplace on the basis of sex may lodge a complaint with the State Labour Inspectorate, Latvia's authority responsible for the enforcement of labour law subordinate to the Ministry of Welfare.

7. European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), Gender mainstreaming – Latvia, Legislative and policy framework section, available at: www.eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/countries/latvia.

8. The Constitution of the Republic of Latvia, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/57980.

9. European Commission, Country report non-discrimination – Latvia 2025, pp. 16-17, available at: www.op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/2cc75473-a3ee-11f0-97c8-01aa75ed71a1.

10. This includes Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation; Council Directive 2004/113/EC of 13 December 2004 implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services; and Directive 2006/54/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation. For a list of relevant national legislation and policy documents, see: www.lm.gov.lv/en/legislation.

13. In June 2024, the government adopted the Plan for the Promotion of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men 2024-2027, which sets out Latvia's current strategic framework for gender equality.¹¹ The plan's focus areas include promoting equal rights in the labour market and education, reducing negative gender stereotypes and integrating the principle of gender equality into policy-planning processes. In addition, at the institutional level, the Ministry of Welfare is the governmental body responsible for planning, implementing and co-ordinating gender equality policy, and its Department of Social Policy Planning and Development, contributes to policy co-ordination and monitoring in this area. In addition, the Committee on Gender Equality, created in 2010, serves as the ministry's consultative body to support and promote gender equality policies. Moreover, Latvia's Ombudsman's Office accepts and examines complaints of discrimination, including discrimination based on sex. In 2024, a Discrimination Prevention Unit was established within the Ombudsman's Office.¹²

14. Despite the existence of these legal and institutional safeguards, GREVIO notes that significant challenges to gender equality persist. A joint women's rights organisations' submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review indicates that Latvia's legislative and policy framework on gender equality does not adequately meet its international legal obligations on women's rights and that current political will does not proactively prioritise gender equality and other intersecting identities within public policies.¹³ Although the gender pay gap has narrowed, it remains considerable, with women earning 13.9% less per hour than men as of 2024.¹⁴ The European Institute for Gender Equality's (EIGE) Gender Equality Index further indicates that Latvia performs below the EU average in terms of overall gender equality.¹⁵ The Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath have disproportionately affected women in Latvia, who are more likely to experience income loss, assume increased unpaid care and domestic responsibilities, and be exposed to, or remain trapped in, violent relationships compared to men.¹⁶ In addition, recent studies highlight the persistence of gender stereotypes in Latvian society.¹⁷ Women are still widely perceived as the primary caregivers and responsible for household tasks, while prevailing attitudes continue to cast men as the primary breadwinners and as deserving higher earnings than their partners.

2. Intersectional discrimination

15. Article 4, paragraph 3, of the Istanbul Convention requires parties to secure the implementation of their undertakings under the convention without any discrimination. This provision provides an open-ended list of grounds of discrimination that draws on that of Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights, as well as the list contained in its Protocol No. 12,¹⁸ and, in addition, includes the grounds of gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, state of health, disability, marital status, and migrant or refugee status or other status. This obligation stems from the realisation that discrimination of certain groups of women, for example at the hands of law-enforcement agencies, the judiciary or service providers, is still widespread.¹⁹

11. Cabinet Order No. 500 of 18 June 2024, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/id/352925-par-sieviesu-un-viriesu-vienlidzigu-tiesibu-un-iespeju-veicinasanas-planu-20242027-gadam.

12. European Network of Legal Experts in Gender Equality and Non-discrimination, First State of Discrimination Report by the Ombudsman's Office, 2 September 2025, available at: www.equalitylaw.eu/country/latvia.

13. The Advocates for Human Rights and Women's NGOs Co-operation Network of Latvia, Stakeholder Report for the United Nations Universal Periodic Review of Latvia (52nd Session), 10 October 2025, available at: www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/International_Submissions/A/Index?id=610.

14. Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia press release: "Gender pay gap is narrowing", available at: www.stat.gov.lv/en/statistics-themes/indicators-well-being-and-equality/gender-equality/press-releases/22941?themeCode=GE&.

15. EIGE, Gender Equality Index 2025 – Latvia, available at: www.eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2025/LV.

16. I. Kažoka, D. Pelse and S. Tarasova-Dubkeviča (2022), "Covid-19 and gender in Latvia", Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, available at: www.collections.fes.de/publikationen/ident/fes/19916.

17. www.dazadiba.lv/resources/novatore-dzimumu-lidztiesibas-barometrs/.

18. The discrimination grounds in question include sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.

19. See the Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, paragraphs 52-54.

16. Latvia does not have an explicit legal prohibition of multiple discrimination and its overall legislative and policy framework on gender equality does not address this issue.²⁰ GREVIO notes with regret that the National Action Plan also does not address the specific needs of women exposed to intersecting forms of discrimination, such as women with disabilities, Roma women and girls, LGBTI women and women with addiction, as well as women belonging to other minority groups. Moreover, the situation for women victims of violence with disabilities remains largely unaddressed. Women with disabilities face heightened vulnerability, risks of violence and distinct barriers when seeking help, and those living in families or social care institutions can be exposed to sexual harassment, including by other residents; women with mental disabilities are at an elevated risk of exploitation and abuse.²¹ GREVIO emphasises that women with disabilities as well as their rights defenders experience difficulties in initiating discussions or reporting incidents, which requires more co-ordinated state-led responses.

17. GREVIO also notes that Latvia's institutional and policy frameworks rarely account for the specific experiences of groups of women who may face multiple forms of discrimination, resulting in limited recognition of these women's experiences of violence and hindering their ability to report incidents and access support and justice. Women from these groups are often reluctant to come forward in cases of violence due to this lack of awareness and tailored services and information, as well as fear of stigma, leaving their needs outside the radar of mainstream policy responses.²²

18. Last, GREVIO notes that migrant women and women belonging to minority groups may also face barriers to accessing support and protection for experiences of violence against women. Language and other barriers may limit their ability to receive information on the available support services and to access them. In this context, GREVIO welcomes the specific efforts made in Latvia to provide support and protection to Ukrainian women fleeing Russia's war of aggression, including by offering support and counselling on an individual basis and in a language that is accessible to them. GREVIO notes that linguistic accessibility of information about their rights, available support and protection mechanisms offered as part of the implementation of the Istanbul Convention should be ensured for all women and girls in Latvia, in line with the principle of equality before the law and equal protection of the law. Insufficient proficiency in the state language should not constitute an obstacle to effective access to rights, as recommended by the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers' resolution on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities by Latvia.²³

19. **GREVIO urges the Latvian authorities to:**

- a. take measures to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence that specifically address the situation of women and girls who are or might be facing multiple forms of discrimination, such as women with disabilities, Roma women, LGBTI women and girls;**
- b. integrate the perspective of women facing multiple discrimination into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies for preventing and combating violence against women, by supporting, funding and closely co-operating with women's rights organisations representing them;**
- c. mainstream preventing and combating violence against women in social inclusion programmes or other policy documents that aim to realise the rights and address the specific needs of women facing multiple forms of discrimination;**
- d. develop and improve accessibility to protection and support services for victims belonging to these groups of women.**

20. See K. Dupate (2025), "Protection against intersectional discrimination in EU and Latvian law": www.apgads.lu.lv/izdevumi/individs-tiesibas-un-tiesas/01/; European Commission, Country report non-discrimination – Latvia 2025, p. 21.

21. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

22. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

23. Committee of Ministers Resolution CM/ResCMN(2025)3 on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities by Latvia, April 2025, available at: www.search.coe.int/cm?i=0900001680b511e3.

D. State obligations and due diligence (Article 5)

20. Article 5 of the Istanbul Convention enshrines the overarching principle of due diligence: states parties are under the obligation to organise their response to all forms of violence covered by the scope of the convention in a way that allows relevant authorities to diligently prevent, investigate, punish and provide reparation for such acts of violence, as well as to provide protection for victims. It is not an obligation of result, but an obligation of means. Failure to meet this obligation incurs state responsibility for an act otherwise solely attributed to a non-state actor. The realisation of the full potential of the due diligence standard relies on the ability of state institutions to invest in equally strong terms in all the required actions of prevention, investigation, punishment, reparation and protection, starting from the duty to transform patriarchal gender structures and values that perpetuate and entrench violence against women.²⁴

21. The state obligation of due diligence is particularly relevant when incidents of violence, or risks thereof, are reported to law-enforcement authorities. Acts or omissions by officials in the context of preventing violence against women or protecting victims should be subject to complaint, review and remedial measures. In Latvia, the principle of due diligence as emanating from the Istanbul Convention and other international law obligations does not find expression in any policy document or statutory guidance. However, where there are concerns about police conduct, internal disciplinary procedures can be initiated to determine whether officers acted in accordance with law and professional regulations. In the context of serious incidents, such as the Jēkabpils murder case in April 2023, these mechanisms have been used to assess potential failings in the police response, which GREVIO welcomes.²⁵

22. In addition to disciplinary measures, the Internal Security Bureau – an independent oversight body tasked with investigating possible criminal offences by police and other officials from the Ministry of the Interior – may refer cases for criminal investigation if there are indications of crimes committed by law-enforcement officials. The bureau provides a hotline for the public to submit information about suspected misconduct (including anonymously) and publishes annual statistics, including the number of reports received.²⁶ It is unclear, however, how this procedure functions in practice, including the number of cases that triggered state liability in the context of violence against women and domestic violence.

23. Last, systematic reviews of individual cases of gender-related killings from the point of view of identifying a state failure to act after a report of violence, including omissions stemming from possible institutional gender bias and discriminatory and stereotypical views of women and their experiences of violence – known as homicide reviews – are not carried out in order to establish any due diligence failures among state actors in Latvia.

24. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to establish a domestic homicide review mechanism, to systematically analyse all cases of gender-related killings of women and girls, in particular in the context of domestic violence, with a view to identifying possible shortcomings in the institutional responses to such violence, protecting the safety of women and girls, holding to account both the perpetrator and the multiple agencies that come into contact with the parties, and ensuring that such gaps are effectively addressed.

24. "The due diligence standard as a tool for the elimination of violence against women", UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, E/CN.4>2006/61, January 2006.

25. www.eng.lsm.lv/article/society/crime/03.05.2023-police-chief-possible-service-violations-in-jekabpils-murder-case.a507222/.

26. www.eng.lsm.lv/article/society/crime/13.02.2025-latvias-internal-security-bureau-publishes-annual-stats.a587631/.

II. Integrated policies and data collection

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

26. Article 7 of the Istanbul Convention requires states parties to ensure that co-ordinated and comprehensive measures to prevent and combat violence against women address all forms of violence against women.

27. The NAP provides the main policy framework and sets out interinstitutional responsibilities for the development, implementation and co-ordination of measures to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence. It sets out four main directions of action, corresponding to the four pillars of the Istanbul Convention: prevention of violence, improvement of support for victims, strengthening perpetrator responsibility and rehabilitation, and establishing unified and co-ordinated policies. It includes a detailed breakdown of tasks that the authorities commit to achieve by 2029 in terms of preventing violence, protecting victims and improving support services, strengthening perpetrator responsibility, and developing and implementing a coherent and co-ordinated policy.

28. The plan aligns with other key strategic policy documents adopted by Latvia that, although not exclusively focused on violence against women and domestic violence, address related areas such as child and family welfare, public health, education and offender rehabilitation and reintegration.²⁷ At the overarching strategic level, the National Development Plan 2021-2027 includes a specific direction of action entitled “Psychological and emotional well-being”, which aims to promote psychological resilience and provide support to persons in crisis situations, including those affected by violence.²⁸ While the authorities have referred to several additional policy-planning documents as relevant in this context, only the Plans for the Promotion of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men 2021-2023 explicitly identifies gender-related violence and domestic violence as a core area of action to be addressed through targeted policy measures, recognising the reduction of gender-based and domestic violence as an integral component of advancing substantive equality.²⁹ The remaining plans operate largely in parallel and do not establish clear or substantive linkages to violence against women, thereby limiting their relevance to the present framework.

29. The NAP designates the Ministry of Welfare as the lead institution responsible for its overall implementation and assigns a number of other authorities as co-responsible bodies, including the Ministries of the Interior, Justice, Health, Culture, and Education and Science. The plan further provides for monitoring through mid-term evaluations in 2027, which GREVIO welcomes.

30. The NAP sets out to reinforce comprehensive and co-ordinated policy making and implementation through its four strategic directions, closely modelled after the requirements of the Istanbul Convention by aiming for “unified, co-ordinated and inclusive policies and legal regulation” on violence against women and domestic violence. The scope of the plan covers preventive

27. See Cabinet Order No. 967 of 21 December 2022, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/id/338304-par-bernu-jaunatnes-un-gimenes-attistibas-pamatnostadnem-20222027-gadam; Cabinet Order No. 359 of 26 May 2022, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/id/332751-sabiedribas-veselibas-pamatnostadnes-2021-2027-gadam; Cabinet Order No. 436 of 22 June 2021, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/id/324332-par-izglitibas-attistibas-pamatnostadnem-20212027-gadam; Cabinet Order No. 413 of 13 June 2022, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/id/333223-par-resocializacijas-politikas-pamatnostadnem-20222027-gadam.

28. National Development Plan of Latvia 2021-2027 of 2 July 2020, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/id/315879-par-latvijas-nacionalo-attistibas-planu-20212027-gadam-nap2027.

29. The 2021–2023 plan explicitly addresses gender-based violence, including domestic violence. The 2024–2027 plan, while a continuation of the earlier framework, does not directly cover gender-based violence or domestic violence, as these issues are now addressed in the NAP.

measures, protection and support services, perpetrator responsibility and institutional frameworks, reflecting a recognition that effective responses to violence against women require integrated action across sectors and levels of government.

31. The NAP further lists activity tables indicating that a range of ministries, law-enforcement bodies, local government authorities, civil society organisations and specialised institutions are expected to take part in implementation. For example, awareness-raising campaigns and public education events involve co-operation between the Ministries of Welfare, Justice, the Interior, Education and Culture, the state police and NGOs. Support services for victims and persons at high risk involve the Ministry of Welfare in conjunction with municipal social services, sectoral experts, NGOs and service providers. Interinstitutional co-operation groups and co-ordinated work to reduce reoffending require organised action from probation services, the state police and other agencies. The plan also foresees the establishment of interdisciplinary support teams for complex cases, with guidelines for cross-institutional co-operation developed by the Ministry of Welfare by 2026 and an assessment of the feasibility of introducing multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs).

32. GREVIO welcomes the broad acknowledgement underlying the NAP that combating violence against women and domestic violence is a collective responsibility. This is also reflected in the plan's drafting history, which included consultation with multiple ministries and civil society organisations, and thus demonstrates involvement of a range of stakeholders in framing Latvia's strategy on implementing the Istanbul Convention. However, it notes that the allocation of responsibilities under the NAP remains largely descriptive and does not sufficiently clarify how co-ordination is to be operationalised in practice or how consistent service provision across local and regional authorities will be ensured, thereby risking the continuation of the systemic fragmentation acknowledged in the plan itself.

33. Although the NAP recognises, at the level of definitions and background analysis, women's predominant exposure to violence at the hands of male perpetrators in Latvia, GREVIO notes that this recognition does not consistently translate into measures reflecting the structural origins of such violence, including an integrated and co-ordinated approach to addressing its root causes. GREVIO recalls in this regard that Article 7 of the Istanbul Convention requires parties to ensure that co-ordination mechanisms are explicitly tailored to the prevention and combating of all forms of violence that targets women because they are women or that affects them disproportionately.

34. For example, the plan places a strong emphasis on violence against children. GREVIO recognises the importance of this focus, given the close links between domestic violence and harm to children recognised by the convention itself, as well as data indicating a high prevalence of sexual violence against minors in Latvia. However, the predominant focus on violence in close or family relationships and on violence against children risks obscuring the need for specific policy approaches to violence against women, as required by Article 7, covering all the forms of violence addressed by the Istanbul Convention, irrespective of family or relationship status and beyond the context of domestic violence.

35. In this regard, GREVIO also notes the absence of measures addressing the digital dimension of violence against women, with the only reference to digital issues appearing in the context of broader educational objectives unrelated to violence prevention.³⁰ The NAP and other relevant policy documents similarly lack integrated measures covering prevention, protection, support services and prosecution in relation to sexual harassment, stalking, female genital mutilation, forced marriage or forced sterilisation and abortion. GREVIO notes with concern that neither the plan nor existing policies adequately address the specific obstacles faced by women who are or may be exposed to multiple forms of discrimination.

36. Last, GREVIO regrets that the NAP does not provide detailed guidance on ensuring uniform implementation across municipalities, despite acknowledged differences in resources, practices and levels of expertise. The absence of binding standards or mandatory co-ordination procedures at the

30. Ibid.

local level risks leading to unequal access to protection and support services for women victims of violence, depending on their place of residence.

37. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to:

- a. develop a comprehensive, long-term and co-ordinated strategy addressing all the forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention, including digital forms of violence, integrating prevention, protection, support and prosecution, addressing the structural and root causes of such violence and ensuring that policies and measures respond effectively to the needs of all victims, including women exposed to multiple forms of discrimination;**
- b. continue to develop a systematic, nationwide and institutionalised co-ordination mechanism with clear mandates, adequate and sustainable human and financial resources, defined responsibilities and accountability arrangements.**

B. Financial resources (Article 8)

38. Latvia has a mixed financing model for the implementation of measures to combat violence against women and domestic violence, which is outlined in the NAP. The plan identifies EU Structural Funds (ESF+), state budget allocations and, to a more limited extent, municipal resources as sources of funding for its activities. A substantial proportion of the planned measures is covered through existing allocations and project funding, which GREVIO welcomes. However, the resources dedicated are not always commensurate with the targets set out in the plan, particularly for preventive work and longer-term structural measures, as acknowledged by the authorities. While ministries are entitled to request supplementary funding through the annual state budget process, in particular via the unallocated budget framework, the allocation of additional state funds is contingent on annual budgetary decisions; where such funds are not granted or are only partially granted, responsible institutions are required to implement the planned measures within their existing budgetary allocations. The Ministry of Welfare, being the co-ordinating authority under the NAP, is responsible for the financial dimension of its implementation, including oversight and reporting, which is embedded within the medium-term budgetary framework and annual state budget procedures.

39. The NAP further foresees the involvement of municipal authorities, which are expected to carry out relevant activities within the limits of their own financial resources, without the earmarking of additional compulsory municipal funding. GREVIO welcomes the provision of indicative estimates of additional state budget needs for the later years of the implementation period (2026 to 2029), signalling an anticipated gradual increase in required funding. However, it notes with concern that these projections have a non-binding character, which risks reducing transparency, predictability and accountability in implementing the convention's requirements. These factors are crucial for closing protection and prevention gaps over time, especially between national and municipal levels, and across municipalities with differing economic strength. Moreover, the financing fragmentation across different sectors, instruments and implementation levels makes the identification and effective assessment of earmarked funds for specific measures under the plan particularly challenging.

40. In substantive terms, state budget funding is predominantly concentrated on support services ("social rehabilitation services") for victims, which are financed at national level and implemented through procurement procedures organised by municipalities. These arrangements are aimed at guaranteeing the provision of core victim support services, which GREVIO welcomes as a key priority. However, GREVIO notes that they also illustrate a sectoral imbalance, as funding for other measures required by the convention, including prevention, awareness raising, research and capacity building, is less prioritised and largely dependent on project-based and time-limited financing, notably through EU-funded projects. This reliance on project funding limits the predictability and sustainability of several measures that are essential to an integrated and co-ordinated approach to combating violence against women, as required by the convention.

41. GREVIO regrets that the systematic use of gender budgeting indicators, which can be instrumental for planning, monitoring and assessing the execution of specific public funding, is currently lacking, making it difficult to assess whether the actual allocation in Latvia reflects the prevalence and severity of the different forms of violence covered by the convention.³¹

42. With regard to civil society organisations and women's specialist NGOs in particular, direct state grants to NGOs are only foreseen when coupled with a formal delegation of functions provided for by law. GREVIO notes with regret that no such delegation currently exists in the field of violence against women and domestic violence. As a result, NGOs may receive state funding primarily through public procurement procedures, whereby services are tendered and NGOs participate as bidders. While GREVIO commends the authorities' commitment to ensuring and improving the transparency of these procedures and notes with interest the authorities' report that governmental funding here has increased, GREVIO emphasises that the service- and contract-oriented nature of this form of fund allocation does not provide for stable, long-term institutional funding, which is essential for ensuring the continuous availability and quality of specialist services. This limitation undermines the ability of women's rights NGOs to engage in sustained prevention work, outreach, advocacy and holistic victim support, particularly at regional and local level, and may constrain their capacity to respond flexibly to victims' needs.

43. This may put particular strain on smaller, community-based women's rights NGOs, whose work is often short-term and project-based yet fundamental for rural areas and for groups of women exposed to multiple forms of discrimination. As GREVIO has had opportunity to note on other occasions, such an approach risks generating financial insecurity and, at times, leading to the loss of experienced staff members.³² GREVIO notes with concern that, in Latvia, the *de facto* availability of funding for organisations working with such groups of women is particularly limited, thereby constraining their capacity to provide sustained and specialised support to different groups of women victims of violence. Moreover, GREVIO is concerned that reliance on competitive, project-based funding tends to advantage larger, well-established NGOs with greater administrative capacity and resources, increasing the risk of concentration in the civil society landscape and in service provision and thereby hampering a plurality of voices and approaches that are essential for responsive and inclusive implementation.

44. Additional funding channels exist but remain fragmented. For example, work with perpetrators is not reimbursed by central government to municipalities and is currently carried out by a single legal entity financed directly from public funds.³³ Measures addressing children affected by violence are funded through contractual arrangements with the responsible ministry via the national children's fund. Furthermore, a separate budget line is allocated to the Society Integration Fund, which organises competitive calls for NGOs based on defined strategic priorities, primarily aimed at capacity building and providing co-financing for EU-funded projects. GREVIO commends the availability of this additional source of funding, which is fundamental to supporting NGO development and is well used by Latvian civil society. Nonetheless, this mechanism remains project-based and does not ensure long-term, predictable funding for specialised service provision, and is thus subject to the issues outlined above in relation to NGOs working on women's rights and violence against women specifically.

31. GREVIO has consistently underlined the added value of adopting gender budgeting in all public bodies. See the baseline evaluation reports on: Andorra, paragraph 36; Denmark, paragraph 28; France, paragraph 48; and Italy, paragraph 54.

32. See GREVIO's thematic evaluation report on the Netherlands, paragraph 31.

33. See Chapter III, Preventive intervention and treatment programmes (Article 16).

45. **GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to:**

- a. **address the structural shortcomings of the current funding framework in terms of sustainability, coherence and sufficiency in order to ensure full compliance with Article 8 of the Istanbul Convention;**
- b. **streamline the funding available at central and municipal levels through a consolidated budget line covering the full range of measures required under the Istanbul Convention and implement gender-responsive budgeting in order to identify and allocate appropriate funding, monitor public spending and measure progress achieved in combating violence against women;**
- c. **ensure appropriate long-term and sustainable funding for women's rights organisations providing specialist support services for women victims of any form of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention and their children, throughout the country, based on transparent and accessible procedures.**

C. Non-governmental organisations and civil society (Article 9)

46. Latvia's approach to planning and implementing measures to eliminate violence against women and domestic violence involves substantive engagement with non-governmental organisations and civil society. GREVIO welcomes the allocation by the Latvian authorities to civil society bodies, and in particular women's rights organisations that provide specialist support services, of an important role in prevention, service provision, awareness raising, training and methodological development, and the recognition of their importance as partners in both policy design and implementation of comprehensive measures to address violence against women and domestic violence.

47. The development, adoption and implementation of the NAP demonstrate official recognition of civil society organisations, including women's rights NGOs, as important stakeholders. During the planning process, between September 2023 and August 2024, NGOs participated in working group meetings and both face-to-face and online consultations. In addition, the Ministry of Welfare organised a series of regional dialogues with various stakeholders, including NGOs working in the area of women's rights and combating violence against women, to inform them about the draft plan.

48. The NAP further embeds co-operation with NGOs in implementation structures, listing them alongside state bodies as partners in awareness-raising campaigns, professional training, data collection and monitoring activities. NGOs are also actively involved in the design and planning of specialised services, such as a working group established to prepare the setting up of a sexual violence centre. On the operational level, NGOs are central to multidisciplinary service provision and capacity building. They run crisis services, including specialist helplines, crisis apartments and support programmes, and contribute to training programmes for professionals. Multi-agency training courses, such as the HELP (Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals) course "Combating violence against women and domestic violence" in co-operation with the Council of Europe, are co-delivered with NGO trainers, allowing such training and their participants to benefit from the victim-centred perspectives and practical experience from the field.

49. Notwithstanding these positive examples of co-operation, which GREVIO welcomes, it notes with concern that civil society organisations representing or working with women exposed to multiple forms of discrimination – including women with disabilities, Roma women, Ukrainian women, women living in rural areas and those that are part of the Russian-speaking population – were neither consulted nor participated meaningfully in the national policy design and implementation processes. This omission enhances the policy blind spot for groups that are particularly dependent on specialised NGO support and are often most affected by compounded discrimination, thereby undermining the principles set out in Article 9 of the Istanbul Convention.

50. Moreover, GREVIO regrets that the institutionalisation of civil society participation in general remains limited. While NGOs are mandated partners in implementing activities under the NAP, they do not have guaranteed representation in entities responsible for setting policy priorities, allocating resources or evaluating outcomes. Access to decision-making processes in which strategic choices are made, such as interinstitutional working groups responsible for steering the implementation of the NAP, is not structurally embedded in the governance arrangements, thereby limiting sustained civil society influence beyond ad hoc and project-level co-operation.

51. Furthermore, although government procurement mechanisms and external funding programmes enable NGOs to secure resources for service provision and project implementation, their pathways to sustained financial support are limited. At the same time, there are emerging concerns about a shrinking civic space for women's rights defenders: public discrediting and heightened scrutiny of NGOs in connection with debates on the Istanbul Convention's ratification and implementation create reputational and operational risks that may discourage independent civil society action.³⁴

52. In addition, stakeholders have expressed practical concerns linked to service sustainability, for example in relation to the planned restructuring of helplines and redistribution of responsibilities between state and non-governmental sectors.³⁵ GREVIO notes that such efforts must preserve continuity, accessibility and the accumulated expertise and institutional knowledge that specialist NGOs bring, notably around the specific needs of women victims of gender-based violence. GREVIO also notes that resource constraints related to the design and implementation of the framework for funding allocation to civil society discussed under Article 8, workforce shortages and uneven regional capacities further challenge the sector's ability to maintain coverage and quality of services, despite efforts to provide remote access to training and support beyond the capital city area.

53. Last, the gap in support for women exposed to multiple forms of discrimination also affects the civil society organisations working to protect their rights. These groups of women face distinct barriers that mainstream systems do not always address, and women's rights NGOs are uniquely positioned to support the state in mitigating these gaps. At the same time, NGOs working with specific groups of women are particularly vulnerable to the systemic challenges outlined above – including insecure funding, limited influence in co-ordination bodies and shrinking civic space – which can further constrain access to tailored support and services.

54. GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to institutionalise meaningful civil society participation by ensuring sustainable and structured representation in efforts to design, co-ordinate and monitor policies on violence against women for women's rights organisations, including those serving women exposed to multiple forms of discrimination. GREVIO also encourages the Latvian authorities to develop and provide safeguards to protect and expand civic space for women's rights NGOs and to ensure continuity and accessibility of specialist services without jeopardising past gains.

D. Co-ordinating body (Article 10)

55. Section 3 of Latvia's Law on the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, which provides the legal basis for the ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention, designates the Ministry of Welfare as the national co-ordinating body within the meaning of Article 10 of the convention.³⁶ Within the ministry, this was initially located within the Department of Child and Family Policy. From 1 December 2025, the co-ordination team was transferred to the Department of Social Policy Planning and Development. GREVIO welcomes this restructuring, as it strengthens the conceptual alignment of violence against

34. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

35. See further remarks under Chapter IV, Telephone helplines (Article 24).

36. Law on the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/id/348233-par-eiropas-padomes-konvenciju-par-vardarbibas-pret-sievietem-un-vardarbibas-gimene-noversanu-un-apkarosanu.

women with gender equality and may help address the risk identified above under Article 3 of conflating it with general violence or violence against children. GREVIO notes with concern, however, that rather than creating or mandating separate structures dedicated to the four core tasks of co-ordination, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, as required by Article 10 of the Istanbul Convention, these tasks have been added to the mandate of the ministry without an enhancement of the operational structures, staffing or funding for the new co-ordinating body.

56. Moreover, GREVIO notes that the Ministry of Welfare, as the co-ordinating body, is mandated both to implement and to monitor the implementation of policies and measures in the area of violence against women. The evaluation function of a co-ordinating structure under Article 10 of the Istanbul Convention entails providing an independent and scientifically grounded assessment, based on robust data, of whether the measures adopted achieve their intended outcomes and whether any unintended effects have emerged. It is essential to distinguish clearly between the implementation of measures and the evaluation of their impact, and to assign these functions to distinct institutions. A framework in which those responsible for implementing measures, and who bear political accountability for them, are simultaneously tasked with evaluating their effectiveness may not ensure the necessary objectivity in assessing policies. An independent evaluation function is therefore crucial to fulfil the convention's requirements.

57. **GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to:**

- a. **ensure that the relevant entities are vested with clear mandates, powers and competences that are widely communicated, and to allocate sufficient human and financial resources to these entities to safeguard the sustainability of their work;**
- b. **maintain a clear separation between the co-ordination and implementation of policies and measures, on the one hand, and their independent monitoring and evaluation, on the other, in order to uphold the objectivity and credibility of policy assessment;**
- c. **ensure that the functions of the co-ordinating body encompass all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention and are supported by adequate and appropriate data systems, which are indispensable for evidence-based policy making.**

E. Data collection and research (Article 11)

58. 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.³⁷

1. Administrative data collection

59. In Latvia, administrative data relevant to the field of violence against women and domestic violence are collected separately across different sectors, most prominently in the law-enforcement and justice systems, as discussed in further detail below. The Central Statistical Bureau, Latvia's national authority responsible for the production, co-ordination and dissemination of official statistics, receives, evaluates and publishes data originating from these administrative sources.³⁸ The Central Statistical Bureau also provides a user interface that allows users to access, process and analyse the most frequently used categories of official statistics.

37. While this section discusses the main considerations related to data collection, Chapters V and VI also offer reflection on data related to specific criminal offences.

38. The Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia is the national institution responsible for official statistics. The Official Statistics Portal (www.stat.gov.lv/en) is the public interface through which the Central Statistical Bureau disseminates statistical data. The portal itself is not a separate institution, but part of the Central Statistical Bureau's data dissemination system.

60. The Central Statistical Bureau presents sex-disaggregated data in its regular publications, including the Statistical Yearbook, and maintains a dedicated section on statistics on its website, which includes a thematic breakdown and direct access to datasets that can be viewed online and downloaded.³⁹ In 2023, the Central Statistical Bureau replaced its long-standing publication “Women and men in Latvia”⁴⁰ with a new publication entitled “Gender equality”. This publication aims to provide statistical indicators on gender equality and highlight the differences between the positions of women and men across a range of dimensions, including knowledge, work, money, time, health, power and violence.⁴¹ However, as the detailed discussion below demonstrates, greater data-collection requirements, based on more detailed data categories, will be needed to comply with the convention’s obligations on the basis of integrated data-collection frameworks.

a. Law-enforcement agencies and the justice sector

61. At the pretrial stage, data are entered into the criminal procedure information system managed by the Information Centre of the Ministry of the Interior.⁴² While this system allows the recording of certain basic information on victims (such as age and sex) and their relationship to the alleged perpetrator, the Law on the Register of Criminal and Administrative Offences does not establish a legal obligation to record victim data, as it primarily regulates the recording of information concerning the perpetrator from the pretrial stage through to the execution of the final court decision.⁴³ The Register of Criminal and Administrative Offences records information on persons involved in criminal proceedings, including their procedural status and the outcome of criminal cases.⁴⁴

62. According to data prepared by the state police, in domestic violence cases in 2022, 616 of 647 calls involved female victims and male perpetrators; in 438 of these cases the violence was perpetrated by a spouse, indicating that most domestic violence occurs between intimate partners. However, the system does not permit reciprocal recording of the perpetrator’s relationship to the victim as a structured analytical variable, resulting in asymmetrical and inconsistently usable relationship data. While domestic violence exists as a separate offence category and can be recorded as a circumstance of an offence, the absence of standardised, mandatory and symmetrical data collection on the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim significantly limits the ability to identify, extract and quantify the number of cases of intimate partner violence. This absence undermines the visibility of such violence as a gendered phenomenon and impedes compliance with Article 11’s requirements for systematic disaggregation by all relevant categories.

63. The existing pretrial data regulations further lack detailed guidance on indicators specific to intimate partner violence and other forms of violence against women, resulting in variable recording practices and a lack of systematic sex-disaggregated statistical output. Unprocessed police data can be made available on request, including in spreadsheet format, but access requires identifying relevant criminal-law provisions and may involve fees for non-public bodies. GREVIO considers this approach to limit transparency and hamper the effective use of administrative data for monitoring trends in violence against women and domestic violence and for informing evidence-based policy.

39. Ibid., “Gender equality”, available at: www.stat.gov.lv/en/statistics-themes/indicators-well-being-and-equality/gender-equality-0.

40. Ibid., “Women and men in Latvia”, 2016, available at: www.stat.gov.lv/en/statistics-themes/indicators-well-being-and-equality/gender-equality/publications-and-4.

41. Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, Gender equality, 2023, available at: www.stat.gov.lv/lv/statistikas-temas/labklajibas-un-vienlidzibas-raditaji/dzumilidztiesiba/publikacijas-un-6

42. See the Information Centre of the Ministry of the Interior, Criminal Procedure Information System, available at: www.ic.iem.gov.lv/en/criminal-procedure-information-system; Cabinet Regulation No. 850 of 14 September 2010, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/217945.

43. Law on the Register of Criminal and Administrative Offences, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/261384.

44. Register of Criminal and Administrative Offences: www.ic.iem.gov.lv/en/punishment-register.

64. At the judicial stage, a centralised national case management and records system used by all courts is maintained by the Court Administration under the Ministry of Justice.⁴⁵ Latvia also operates a publicly accessible electronic case law database, which is part of the National Courts Portal.⁴⁶ The system registers incoming cases, records procedural actions, stores court decisions and enables publication of anonymised decisions in line with data-protection requirements. Unlike at the pretrial stage, however, there is no structured recording of the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim. This is also the case for data related to conviction and sentencing, which are compiled on the basis of information recorded in the court administration systems.⁴⁷ Taking into account these structural features, GREVIO regrets that judicial data are not disaggregated in line with the requirements of the convention, in particular due to the absence of systematic recording of the victim–perpetrator relationship and other key variables necessary to monitor violence against women and domestic violence.

65. GREVIO welcomes the acknowledgement by the Latvian authorities that greater data disaggregation is required, and that broader efforts are underway to modernise justice sector information systems, including the introduction and improvement of the e-Case system, aimed at facilitating digitalisation and data exchange between institutions.⁴⁸ Equally, GREVIO notes the efforts made by the Latvian authorities to provide data on the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim upon request but points to the fact that this is not yet systematically or publicly disseminated in a way that enables comprehensive analysis and monitoring across case types.

66. Moreover, GREVIO regrets that Latvia's current data-collection and management framework does not yet enable the systematic tracking of cases that pertain to violence against women from reporting through indictment and conviction in a manner permitting regular assessment of attrition, conviction and recidivism rates across all criminal offences covered by the convention. The absence of harmonised data categories and interoperable identifiers across police and court databases significantly limits the ability to follow cases throughout the criminal justice chain. Although criminal cases are assigned a case number at an early stage, this does not currently function as a fully interoperable unique identifier enabling longitudinal case tracking. In addition, while the e-Case system constitutes an important structural development towards interoperability and continuity, it has not yet delivered a harmonised system for the systematic collection, analysis and publication of statistical data on violence against women and domestic violence across all stages of proceedings, as required under Article 11.

67. While data are available on the total number of women killed in Latvia, it is not possible to determine how many of these homicides are gender-related, owing to the absence of indicators capturing motive, context or gender-based elements.⁴⁹ Data provided by the authorities encompass all female victims of homicide and are not limited to domestic violence or other forms of violence against women falling within the scope of the convention. Moreover, information on whether the authorities had prior knowledge of a woman's exposure to violence is not systematically recorded. GREVIO notes with grave concern that the continued occurrence of women's homicides in Latvia, combined with the lack of disaggregated data on the circumstances of the killings – including the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim – significantly hampers the ability to identify gender-related killings of women and to assess systemic failures. This situation underscores the urgent need to strengthen data-collection systems in order to capture the gendered dynamics of lethal violence against women in line with the requirements of the Istanbul Convention.

45. Cabinet Regulation No. 618 of 20 September 2016, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/id/284905-tiesu-informativas-sistemas-noteikumi.

46. See the National Courts Portal (e-services and case-law database), available at: www.manas.tiesas.lv/eTiesasMvc/e-pakalpojumi/judikatura; Latvia's e-case portal for courts ("Manas e-lietas"), available at: www.elieta.lv/web/.

47. Sanctions imposed for established criminal offences are recorded in the Punishment Register.

48. Information obtained during the evaluation visit. See also the State Audit Office of the Republic of Latvia, press release "The e-case program management must be improved", 11 January 2021, available at: www.lrvk.gov.lv/en/news/the-e-case-program-management-must-be-improved.

49. Administrative homicide data indicate that 19 women were murdered in 2022, 13 in 2023 and seven in the first nine months of 2024. Police records further indicate attempted murders or preparations for killing: nine cases against women in 2022, 11 cases in 2023 and seven cases in the first nine months of 2024.

68. Data concerning protection measures are recorded in information systems managed by the Ministry of the Interior and the state police. For 2022-2023, authorities provided data disaggregated by sex for emergency barring orders (police-issued separation orders). Sex is currently the only indicator captured systematically. For court-issued protection orders (temporary protection orders within civil proceedings), data on sex, age and the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim are collected and provided with detailed categories – including sibling, parent/child, grandparent/grandchild, spouse and co-resident – each disaggregated by sex. These indicators are useful for identifying cases or suspicions of domestic violence, that is, intimate partner violence against women, including the prevalence of protection orders for female victims against male relatives and former partners. However, there remains no systematic case tracing, harmonised indicators or unified case identifiers linking protection measures across police and court systems.

69. Critically, data on violations of protection orders, which can trigger criminal liability, and sanctions imposed as a result of such breaches are not systematically collected or linked to the original civil protection order in a way that allows longitudinal tracking. While GREVIO welcomes the authorities' commitment to modernise and expand data collection on protection orders and related indicators, the current lack of data linking civil law remedies to resulting criminal sanctions prevents full analysis of whether emergency or protection orders effectively reduce secondary victimisation and reoffending over time. Such analysis is essential to assess whether protective measures achieve sustainable safety outcomes for women victims of violence and contribute to effective enforcement and deterrence, a key element of Article 11 monitoring.

70. Moreover, there are no data on the number of decisions in civil proceedings on custody, visitation or residence of children that expressly take into account reports of domestic violence and ensure the safety of all family members. This indicator is a significant measure of the extent to which family law processes protect women and children when domestic violence is reported, and its absence hinders a full assessment of holistic protection outcomes for victims of violence against women in civil justice contexts.

71. Last, GREVIO notes the absence of specific data on technology-facilitated forms of violence against women. As administrative data collection is primarily organised by reference to criminal offence categories, no distinction is made between online and offline forms of perpetration. Awareness of the growing relevance of technology-facilitated violence and an intention to address this issue in future data-collection efforts has, however, been expressed by the Latvian authorities, which GREVIO welcomes.

72. **GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to:**

- a. **strengthen and harmonise administrative data collection on violence against women and domestic violence across the justice chain by collecting data on sex, age, type of violence, the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim and geographical location, to be added to all relevant systems (police, prosecution and courts);**
- b. **ensure that conviction and sentencing data be systematically disaggregated by sex, age, type of violence, the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim and geographical location, and be regularly published;**
- c. **establish formalised cross-sectoral co-operation mechanisms among the relevant ministries to support integrated data recording and analysis, in line with the requirements of Article 11 of the Istanbul Convention;**
- d. **ensure that all relevant data are made available to the public in line with Article 11, paragraph 4, of the Istanbul Convention.**

b. Healthcare sector

73. Under Latvia's Medical Treatment Law, data collection within the health sector is organised through a centralised system of national health information registers, co-ordinated primarily by the National Health Service under the supervision of the Ministry of Health.⁵⁰ Healthcare institutions and professionals are legally required to submit information on services provided to patients through electronic health information systems, notably the national e-health system. These data are primarily collected for purposes of healthcare delivery, reimbursement and public health monitoring.

74. With regard to injuries incurred in cases of violence, medical professionals must complete an information card on trauma and injury.⁵¹ This information is submitted to the Centre for Disease Prevention and Control of Latvia, which maintains an electronic database on diseases and injuries.⁵² On this basis, the centre compiles statistics and publishes them on the Official Statistics Portal of Latvia, with data disaggregated by sex, age group and type of injury, among other categories.⁵³

75. Injuries or health consequences resulting from violence may be recorded under general diagnostic categories, but there is no mandatory requirement to record the cause of injury as domestic violence or violence against women, nor to capture the relationship between the patient and the perpetrator as a structured data variable. Consequently, cases of violence against women are not readily identifiable or extractable from routine health administrative data for statistical analysis. The absence of data disaggregated specifically for the purposes of the Istanbul Convention – for example, broken down by victims' sex, age and relationship with the alleged perpetrator – prevents a comprehensive assessment of the number of women and girls who seek help or contact the health sector for experiences of violence against women, including domestic violence.

76. GREVIO notes, however, a positive development in the context of forensic medical examinations. The State Centre for Forensic Medical Examination, a state institution conducting forensic medical expertise under Latvian law, carries out expert examinations of living persons and deaths where external causes, including violence, are involved.⁵⁴ The centre's mandate includes documenting injuries consistent with violence and producing expert opinions that may be used in legal proceedings; it is also included among institutions responsible for health protection and forensic expertise under the Ministry of Health framework.

77. The centre systematises cases of injury related to violence and prepares annual statistical reports indicating the number of cases where there has been violence in the family. Disaggregated data are available upon request and can be supplied to ministries and relevant stakeholders. These are identifiable according to the context of the injury, such as domestic violence and violence against women in the family, broken down by age groups, as well as types of violence, including sexual violence.⁵⁵ Despite the broader absence of systematic data specific to domestic violence and violence against women in the general health information system, the availability of structured, disaggregated forensic data represents a valuable model for improving data collection across the health sector. Following the example set by the State Centre for Forensic Medical Examination, systematically linking instances of violence with health administrative data could help the Latvian authorities develop a more comprehensive and integrated data ecosystem, moving closer to compliance with the convention's requirements under Article 10. Such an approach would not only make cases of violence against women and domestic violence more visible and trackable across the health sector but also provide a robust evidence base for policy development, prevention strategies, resource allocation and targeted interventions.

50. Medical Treatment Law, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/44108.

51. Information obtained during the evaluation visit. See Cabinet Regulation No. 206 of 22 April 2014 amending Cabinet Regulation No. 746 of 15 September 2008, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/id/266405.

52. Centre for Disease Prevention and Control of Latvia: www.spkc.gov.lv/lv.

53. Official Statistics Portal of Latvia, Number of registered injury and poisoning cases by intent 2010-2024, available at: www.data.stat.gov.lv/pxweb/en/OSP_PUB/START_VES_VS_VST/VST030.

54. State Centre for Forensic Medical Examination: www.vtmec.gov.lv/lv.

55. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

78. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to ensure the systematic and comparable collection of data by the healthcare sector on the number of instances that contact has been made by women and girls who seek assistance from, or come into contact with, public or private healthcare services due to their experiences of any of the forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention.

c. Social services

79. Data on social services in Latvia are collected through administrative reporting by local governments and service providers and are incorporated into the official social protection statistics compiled by the Ministry of Welfare. Administrative reporting covers social services for individuals affected by violence. Some aggregated data capture the number of individuals accessing these services;⁵⁶ for example, figures for 2024 were reported on women receiving counselling and support and shelter services.⁵⁷

80. Despite these reporting mechanisms, Latvia does not maintain a standardised, comprehensive national register or statistical database that systematically records contact with social services specifically related to violence against women or domestic violence, disaggregated by relationship to the perpetrator. While administrative systems capture some data on service use related to cases of violence, such information is not routinely published in a disaggregated or easily accessible format on the official statistical portal.

81. As a result, there is currently no systematic, routine and publicly available reporting that would allow information on the number of women and girls contacting social services for experiences of violence, including domestic violence, to become available, nor for patterns of service use to emerge according to sex, age and relationship to the perpetrator. Furthermore, administrative data on social services are not linked to other relevant sources, such as health, justice or police records, which limits the ability to monitor state responses comprehensively. While disaggregation exists in related datasets, such as injury registers, these are not directly connected to social service usage. Broader social inclusion indicators, including general survey or injury data, provide useful contextual information but cannot substitute for dedicated metrics on instances of contact with social services.

82. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to collect data in the field of social services disaggregated by sex, age, type of violence, the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim and geographical location as well as other factors deemed relevant, including the types of services that are provided, in order to enhance its capacity to monitor, evaluate and respond effectively to violence against women and domestic violence, in line with the requirements of the Istanbul Convention.

d. Data on the asylum procedure

83. The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, which is the authority responsible for the asylum procedure, maintains the Asylum Seekers' Register in accordance with Cabinet Regulation No. 456.⁵⁸ The register forms part of the Unified Migration Information System (VMIS) and is operated in co-operation with the Information Centre of the Ministry of the Interior and the State Border Guard. Pursuant to the regulation, the competent authorities are required to record, store and process data on asylum seekers and their applications for international protection, including information on residence documents issued in the context of international protection proceedings.

56. See the Official Statistics Portal, Data on recipients of social services depending on the type of the violence 2022-2024: www.stat.gov.lv/lv/statistikas-temas/soc-aizsardziba-veseliba/pensijas-pabalsti/tabulas/ppr080-no-prettiesiskam?themeCode=PP; Data on recipients of rehabilitation services by age groups 2022-2024, available at: <https://stat.gov.lv/lv/statistikas-temas/soc-aizsardziba-veseliba/pensijas-pabalsti/tabulas/ppr070-no-prettiesiskam?themeCode=PP>.

57. European Social Network, European Social Services Index 2025 – Latvia factsheet, available at: www.esn-eu.org/social-services-index/2025/latvia.

58. Cabinet Regulation No. 456 of 12 July 2016, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/id/283577-patveruma-mekletaju-registra-noteikumi.

These data are subsequently transmitted to Eurostat, the EU statistical office, which publishes harmonised asylum statistics disaggregated, *inter alia*, by the sex of the applicant.⁵⁹

84. Latvia's data on the asylum procedure, however, does not collect data on the number of asylum claims on the basis of gender-related persecution and their outcomes. On other occasions, GREVIO has noted that the lack of data regarding asylum claims made on the basis of gender-related forms of persecution makes it impossible to ascertain how many women had made claims on this basis, and how many of these claimants received refugee status or other forms of international protection.⁶⁰

85. **GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to collect data on the number of asylum requests made and the number of decisions granted on the grounds of gender-based violence against women.**

2. Population-based surveys

86. Article 11 of the Istanbul Convention requires parties to conduct population-based surveys at regular intervals to ensure a pertinent and comparative assessment of the prevalence and trends of all forms of violence against women covered by the convention, thereby enabling longitudinal monitoring of developments over time.⁶¹

87. In 2021, a survey on gender-related violence conducted by the Central Statistical Bureau collected data on women's exposure to psychological, physical and sexual violence in a range of contexts, including society at large, intimate partnerships, the family sphere and during childhood.⁶² While this survey constitutes a valuable source of information and represents an important step towards evidence-based policy making, GREVIO notes that its scope was limited to persons living in private households. As a result, institutionalised populations – such as women living in retirement homes, psychiatric or disability institutions, student dormitories, hospitals and places of detention – were excluded from the sample. This limitation affects the representativeness of the findings, particularly with regard to women who may be exposed to multiple forms of discrimination and heightened risks of violence and who, due to specific needs or circumstances, are more likely to reside in institutional settings. This includes, *inter alia*, certain women with disabilities, women with addiction and migrant or refugee women.

88. Previously, a survey conducted by the Child Protection Centre (formerly the State Inspectorate for Protection of Children's Rights) in 2020 on changing attitudes to domestic violence focused primarily on parenting practices and societal responses to child abuse.⁶³ While the survey was not designed as a comprehensive victimisation survey, it nevertheless provides some indirect insights into the prevalence of psychological and physical forms of domestic violence affecting women within the household context.

89. Moreover, Latvia participates in surveys conducted at European Union level. The most recent results on women's exposure to gender-based violence across the EU were published in 2024 by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights – the "EU gender-based violence survey: key results". The survey provides comprehensive and comparable data on women's experiences of multiple forms of violence across all 27 EU member states, including Latvia, and covers a total of 114 023 women aged 18 to 74.

59. Eurostat, Asylum applicants by type, citizenship, age and sex – annual aggregated data, available at: www.ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr_asyappctza/default/table?lang=en&category=migr.migr_asy.migr_asyapp.

60. See GREVIO's baseline evaluation report on Italy, paragraph 273(b).

61. Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, paragraph 78.

62. The results are published in the statistical tables on the prevalence of violence in Latvia, available at: www.stat.gov.lv/en/statistics-themes/population/crimes/publications-and-infographics/10940-prevalence-violence-2021.

63. State Inspectorate for Protection of Children's Rights, Population survey on changes in public attitudes towards domestic violence, 25 January 2021, available at: www.bac.gov.lv/lv/iedzivotaju-aptauja-par-attieksmes-mainu-attieciba-uz-vardarbibu-gimene.

90. Notwithstanding these initiatives, GREVIO notes that there is currently little indication that regular, methodologically robust population-based surveys specifically dedicated to all forms of violence against women are in place or foreseen in the near future and that no population-based surveys have ever covered forced marriage, forced abortion, forced sterilisation or the digital dimension of violence against women. As GREVIO has emphasised on other occasions, surveys covering all forms of violence encompassed by the Istanbul Convention are necessary to inform the development, implementation and evaluation of comprehensive policies and measures, to identify gaps in protection and support, and to enable an accurate assessment of prevalence, patterns and trends over time.⁶⁴ Furthermore, dedicated surveys examining violence affecting specific groups of women – such as women with disabilities, migrant and refugee women, Roma women and other women belonging to minority groups – are lacking. This constitutes a significant gap in the data available to the authorities, particularly in light of the heightened exposure to violence and barriers to reporting experienced by many women within these groups.⁶⁵

91. Last, GREVIO notes with interest a survey on sexual harassment in academic settings initiated by the Ombudsman's Office following media reports of sexual harassment affecting students in higher education institutions. This survey resulted in a publicly available special report,⁶⁶ which constitutes an important step towards documenting sexual harassment as a form of violence against women beyond the domestic sphere. GREVIO welcomes this initiative, which also underlines the instrumental role the Ombudsman's Office can play in supporting the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, including through measures relevant to Article 11, as further elaborated on below.

92. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to regularly conduct population-based surveys covering all forms of violence against women as defined by the Istanbul Convention. Such surveys should, as much as possible, cover the experiences of all women, with particular attention to those from groups at heightened risk of violence, including those living in institutional settings, in order to ensure a pertinent, inclusive and comparable assessment of prevalence and trends over time.

3. Research

93. Article 11, paragraph 1b, of the Istanbul Convention creates the obligation for parties to support research, out of the consideration that it is essential that parties base their policies and measures to prevent and combat all forms of violence covered by the convention on state-of-the-art research and knowledge in this field. As a key element of evidence-based policy making, research can contribute greatly to improving day-to-day, real-world responses to violence against women and domestic violence by the judiciary, support services and law-enforcement agencies.⁶⁷ GREVIO notes with satisfaction that Latvia has undertaken several publicly funded studies contributing to the understanding of violence against women and domestic violence, both directly and by examining contextual factors influencing prevalence. Of particular significance is the comprehensive 2023 study commissioned by the Ministry of Welfare on establishing a monitoring system for domestic violence and violence against children.⁶⁸ The study reviewed administrative data, research evidence and international recommendations, and applied qualitative methods – including in-depth interviews with professionals, specialist surveys and focus groups – to identify key indicators for assessing both the dynamics of violence and the effectiveness of state interventions. It proposed public safety and awareness indicators, such as trust in institutions and changes in societal tolerance of violence. It

64. See GREVIO's baseline evaluation reports on: Albania, paragraph 51; Finland, paragraph 44; Montenegro, paragraph 61; and Türkiye, paragraph 89.

65. See GREVIO's baseline evaluation reports on: Finland, paragraph 44; Montenegro, paragraph 61; Serbia, paragraph 70; and Sweden, paragraph 68.

66. Ombudsman's Office, Survey on sexual harassment in higher education institutions: special report, 2025, available at: www.tiesibsargs.lv/en/news/invitation-to-participate-in-a-survey-on-sexual-harassment-in-higher-education-institutions/.

67. Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, paragraph 77.

68. Ministry of Welfare of the Republic of Latvia, Study on the establishment of a data-monitoring system on domestic violence and violence against children, 2022, available at: www.ppdb.mk.gov.lv/database/petijums-par-vardarbibas-gimene-un-vardarbibas-pret-bernu-datu-monitoringa-sistemas-izveidi/.

highlights the need for regular, methodologically consistent quantitative and qualitative data collection capable of producing comparable data over time, noting that research in Latvia has largely been conducted through isolated, one-off initiatives. While GREVIO acknowledges the scale and depth of this study, the resources underpinning it and its contribution to informing the National Action Plan, it regrets that the research does not examine the gendered dimension of intimate partner violence against women, nor does it analyse the underlying power dynamics or the context of women's inequality with men in which such violence occurs. GREVIO points to the importance of addressing, in future research and studies, the power dynamics and women's specific experiences of domestic violence in order to identify and address its root causes.

94. Moreover, GREVIO notes that no studies have been conducted to estimate the economic costs and societal burden of intimate partner violence, including its impact on the police, prosecution and judicial sectors. The absence of such assessments may limit understanding of the broader consequences of violence beyond individual harm, particularly in terms of public expenditure and institutional resources.

95. Other studies conducted in Latvia provide useful contextual insights into societal stressors and potential risk factors but focus primarily on violence in general, domestic violence or violence against children, rather than on violence against women as a distinct, gender-based phenomenon.⁶⁹

96. GREVIO regrets that other forms of violence against women covered by the convention, particularly online and technology-facilitated violence, FGM, forced marriage and "honour"-related violence, remain largely unexamined. The same applies to publicly funded research on the specific challenges and needs of groups of women exposed to different forms of discrimination, including women with disabilities, women belonging to other minority groups and refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls. These gaps risk leaving the evidence base on the scale, characteristics and potential presence of these forms of violence underdeveloped, thereby constraining the authorities' capacity to assess risks, identify emerging patterns and design targeted prevention and protection measures.

97. Furthermore, GREVIO regrets that public support for academic institutions to conduct research on violence against women appears to be limited. Such research could inform the authorities' efforts to monitor and improve the effectiveness of policies and measures addressing violence against women, including victim support services.⁷⁰ Accordingly, GREVIO has stressed on several occasions the importance of strengthening financial and institutional support for academic research in this field.⁷¹

98. Last, GREVIO notes with interest research initiatives undertaken by the Ombudsman's Office that contribute to the national evidence base. In particular, research on the application and effectiveness of temporary protection orders – conducted following extensive legislative amendments adopted in 2024 – has provided insights into the functioning of the revised system and its impact on victim protection.⁷²

69. These include a 2023 study on emotional well-being in educational institutions: www.izm.gov.lv/lv/media/22833/download?attachment; and a 2021 study on societal responses to the Covid-19 crisis: www.lzp.gov.lv/lv/media/2026/download?attachment.

70. See GREVIO's baseline evaluation reports on: Andorra, paragraph 63; Austria, paragraph 60; Finland, paragraph 50; Portugal, paragraph 77; and Türkiye, paragraph 92.

71. See GREVIO's baseline evaluation reports on: Albania, paragraph 48; Italy, paragraph 83; and Montenegro, paragraph 65.

72. Ombudsman's Office, Study – Temporary protection against violence in court, 10 December 2024, available at www.tiesibsargs.lv/resource/pagaidu-aizsardziba-pret-vardarbibu-tiesa/.

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99. **GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to:**
- a. **develop structured, systematic and regular research on all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention, including female genital mutilation, forced marriage, online and technology-facilitated violence, and violence committed in the name of “honour”;**
 - b. **support academic research on violence against women, including targeted studies on groups of women facing discrimination on multiple grounds in order to inform comprehensive and evidence-based policies and measures.**

III. Prevention

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

A. General obligations (Article 12)

101. Article 12 of the Istanbul Convention delineates the fundamental foundations of the parties' duty to prevent violence against women. These include the parties' determination 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 that are based on the idea of the inferiority of women or on stereotyped roles for women and men. 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 and to achieve greater gender equality in order to reduce women's vulnerability to violence.

102. Latvia's measures to prevent violence against women are largely embedded within broader equality, inclusion and well-being policies. GREVIO welcomes the National Action Plan for 2024-2029 as a step towards consolidating and synchronising general violence prevention efforts and notes with satisfaction the plan's explicit endorsement of a cross-sectoral zero-tolerance approach to interpersonal violence and its intention to translate this approach into concrete preventive action.

103. However, GREVIO notes that prevention efforts in Latvia, including those addressing violence against women, are largely framed in gender-neutral terms as a general social problem, with limited acknowledgement that violence against women is rooted in harmful gender stereotypes and discriminatory practices. This framing risks reinforcing perceptions that the control, subjugation or abuse of women, particularly in intimate or domestic contexts, is a private matter or one that may be socially tolerated, rather than a manifestation of structural gender inequality requiring targeted prevention and response. GREVIO further notes the repeated emphasis placed by the authorities on not "singling out" women in education and prevention measures. While intended to avoid discrimination, such an approach risks obscuring the distinct nature of violence against women as violence that affects women disproportionately and may limit the transformative potential of primary prevention policies by failing to address the underlying root causes and their linkages with harmful stereotypes. GREVIO reiterates that specific primary prevention measures to address violence against women do not constitute discrimination under the Istanbul Convention.⁷³

104. Moreover, while GREVIO welcomes the plan's emphasis on public awareness and societal education and notes the existence of some civil society-led initiatives as referenced below, it regrets the very limited availability of targeted initiatives engaging men and boys as agents of change in the prevention of violence against women and the promotion of gender equality as a form of primary prevention of violence against women. GREVIO likewise notes the lack of specific measures aimed at challenging cultural, traditional or religious justifications for violence against women, as required under the convention.

73. Article 4, paragraph 4, of the Istanbul Convention, and paragraph 55 of the Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention.

105. **GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to:**

- a. **strengthen primary prevention measures by explicitly challenging harmful stereotypes and bias that justify or perpetuate violence against women, understood as a form of violence that targets women because they are women or that affects them disproportionately;**
- b. **reinforce prevention efforts through systematic and targeted engagement of men and boys, in line with the Istanbul Convention's preventive and transformative objectives.**

B. Awareness raising (Article 13)

106. GREVIO notes the range of awareness-raising initiatives undertaken by the Latvian authorities to address violence, discrimination and bullying, including domestic violence and violence against women. It welcomes the launch of a state-organised campaign in 2023 dedicated specifically to violence against women by the Ministry of Welfare ("Violence likes silence. Don't stay silent!"), aimed at raising awareness of intimate partner violence and emotional abuse, reducing societal ignorance and encouraging reporting to the police.⁷⁴ The National Action Plan envisages educational and awareness-raising activities for children, young people and parents on forms and indicators of violence, including sexual exploitation risks, as well as on respectful relationships, consent and non-violent conflict resolution.

107. Other awareness-raising initiatives include more general campaigns such as "Openness is a value" implemented by the Society Integration Foundation,⁷⁵ which address discrimination, gender stereotypes in employment, the pay gap and women's leadership. The Child Protection Centre also implements annual campaigns on child abuse, sexual exploitation and the importance of supportive relationships, contributing to early awareness among children and families. While GREVIO welcomes these initiatives, limited information on their reach, depth or impact makes it difficult to assess their effectiveness in meeting the standards of Article 13 of the Istanbul Convention.

108. GREVIO also notes that civil society plays a central role in awareness raising and welcomes examples of collaboration with the state, such as the MARTA workshops for adolescents aged 15 to 19, which, in partnership with the Ministry of Welfare, promote respectful relationships, gender equality and understanding of different forms of violence.⁷⁶ GREVIO regrets, however, that the structured participation of women's NGOs, including in the implementation of the National Action Plan, is lacking, undermining the consistent and sustainable integration of specialised expertise needed for a victim-centred approach. GREVIO further notes that current awareness-raising efforts are fragmented and scattered across multiple public institutions and NGOs, with limited co-ordination, no single cohesive nationwide strategy and no guarantee of sustained funding.

109. In addition to ongoing initiatives, the National Action Plan foresees the introduction of annual, multi-stakeholder awareness-raising campaigns and sets measurable objectives, notably that 80% of the population should consider violence against women and domestic violence unacceptable by 2029, which GREVIO welcomes. However, GREVIO notes that the plan lacks a systematic and concrete strategy to ensure that these programmes are effectively implemented and reach their intended audiences. Awareness raising in areas related to violence prevention is identified as a priority in several policy documents beyond the National Action Plan, including the Guidelines for the Development of Children, Youth and Family for 2022-2027 and the Plan for the Promotion of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men 2024-2027.

74. www.bernulabklajiba.lv/labklajibas-ministrija-uzsak-kampanu-par-vardarbibas-pret-sievietem-un-gimene-mazinasanu. The Ministry of Welfare also operates a web page with dedicated resources, available at: www.lm.gov.lv/lv/vardarbiba-gimene-un-vardarbiba-pret-bernu.

75. A public foundation established in 2001 that administers state and EU funding programmes, available at: www.sif.gov.lv/lv.

76. www.marta.lv/post/centrs-marta-isteno-darbnicu-ciklu-jauniesiem-ka-macet-attiecibas.

110. At the same time, GREVIO notes that awareness-raising initiatives largely embed violence against women and domestic violence within broader equality and inclusion frameworks, as discussed earlier in this report. Moreover, the current and planned initiatives do not systematically address under-reported forms of violence, such as sexual harassment, stalking and technology-facilitated abuse. Similarly, limited attention is devoted to women exposed to multiple forms of discrimination and therefore at heightened risk, including women with disabilities, women belonging to other minority groups and migrant women.⁷⁷ GREVIO also notes the absence of dedicated campaigns informing women about international human rights standards and available remedies under international law. Civil society organisations have highlighted that many victims currently have limited knowledge of existing support services or how to access them.⁷⁸ Likewise, campaigns specifically addressing the harm experienced by children who witness violence, independently of direct physical abuse, remain scarce, and their reach and effectiveness are unclear.⁷⁹

111. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to address gaps in coverage, visibility and co-ordination and develop a more coherent framework that expands and aligns awareness-raising initiatives on all forms of violence against women with the standards and transformative objectives of the Istanbul Convention.

C. Education (Article 14)

112. Attitudes, convictions and behavioural patterns are shaped very early in life. Educational establishments therefore have an important role to play in promoting equality between women and men and human rights. 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 that informs learners of the different forms of gender-based violence against women.

113. The Ministry of Education and Science plays a central role in this regard and works through regional and state-city education boards, which act as intermediaries between central authorities and individual schools. These boards disseminate guidance, organise seminars and campaigns and monitor implementation at local level, while school heads ensure follow-up within institutions. Educational establishments co-operate with municipal child-protection services, the state police, prosecutors and other relevant bodies to support prevention, reporting and referral mechanisms. Prevention of and awareness raising on violence against women are delivered through mandatory curricula, extracurricular activities and methodological support for teachers.

114. GREVIO notes with satisfaction that Latvia has integrated core elements of Article 14, such as equality, mutual respect, non-violent conflict resolution and recognition of violence, into formal education. Cabinet regulations on primary and secondary education mandate teaching to cover interpersonal relationships, emotional and physical violence, human rights and behavioural principles aimed at reducing inequalities as transversal skills promoted across subjects.⁸⁰ From the first grade onwards, these themes are addressed mainly through social and civic education, upbringing-related classes and psychological education on mental health and well-being. At the same time, GREVIO notes that the authorities rely primarily on the integration of Article 14 elements into existing educational activities across the curriculum, rather than on stand-alone or dedicated

77. NGO written submission by the MARTA Centre, p. 10.

78. Ibid.

79. According to information provided by the authorities, the Plan for the Prevention of Child Crime and the Protection of Children from Criminal Offences 2023-2024 and the follow-up Plan for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency and Protection of Children against Criminal Offences 2025–2027, approved by Cabinet Order No. 276 of 13 May 2025, include measures aimed at improving the identification of child victims of crime and providing effective assistance and protection to prevent negative consequences and risks of re-victimisation.

80. See Cabinet Regulation No. 747 of 27 November 2018, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/303768-regulations-regarding-the-state-basic-education-standard-and-model-basic-education-programmes; Cabinet Regulation No. 416 of 3 September 2019, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/309597-regulations-regarding-the-state-general-secondary-education-standard-and-model-general-secondary-education-programmes.

courses. While GREVIO acknowledges that integrating Article 14 elements across the curriculum may ensure broader coverage, it notes that this approach could benefit from being complemented by more structured and visible forms of teaching, with a view to ensuring sufficient depth, consistency and effectiveness.

115. In this context, GREVIO further notes that the issue of violence is generally addressed in educational curricula, without distinguishing violence against women from other forms of violence, in line with the stated aim of avoiding stigmatisation and as reflected in the National Action Plan. GREVIO notes with concern that this risks leaving the specific forms, dynamics and impacts of violence against women insufficiently addressed and liable to undermine the educational aim of instilling in children an understanding of the linkages between women's inequality with men in society and intimate relationships with their victimisation.

116. Further to the above, the Ministry of Education and Science has commissioned the University of Latvia to review curricula, including their alignment with UNESCO guidelines on sexual and reproductive health and rights. Methodological materials for teachers linked to Article 14 are under development and expected in 2026. However, while GREVIO notes that teaching materials are subject to mandatory review, there is limited evidence of a consistent and systematic evaluation of stereotypes and narratives that undermine the equality between men and women. Since 2023, Latvia has rolled out the KiVa programme – an evidence-based international anti-bullying approach developed by the University of Turku in Finland targeting school-aged children – combining prevention, early intervention and monitoring tools. According to data from the Ministry of Education and Science, a total of 1,205 educational institutions, including pre-school institutions, had participated in broader violence prevention activities by the 2024/2025 academic year. In addition, the Ombudsman's Office has developed materials on dignity and respect for upper-secondary students.⁸¹ GREVIO notes that the 2020 national education standards include 242 learning outcomes in social and civic education, of which 13 at primary level and 22 at secondary level relate directly or indirectly to human rights issues, including the assessment, response and prevention of violence, embedded across specific subjects with defined student activities set out in sample syllabi. GREVIO further welcomes that working groups are currently revising these syllabi to incorporate the UNESCO International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education, with violence against women and gender stereotypes explicitly identified as key components, and teaching materials expected to be finalised and made publicly available by August 2029. Last the Education Law has been amended to require all educational institutions to implement systemic violence prevention and well-being promotion measures, with full implementation required from September 2026, supported by dedicated funding allocated by the Ministry of Education and Science. In this context, GREVIO points to the importance of ensuring systematic monitoring of the implementation of this law and the extent to which the principles of Article 14 are taught in practice.

117. As regards non-formal education measures on violence against women and gender equality in sports, cultural, or leisure settings, GREVIO notes that while professional and ethical frameworks governing coaches and other educators working with children include safety and safeguarding requirements, these do not specifically address the aims of Article 14 of the Convention.

118. **GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to:**

- a. consider introducing dedicated curricular modules covering all of the principles spelled out in Article 14 of the Istanbul Convention to complement mainstreamed content, ensuring that the forms of violence against women and their linkages to questions of mutual respect, non-violent conflict resolution and women's equality with men are specifically covered, and that violence against women is addressed as a distinct phenomenon with specific causes, dynamics and consequences;**

81. Ombudsman's Office, Informational material on dignity for grade 10 students, 2024, available at: www.tiesibsargs.lv/resource/materials-vidusskoleniem-par-cienu/.

- b. strengthen the systematic monitoring of the implementation of the teaching requirements arising from Article 14 of the Istanbul Convention and ensure mandatory review of teaching materials and curricula to identify and eliminate stereotypes and narratives that undermine the equality between men and women;**
- c. expand and structure non-formal education initiatives in schools, sports, cultural, and leisure settings to promote non-violent conflict resolution, mutual respect and equality.**

D. Training of professionals (Article 15)

119. The standard set by the Istanbul Convention in its Article 15, as interpreted by GREVIO, is that of systematic initial and in-service training of the relevant professionals 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.

120. GREVIO notes with satisfaction that several policy documents in Latvia, including the Public Health Guidelines 2021-2027 and the Culture Education Strategy 2025-2027, place a strong emphasis on training and capacity building across multiple sectors.⁸² Most notably, the National Action Plan foresees professional development and multidisciplinary training for practitioners in education, social services, healthcare, law enforcement and related fields, with a particular focus on strengthening the competences of pedagogues, including general and vocational teachers, to recognise and address violence in educational settings. The plan also refers to the development of interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral training and guidelines for professionals for action when violence is suspected or detected, with an emphasis on violence against children and sexual exploitation. In addition, the plan's financial annex allocates resources for sector-specific training, notably in the culture and media sectors, to enhance professional knowledge and responsible representation of violence against women. The plan further refers to enhanced specialised training for perpetrator programmes, with defined targets for the number of trained professionals and programme participants, and envisages joint familiarisation and training linked to interinstitutional co-operation and standardised risk-assessment models, such as multi-agency response frameworks (like the MARAC model). While the implementation of these measures will undoubtedly contribute to bringing Latvia into closer alignment with the requirements of Article 15, GREVIO regrets that the current and planned measures do not include comprehensive, mandatory training programmes focused on violence against women and domestic violence in any sector, although elements of relevant training exist.

121. According to the authorities, initial training for healthcare professionals (doctors, nurses and midwives) covers prevention and detection of violence, gender equality and victims' rights.⁸³ Current regulation requires competences in recognising violence, gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and children's rights.⁸⁴ However, GREVIO notes that this training is not specifically targeted at violence against women and remains embedded in broader, largely child-centred courses. The different forms of violence against women are also not systematically addressed, with concepts of violence encompassing any and all types of violence against a person, and no dedicated modules exist to highlight the specific and gender-based nature of the forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention. While professional development for healthcare providers is formally required, there is no systematic, mandatory training on violence against women, domestic violence or related issues such as female genital mutilation or non-lethal strangulation; where such content exists, it appears to be offered on an elective or ad hoc basis rather than as part of a structured national programme. In forensic medicine and accident and emergency settings, training

82. See the Public Health Guidelines 2021-2027; Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia, Culture Education Strategy 2025-2027, available at: www.km.gov.lv/lv/media/48609/download?attachment.

83. State report, p. 52.

84. Cabinet Regulation No. 617 of 24 September 2024, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/id/355161-noteikumi-par-arstniecibas-personu-un-studejoso-kuri-apgust-mediciniskasizglitibas-programmas-kompetenci-arstnieciba-un-so-personu-teoretisko-un-praktisko-zinasanu-apjomu.

is largely limited to residency-based instruction, focusing on injury identification, classification and sexual violence in forensic medicine, and on-the-job learning in emergency departments, without explicitly or systematically addressing violence against women.

122. Similarly, the ESF+ project led by the Ministry of Health, Providing Education Opportunities for Persons Involved in Medical Treatment, focuses on ethics, patients' rights and general competences, without targeted training on violence against women.⁸⁵ The Public Health Guidelines 2021-2027 set out policy ambitions to strengthen training, including education programmes on sexual and reproductive health (with elements on sexual violence), training of specialists at local level, education of medical practitioners on recognising and reporting violence against children, regular training of general practitioners and prenatal care specialists on sexual violence, and improved pre- and post-graduate education integrating competences on violence, gender equality, communication and patient safety. While GREVIO welcomes the policy commitment to enhance relevant training in these fields, the implementation and mandatory nature of these measures remain unclear at this stage. GREVIO also notes reports by civil society organisations that general practitioners, who are often the first point of contact for victims, lack adequate training and awareness to identify violence against women, assess risk, respond appropriately and refer victims to specialised support services, resulting in missed opportunities for early detection and protection.⁸⁶

123. The Academy of Justice of Latvia, which began operating in January 2025, is responsible for initial and in-service training of judges and other judicial professionals. GREVIO regrets that judges do not receive mandatory initial training specifically addressing violence against women or domestic violence. Specialised in-service training for judges and prosecutors includes the HELP e-course "Combating violence against women and domestic violence", delivered twice in 2024 with national expert-led seminars and again in 2025, with up to 40 participants per course. The National Action Plan further provides for two additional annual courses on violence against women and girls and domestic violence to be delivered each year until 2029. In addition, GREVIO takes note of the course "A victim-centered approach to the justice system", developed and delivered by NGOs specialising in victim support in 2024 and 2025 to groups of up to 30 judges, prosecutors and investigators, covering the nature and dynamics of violence against women, trauma-informed approaches, gender stereotyping and the impact of domestic violence on children. This course is complemented by optional online seminars on partner violence, children in divorce and victims' rights in the EU. These initiatives, often delivered in co-operation with NGOs and through interdisciplinary formats, are positively assessed by judges and contribute to an improved understanding of the dynamics of domestic, psychological and emotional violence. GREVIO welcomes in this context the establishment of the Academy of Justice in January 2025 as a unified, state-funded training centre. While GREVIO welcomes the expansion of training opportunities and their positive reception by professionals, it regrets that participation in these courses remains voluntary, with the number of participants constituting only a small fraction of Latvia's judiciary and prosecution service.⁸⁷ Moreover, GREVIO notes concerns raised by civil society organisations regarding the consistent reach and long-term sustainability of state funding and the institutionalisation of certain key training programmes.⁸⁸

124. While GREVIO underscores its full respect for the essential principle of independence of the judiciary and judicial autonomy in the organisation of training, it emphasises that the judiciary's central role in applying the Istanbul Convention means that judicial decisions may directly engage states' responsibility.⁸⁹ The convention requires judges to possess specialist, in-depth knowledge of

85. www.talakizglitiba.lv/projekti/izglitibas-iespeju-nodrosinasana-arstnieciba-iesaistitajam-personam.

86. Submission by the MARTA Centre, p. 11.

87. According to the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, at the end of 2024 there were 512 judges in Latvia: www.data.stat.gov.lv/pxweb/lv/OSP_PUB/START__POP__TS__TSG/TSG040/table/tableViewLayout1/.

88. Submission by the MARTA Centre, p. 11.

89. The following are examples among the many cases in the area of violence against women in which decisions by judge(s) have engaged states' responsibility under the European Convention on Human Rights and led to a finding of a violation of the Istanbul Convention: *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).

the nature and dynamics of violence against women, including trauma-related victim behaviour, gender stereotyping and the impact of domestic violence on children. As GREVIO has had the opportunity to note on other occasions, insufficient judicial training undermines effective adjudication and victim protection, a gap that cannot be remedied through ad hoc or voluntary courses. In this regard, data collected by the Council of Europe European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ) in 2020 indicate that 24 member states of the Council of Europe already require some form of compulsory in-service training for judges, demonstrating the feasibility of such an approach.⁹⁰ Mandatory and comprehensive training, covering both criminal and family law proceedings, is therefore essential to ensure informed decision making, prevent re-victimisation and strengthen victims' trust in the justice system in line with the requirements of Article 15 of the Istanbul Convention.

125. Initial police training is provided through the State Police College and, according to information provided by the authorities, includes modules on handling family conflicts and domestic violence, equality between women and men, victims' rights and needs, prevention of secondary victimisation, and multi-agency co-operation.⁹¹ GREVIO notes with satisfaction the authorities' reports that the formal education programme includes mandatory modules specifically addressing domestic violence across multiple study courses, covering police competence, criminal law qualification, investigative aspects, victim communication, psychology of violence, and the identification of perpetrators and victims, amounting to a substantial number of contact hours. While welcoming the mandatory and substantive nature of this initial training, GREVIO notes that it remains unclear to what extent violence against women is addressed as a distinct gendered phenomenon, with specific causes, dynamics and consequences, as distinct from domestic violence and family conflict more broadly.

126. A wide range of voluntary in-service training is offered by the State Police College, occasionally in co-operation with civil society partners, including courses on victim questioning, the psychological aspects of victimisation, emotional violence, communication with persons reporting violence, victims' rights and perpetrator accountability. Participation varies by topic and is generally not mandatory, except where linked to the maintenance of specific professional qualifications or certifications. GREVIO welcomes information provided by the authorities that in-service training covers a wide range of relevant topics and that between 2022 and 2025, the Investigators' Training Centre organised 11 training events specifically focused on violence against women and gender-based violence, attended by a total of 350 officials from multiple institutions. GREVIO nevertheless regrets that participation in in-service training remains largely voluntary and that the overall proportion of officers receiving specialised training on violence against women remains limited relative to the total size of the State Police.

127. In terms of specialisation among law-enforcement officers, efforts include the HELP e-course "Violence against women and domestic violence for law enforcement" and a range of non-formal education programmes. The authorities also informed GREVIO that regional data indicate that training reached officials across different regions of Latvia, with 205 officials trained across regions in 2023 and 95 in 2024. While recognising the importance of such training offers, GREVIO notes with concern both the overall low proportion of officers receiving specialised training and the uneven distribution of training efforts across regions and over time, which may result in inconsistent access to adequately trained law-enforcement responses. While GREVIO welcomes the authorities' efforts to increase training, the current coverage does not yet ensure a consistently predictable and adequate level of protection for all victims of violence against women, particularly in rural areas.

128. GREVIO notes with satisfaction that, following legislative amendments in 2022 enabling police to impose separation measures without written victim consent,⁹² increasingly comprehensive instruction is being delivered on the use of these instruments. Local authorities in Liepāja report near-universal coverage among police officers in terms of familiarity with these measures, which

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

91. State report, p. 51.

92. See Chapter VI, Emergency barring orders (Article 52).

GREVIO welcomes. GREVIO also welcomes reports from NGOs indicating high levels of co-operation and responsiveness from the police, including strong interest and participation in NGO-led training.⁹³ This suggests openness within law enforcement to capacity building through external, victim-centred expertise.

129. Initial and in-service training for social workers on violence-related cases is developing progressively but remains largely non-mandatory and unevenly institutionalised. The Ministry of Welfare introduced a methodology in 2020 entitled Professional Social Work Development in Local Governments, focusing on work with victims and perpetrators of violence. This methodology was acquired by 61 municipal social workers in 2022 and 39 in 2023, and further methodological training is planned using EU funds for the 2021-2027 period through the Ministry of Welfare project Development of Professional and Modern Social Work. In parallel, since 2020, specialist training grounded in guidelines and methodologies developed through a collaborative process with NGOs, including the MARTA Centre, Skalbes, and Diakonija, has been delivered to social workers working with victims of violence.⁹⁴

130. While many practitioners working with victims and perpetrators reportedly seek out such training, e-learning and seminar-based training on violence are available but not compulsory.⁹⁵ Mandatory training exists mainly for social workers working with children, including training on the protection of the rights of the child, as well as courses on sexual violence and early-warning indicators (“traffic lights of violence”). Employees in the Orphans and Custody Courts are subject to one-year training programmes, and in 2023 the Child Protection Centre delivered targeted seminars to 80 employees of the Orphans and Custody Courts on interviewing children and assessing parental violence and neglect. Awareness raising among professionals is further supported through annual international conferences on violence, victim protection and support services.⁹⁶ Specialist services such as helplines also provide their own training.⁹⁷

131. In light of the above, GREVIO notes that while training opportunities for social workers in the broader area of general violence prevention and response exists, the absence of mandatory, standardised and specialised training frameworks limits consistent application of a victim-centred approach in cases of violence against women and domestic violence. Moreover, GREVIO notes with concern that NGOs report persistent gaps in ensuring consistent, victim-centred training for social workers and child-protection bodies, particularly in the proceedings of Orphans and Custody Courts.⁹⁸

132. Training on violence prevention in Latvia’s education sector is embedded in broader mandatory professional development frameworks, with a strong emphasis on children’s rights, inclusive education and safe learning environments.⁹⁹ Teachers are required to regularly update their qualifications, including on general violence prevention and risk management, and national policy instruments, such as the Education Development Guidelines 2021-2027 and the Culture Education Strategy 2025-2027, prioritise safe education, internal reporting mechanisms and access to support services. According to the authorities, in 2025, about 1,600 teachers and other school staff participated in professional competence development programmes covering child protection, health and safety, and the recognition and prevention of child abuse, including sexual abuse and domestic violence. A further course on managing violence risks in educational institutions is planned for 200 educators in 2026, and amendments to national regulations are under preparation to make

93. Submission by the MARTA Centre, p. 11.

94. According to information provided by the authorities, this resulted in a 100-hour specialist training programme emphasising case analysis and reflective practice; by 2023, 211 regional social workers had completed this training, delivered primarily by NGO experts bringing practical case-based experience.

95. The only mandatory requirements are general: 72 hours of training over a three-year period and 21 hours of annual supervision.

96. Three such conferences were reported in 2023; see the state report, p. 13.

97. For example, according to information obtained during the evaluation visit, the 116123 helpline is staffed by approximately 110 trained specialists.

98. Submission by the MARTA Centre, pp. 11-12.

99. Cabinet Regulation No. 569 of 11 September 2018, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/id/301572-noteikumi-par-pedagogiem-nepieciesamo-izglitiba-un-profesionalo-kvalifikaciju-un-pedagogu-profesionalas-kompetences-pilnveides.

child protection training mandatory for all educators every three years. At local level, some municipalities, such as Liepāja, require mandatory training on children's rights aimed at identifying risk situations affecting children.¹⁰⁰ GREVIO therefore notes that training remains largely general in nature and focused on child protection and school safety. This may not only constrain educators' ability to recognise and respond to violence against women and domestic violence, but also weaken efforts to challenge stereotypes that undermine equality between women and men, thereby risking the perpetuation of tolerance of violence against women and girls in its various forms among pupils.

133. Training for officials working in the asylum and immigration context in Latvia is available but remains largely dependent on EU-level frameworks rather than national structures. Such training is organised by the State Border Guard College and is accessible to officials working in immigration and those who encounter asylum seekers, including training on procedural safeguards when working with minors. In addition, Latvian authorities participate in the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) training network, through which basic training modules are offered to institutions involved in asylum procedures, including recent training addressing women as a vulnerable group. While advanced EUAA training modules on violence against women exist, no information is available on whether and how they are systematically used in Latvia, beyond the authorities' indication that these modules are currently being translated into Latvian to enable broader uptake.

134. Last, no specific training measures appear to be in place to equip professionals with the knowledge and skills required to respond effectively to women exposed to multiple forms of discrimination, including women with disabilities, women belonging to minority groups and migrant or asylum-seeking women. In addition, the lack of information on the systematic evaluation of training programmes on violence against women limits GREVIO's ability to assess their quality, effectiveness and impact over time.

135. GREVIO urges the Latvian authorities to ensure the systematic and mandatory provision of both initial and in-service training on the prevention, detection and response to all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention, taking due account of their specific characteristics, interconnections and the risks of re-victimisation. This training must be ensured across all relevant sectors, adequately address the needs of all victims, including women exposed to multiple forms of discrimination, be supported by clear and binding protocols and guidelines, and be subjected to regular evaluation mechanisms to assess its quality, consistency and practical impact.

E. Preventive intervention and treatment programmes (Article 16)

1. Programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence

136. In Latvia a state-funded Social Rehabilitation Programme for persons with violent behaviour has been in operation since 2015. Participation is granted through referral by a social worker or a court (civil procedure), including in the context of temporary protection orders, or on a voluntary basis. Data provided by the authorities indicate a steadily increasing use of this programme. In 2023, 805 people participated in the service to reduce violent behaviour, 267 of whom were referred by a court or judge, representing a marked increase compared to previous years.¹⁰¹ This trend suggests a growing reliance on judicial assignment and an expansion in programme uptake, particularly since 2021. GREVIO regrets, however, that the programme targets persons with violent behaviour in general and is not specifically designed for perpetrators of domestic violence, nor does it address the distinct manifestations and underlying power dynamics of violence against women. Moreover, since its establishment in 2015, no comprehensive impact assessment has been carried out to evaluate its effectiveness and any behavioural change or reoffending rates among perpetrators. GREVIO notes with interest that a forthcoming evaluation is planned under the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) project Support Instruments for the Reduction of Domestic Violence.

100. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

101. State report, p. 14. In previous years, the participation figures were as follows: 509 people in 2019; 492 in 2020; 445 in 2021 (including 21 referred by a court or judge); and 708 in 2022 (including 154 referred by a court or judge).

137. Work with perpetrators of violence, including perpetrators of domestic and sexual violence, in the framework of criminal sentence is organised through a multi-pathway system embedded in the broader framework of resocialisation measures implemented by the Prison Administration and the State Probation Service, under the overall responsibility of the Ministry of Justice.

138. Within custodial settings, the Prison Administration implements a range of resocialisation and social behaviour adjustment programmes. These include programmes that appear to aim at achieving behavioural change. Participation in these programmes is based on individual risk and needs assessments and is formally voluntary, even where participation is recommended as part of a resocialisation plan. These programmes are also not exclusively focused on violence against women or domestic violence but may include perpetrators of such offences. They include, *inter alia*, programmes addressing non-violent communication and social skills, programmes focusing on health risks and healthy sexual relationships (including issues of consent) and programmes aimed at aggression reduction, accountability and emotional regulation.¹⁰²

139. At the level of probation supervision, the State Probation Service implements a range of licensed probation programmes, including programmes specifically targeting persons convicted of offences involving violence in intimate or family relationships, as well as persons whose offending behaviour and risk-and-needs assessment indicate a risk of such violence. Among these, three programmes specifically target perpetrators of violence: "Building Respectful Relationships", for persons convicted of violent offences in intimate relationships; "Emotion Management", for violent offenders whose behaviour is linked to difficulties with emotional regulation; and "Path of Change", for persons convicted of sexual offences. Participation is individually determined on the basis of risk and needs assessment, including a general recidivism risk assessment tool, a violence recidivism risk assessment tool, and a sexual offence recidivism risk assessment tool. Probation programmes are restricted to persons assessed as presenting a medium, high, or very high risk of reoffending; low risk offenders are excluded on the basis of the risk-needs-responsivity principle.¹⁰³ While the authorities ground this approach in general recidivism reduction, GREVIO notes that risk assessment tools designed for general criminal recidivism may not fully capture the specific danger posed by perpetrators of domestic and intimate partner violence, where even persons assessed as low-risk may continue to pose a significant threat to victim safety because risk levels may change. GREVIO further recalls that Article 16 of the convention does not distinguish between perpetrators on the basis of estimated recidivism risk.

140. Probation programmes form one component of a broader supervision system that also includes individually assigned obligations imposed by probation officers — such as requirements to consult specialists or comply with specific behavioural restrictions — as well as multi-agency cooperation through Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangement (MAPPA) meetings, when a person has been convicted of a serious violent or sexual offence.¹⁰⁴ SPS staff delivering these programmes receive specialised training, including training on risk assessment tools, on working with sexual offenders, and on programme delivery. GREVIO notes with concern that available data indicate that participation levels in the "Building Respectful Relationships" programme remain very low (4 persons in 2022 and 18 persons in 2023), and no comparable data were provided for the other violence-specific programmes. This suggests that, in practice, these programmes may play a complementary rather than central role in Latvia's overall response to domestic violence.

141. A specialised perpetrator programme addressing violence in intimate or family relationships is implemented by the MKB Centre, a private legal entity selected through public procurement. The

102. Ibid. Available programmes include School of Life IV (for persons nearing release); Thoughts. Accountability. The Action; and Rationality and Resocialisation.

103. According to information provided by the authorities, a recidivism study carried out by State Probation Service of Latvia (15 May 2026) finds recidivism rates rising from 6% among very low-risk clients to 14% among low-risk clients, 36% among medium-risk clients, 59% among high-risk clients, and 85% among very high-risk clients.

104. According to the information provided by the authorities, MAPPA brings together the SPS, State Police, the Prison Administration and, since 2021, the State Inspectorate for the Protection of Children's Rights, with the aim of coordinating information exchange, addressing the needs and risks of the convicted person, and preventing reoffending.

programme is delivered in the community, outside custodial settings, and participation is based on referral by courts, or social services, or on a voluntary basis. Persons subject to probation supervision may also be referred to the programme by their probation officer, as community-based services are available to probation clients. While persons referred by the State Probation Service bear no costs, other referred participants are required to make a co-payment covering 10% of programme costs and voluntary participants bear the full cost, which may constitute an obstacle to access for the latter group. Failure to complete a mandated programme within six months may result in an obligation to reimburse the full cost of participation, reportedly up to EUR 1,500. The programme combines structured group work with individual consultations and is delivered by psychologists and social workers who must complete specialist training of approximately 50 hours to qualify as service providers. It typically consists of up to 16 group sessions of around two hours each, co-facilitated by a psychologist and a social worker, and up to 16 individual consultations of 45 minutes, with additional individual psychological sessions available where necessary. Group sizes may reach up to 12 participants. GREVIO welcomes the programme's substantive focus, noting that it addresses physical, psychological and controlling forms of violence, with particular emphasis on power and control dynamics, the cyclical nature of abuse and its impact on victims, children and family members. The programme also situates violent behaviour within a framework of legal accountability rather than mutual conflict and incorporates co-operation with municipal social services, notably in cases referred by courts or social services. However, GREVIO notes with concern that only 68 participants reportedly took part in the programme in 2024, which suggests that its current reach is insufficient to meet the needs arising from the prevalence of violence against women and domestic violence in Latvia.

142. While GREVIO welcomes the availability of multiple pathways for perpetrator intervention, it notes with concern significant shortcomings regarding their design, accessibility and effectiveness. The system in place remains fragmented, and lacks a coherent national framework for work with perpetrators specifically addressing domestic violence. In particular, GREVIO notes that provision of the MKB Centre's specialist programme through procurement- and project-based arrangements by a single private entity raises questions regarding long-term sustainability, geographical accessibility and consistency of quality assurance. Despite reports of increasing court referrals, GREVIO regrets the lack of comprehensive data on referral and completion rates and outcomes across all relevant programmes. In addition, the relatively short duration of existing programmes raises doubts as to their capacity to achieve durable behavioural change and ensure victim safety, as required under Article 16 of the Istanbul Convention.

143. GREVIO therefore draws the attention of the Latvian authorities to the importance of setting minimum standards for work with perpetrators. In this connection, the recent publication by the European Network for the Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence of a set of European standards for perpetrator programmes, which are entirely in line with the Istanbul Convention, could serve as a reference on the subject.¹⁰⁵ GREVIO further points to the need to continue along this path and to develop standards and criteria for programme evaluation on the basis of existing best practices so that the authorities can obtain assurance that these programmes actually serve their preventive purpose.¹⁰⁶

144. Further to the above, GREVIO notes that civil society and practitioners have drawn attention to certain challenges in programme delivery, including concerns relating to victim-blaming attitudes and the need for a stronger focus on gender equality and on perpetrators' responsibility, including in the context of the MKB programme.¹⁰⁷ GREVIO also notes with concern reports that certificates of completion may be issued without assessing behavioural change and are subsequently used to justify weakening victim-protection measures or custody benefits.¹⁰⁸ Civil society has further alerted GREVIO to instances where programme staff allegedly encouraged perpetrators to initiate litigation

105. www.work-with-perpetrators.eu/european-standards-for-perpetrator-programmes.

106. The IMPACT project of the European Network for the Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence has developed guidelines for assessment and evaluation of perpetrator programmes, available at: www.work-with-perpetrators.eu/what-we-do/research/project-impact.

107. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

108. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

against women, including in cases involving coercive control and severe abuse.¹⁰⁹ In this connection, GREVIO notes with grave concern that the gender-neutral framing of the available programmes may significantly undermine their suitability for addressing and preventing violence against women in all its forms. Moreover, the MKB Centre programme is attended both by men who have perpetrated violence against their female (ex-) partners and by women who have used violence against children, raising doubts as to whether the programme adequately targets the gendered dynamics and root causes of violence perpetrated by men against women.¹¹⁰ GREVIO has had the opportunity to note on other occasions that the Istanbul Convention requires perpetrator programmes to address root causes, including sexist stereotypes, and encourage perpetrators to take full responsibility for their actions and examine their attitudes and beliefs towards women.¹¹¹

145. Last, GREVIO notes with satisfaction the effectiveness studies conducted by the State Probation Service in 2025–2026 assessing the impact of several probation programmes, including "Building Respectful Relationships", "Emotion Management" and "Path of Change", on participants' behaviour and risk of recidivism. According to the information provided by the authorities, these studies found meaningful reductions in dynamic risk factors and reoffending among programme completers relative to those who did not complete or participate in the programmes. GREVIO welcomes this development as it can allow the authorities to build on this evidence base. At the current stage, however, it is not yet possible to fully assess the scope and methodology of these studies, nor to draw comprehensive conclusions regarding long-term impact. GREVIO further notes that the information provided does not address victim safety outcomes, which, alongside behavioural change and recidivism, form an integral part of the assessment framework under Article 16 of the Istanbul Convention. In this light, GREVIO underlines the importance of subjecting perpetrator programmes to regular, independent evaluation encompassing all three dimensions — behavioural change, recidivism, and victim safety — so as to enable evidence-based policy development and ensure that programmes effectively serve their preventive purpose.

146. **GREVIO urges the Latvian authorities to:**

- a. **develop new and consolidate existing programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence based on common minimum standards, with a specific focus on the gendered dynamics of domestic violence, behavioural change and the taking of responsibility for acts of violence against women. These programmes should operate in systematic co-ordination with specialist support services for victims to ensure their safety, building on and further strengthening existing inter-institutional cooperation mechanisms;**
- b. **take measures to increase the level of attendance and the rate of completion of such perpetrator programmes;**
- c. **ensure that that specialised training requirements for professionals delivering perpetrator programmes are standardised and consistently applied across all programme providers, building on and expanding existing training measures developed within the State Probation Service;**
- d. **ensure consistent application of referral criteria across all perpetrator programme providers, so that persons assessed as requiring intervention are systematically directed to appropriate programmes regardless of the pathway through which they come into contact with the authorities;**
- e. **ensure robust victim-centred safeguards, preventing programme participation or completion from being used to weaken protection measures or custody arrangements;**

109. Submission by the MARTA Centre, pp. 12-13.

110. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

111. See GREVIO's baseline evaluation reports on: Belgium, paragraph 95; France, paragraph 120; Monaco, paragraph 58; the Netherlands, paragraph 107; and Türkiye, paragraph 129.

- f. further develop systematic monitoring and independent evaluation of programmes across all providers and pathways, and ensure that evaluation frameworks encompass data on referrals, completion rates, recidivism and, in particular, victim safety outcomes.**

2. Programmes for perpetrators of sexual violence

147. Work with perpetrators of sexual violence, implemented by the State Probation Service, has been in place in Latvia since 2009 under different iterations of the “Path off Change” framework, following targeted capacity-building support from British practitioners. In 2022, the programme was revised and adapted to Latvian practice, and subsequently re-licensed for a further three-year period. The programme operates through two tracks: a community-based programme that is mandatory for persons serving non-custodial sentences in society and assigned on the basis of individual risk and needs assessment; and a custodial programme offered in places of deprivation of liberty, where participation is formally voluntary but linked to individual resocialisation plans. It targets persons convicted of sexual offences, including rape against adult women, and is delivered using cognitive-behavioural methods by trained specialists, following prior screening for suitability and professional supervision. Specialists working with sexual offenders within the SPS receive dedicated training, upon completion of which they obtain a recognised specialisation in this area. However, participation levels remain very low. According to information provided by the authorities, 11 people took part in the programme in 2023 under probation supervision. GREVIO notes with interest the effectiveness studies conducted by the State Probation Service in 2025–2026, which, according to the authorities, included an assessment of the “Path of Change” programme and found statistically meaningful reductions in dynamic risk factors and reoffending among programme completers. As noted above, however, full assessment of the scope and methodology of these studies is not yet possible at this stage. Moreover, the lack of further evidence on curriculum, referral and completion rates, long-term outcomes, recidivism and victim safety prevents an assessment of whether the programme fully meets the effectiveness and safety requirements of Article 16 of the Istanbul Convention.

F. Participation of the private sector and the media (Article 17)

148. GREVIO welcomes the existence of several initiatives in Latvia that address some of the issues outlined in Article 17 of the Istanbul Convention. For example, Latvia has a framework of media self-regulation, overseen by the Media Ethics Council, aimed at promoting ethical standards and preventing discriminatory content.¹¹² The Code of Media Ethics formally protects core values such as equality, non-discrimination and respect for human rights, with particular attention on the rights of children and minors, and recognises the educational role of the media.¹¹³ In the field of advertising, the Code of Ethics for Advertising Professionals provides that advertising content is governed by both self-regulatory and statutory norms requiring the avoidance of harmful gender stereotypes and depictions of violence.¹¹⁴

149. The Advertising Law requires that only content consistent with ethical, humanistic, moral and decency standards is permitted and prohibits discriminatory advertising on a range of grounds, including sex, as well as misleading advertising.¹¹⁵ GREVIO notes with interest that, in 2024, the Ombudsman’s Office of Latvia organised discussions with advertising professionals and other stakeholders on sexist and stereotypical representations in advertising.¹¹⁶ These consultations reportedly highlighted gaps in awareness among advertising professionals and the need for targeted educational measures clarifying which types of content may constitute sexist or discriminatory portrayals. GREVIO further welcomes initiatives engaging media outlets, such as the All Good

112. www.lmepadome.lv/home/.

113. www.lmepadome.lv/about/documents/.

114. www.lra.lv/lv/etikas-padome/.

115. Sections 3-5 of the Advertising Law, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/163-advertising-law.

116. Ombudsman’s Office, Discussing gender stereotypes and sexism in advertising, News archive, 18 June 2024, available at: www.tiesibsargs.lv/en/news/discussing-gender-stereotypes-and-sexism-in-advertising/.

project (2023-2024), supported by the Media Aid Fund, which promoted educational media content on gender equality and challenged stereotypes about women's roles.¹¹⁷ Beyond these examples, GREVIO notes that the lack of information on complaints, enforcement action or outcomes prevents an assessment of how these self-regulatory and legal frameworks operate in practice and whether they effectively contribute to preventing violence against women and harmful stereotypes, as required under Article 17 of the Istanbul Convention.

150. Furthermore, GREVIO notes that sexual harassment in the workplace is a widespread concern in Latvia: according to a 2021 study by the Central Statistical Bureau, 11% of women reported experiencing sexual harassment or humiliation at work.¹¹⁸ The Labour Law prohibits discrimination in employment on the basis of gender and other characteristics and treats harassment and instructions to discriminate as prohibited differential treatment.¹¹⁹ Victims of such treatment are entitled to claim compensation, including for moral harm. However, GREVIO regrets the limited information available on the practical implementation of these provisions. Civil society and trade union representatives have indicated that, despite increased public discussion and awareness raising around sexual harassment and mobbing in the workplace, responses by employers and responsible authorities remain limited. GREVIO further notes reports of a lack of targeted training for employers and managerial staff on preventing and addressing violence against women in the workplace, as well as practical barriers to reporting and pursuing complaints. These include fear of retaliation, lack of confidence in internal procedures and the perceived burden of lengthy and complex proceedings, which together contribute to very low numbers of reported and adjudicated cases. In this context, GREVIO notes with interests the introduction, in 2024, of an administrative offence of sexual harassment, discussed in more detail under Article 40.

151. In addition to the above, GREVIO considers it of particular importance that Latvia fully implement Article 17, paragraph 2, of the Istanbul Convention, which requires parties to develop and promote skills among children, parents and educators to address degrading content in the information and communication technologies environment, including material of a sexual and/or violent nature. As GREVIO has had the opportunity to note, children's exposure to violent pornography online is increasing, contributing to the normalisation of harmful and degrading practices.¹²⁰ This trend is of serious concern, as it may adversely affect women and girls in their sexual relations with men and boys. In this context, GREVIO points to existing guidance from the Council of Europe's European Audiovisual Observatory on age-verification mechanisms for video-sharing platforms.¹²¹ It further emphasises that regulatory or technical measures must be accompanied by sustained awareness raising and education efforts addressing sexual violence, consent and the critical assessment of potentially harmful online content, including material of a sexual or violent nature.

117. www.sif.gov.lv/en/media-aid-fund.

118. State report, p. 16.

119. Sections 7 and 29 of the Labour Law, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/id/26019-darba-likums.

120. See GREVIO's baseline evaluation report on the United Kingdom, paragraph 171.

121. European Audiovisual Observatory, The protection of minors on video sharing platforms (VSPs): age verification and parental control, 2023, available at: www.obs.coe.int/en/web/observatoire/-/the-protection-of-minors-on-video-sharing-platforms-vsps-age-verification-and-parental-control.

IV. Protection and support

152. Chapter IV of the Istanbul Convention aims at a multifaceted, professional and victim-oriented support structure for any woman who has experienced any of the forms of violence covered by the convention.

A. General obligations (Article 18)

153. 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. 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, taking into account the relationship between victims, offenders, children and their wider social environment. Addressing the complexity of violence against women requires establishing an intervention system that involves all relevant policy sectors and administrative levels. Multisectoral and multi-agency interventions across the national, regional and local levels are key to ensuring an effective and cohesive response to all forms of violence. Effective co-ordination at local levels is particularly important in terms of ensuring that responses fit the community needs and of providing “one-stop-shop” services to victims.

154. Multi-agency co-ordination in Latvia operates primarily through municipal social services, which act as core case-management focal points/structures and co-operate with institutions such as the state police, the Orphans and Custody Courts, health services, schools and NGOs. The legal requirement for the police to notify social services and Orphans and Custody Courts when responding to domestic violence incidents involving children strengthens interagency co-operation at the local level.¹²² The ongoing assessment of the feasibility of introducing the MARAC model and the establishment of requirements for social service providers, including standards related to the organisation and delivery of social services for persons in need, such as victims of violence, demonstrate efforts to systematise risk management under the framework governing social service provision.¹²³ GREVIO notes with interest that the development of standardised protocols (“algorithms”) in relation to violence against women is reiterated in several parts of the National Action Plan. However, effective implementation of these measures will depend on whether and how these commitments are translated into practice. GREVIO also welcomes examples of close co-operation between the state and NGOs in developing and delivering a specialist victim-oriented social work training programme,¹²⁴ as well as their collaboration in establishing crisis apartments in 2023 (see Article 23). In addition, the Barnahus model launched in Latvia in 2023 brings together the relevant professional agencies to ensure a co-ordinated, multidisciplinary and child-friendly response to cases of violence against children.¹²⁵ According to the authorities, it constitutes the only specialised co-operation model of this kind currently operating in Latvia.

155. GREVIO notes that the Barnahus model also constitutes the only one-stop-shop model of counselling and support for victims in Latvia, where the required multi-agency response involving specialist support, counselling, psychologists, medical support, law-enforcement agencies, lawyers and social workers are located in the same premise. GREVIO welcomes this as a first example of the anchoring of an approach to the provision of support services based on the one-stop-shop model. It emphasises the need to develop such approaches for the provision of support services for women victims of the different forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention throughout the country, where possible. As states in the Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, some examples in which services, including branches of law-enforcement agencies, are located in the same building or in close proximity to one another and co-operate have shown to significantly increase levels of

122. Introduced by amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 161 of 25 March 2014, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/id/265314-kartiba-kada-novers-vardarbibas-draudus-un-nodrosina-pagaidu-aizsardzibupret-vardarbibu.

123. Cabinet Regulation No. 338, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/id/291788-prasibas-socialo-pakalpojumu-sniedzjiem.

124. According to information provided by the authorities during the evaluation visit, 211 social workers have completed a 100-hour specialist training programme since 2020.

125. For further details, see the state report, pp. 20-21.

satisfaction with services and have, in some cases, increased the willingness of victims to press charges or go through with a case.¹²⁶

156. While welcoming these efforts to enhance multi-agency co-operation, GREVIO notes that the system operates in a fragmented and largely project-based manner, resulting in uneven provision and disparities in resources and institutional capacity across municipalities. Staff shortages and the resulting sustainability challenges, as acknowledged by the authorities, and concerns raised by women's rights organisations and civil society experts working with women victims of violence regarding inconsistent municipal funding suggest that the existing multi-agency system requires strengthening. Co-ordination relies predominantly on local networks rather than a fully institutionalised national framework with clear, binding modes of co-operation and referral mechanisms, involving also those women's rights organisations that provide support services for victims. As a result, the quality of multi-agency responses often varies across municipalities and it is unclear to what extent protective and support services involved in such co-operation seek to address the underlying gendered dynamics, impact and consequences of the different forms of violence and which operate within a gender equality and human rights framework.¹²⁷ Structured co-ordination appears to focus mainly on domestic violence, with less clarity regarding other forms of violence against women or protection gaps in contexts such as the reception of asylum seekers, including women and girls seeking asylum for experiences of gender-based violence and persecution. Taken together, these factors indicate that, despite important foundations, the comprehensiveness and consistency of Latvia's victim-centred response via multi-agency co-operation remain contingent on local resources and implementation practices.

157. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to operationalise and institutionalise interinstitutional co-operation at all relevant levels in order to embed the provision of services for victims of all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention in multi-agency co-operation structures that involve all relevant bodies, including women's specialist support services, and that operate in accordance with protocols and guidelines for co-operation, based on a gendered understanding of violence against women and domestic violence and focusing on the human rights and safety of women victims and their children, as well as on their empowerment and economic independence.

158. To this end, GREVIO urges the Latvian authorities to establish mandatory guidelines and/or protocols for relevant professionals on how to respond to cases of violence against women as covered by the Istanbul Convention on the basis of multi-agency co-operation with a view to ensuring the coherent, victim-centred and consistent implementation of the Action Plan for the Prevention and Combating of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence 2024-2029 across the country. These efforts should be accompanied by systematic monitoring of progress, structured exchanges of good practices between municipalities and the formalised involvement of specialist women's rights organisations with recognised expertise in the field.

159. GREVIO further strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to ensure that protection and support services are made available as much as possible on the same premises ("one-stop shop").

B. Information (Article 19)

160. Latvia has no stand-alone legislative provision laying down a general obligation to ensure that victims of violence, including violence against women, receive appropriate and timely information on available support services and remedies. However, the Criminal Procedure Law provides that persons involved in criminal proceedings, including victims, who do not speak the official language have the right to use a language they understand and to benefit from interpretation

126. Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, paragraph 119.

127. Ibid., paragraph 115.

free of charge during procedural actions.¹²⁸ The law also requires that, once a person is recognised as a victim, written information on their procedural rights is issued without delay and explained where necessary.¹²⁹ Moreover, Section 97.¹(1)(10) of the Criminal Procedure Law provides that victims in criminal proceedings have the right to receive information on available support and medical assistance. According to the authorities, victims who come into contact with the police are provided with written information on their rights and on protection and support mechanisms, including through dedicated informational materials and referrals to municipal social services. This includes the police booklet “Stop! Recognise violence! Call for help!” and information embedded in standardised forms such as the questionnaire used in the context of family conflicts that contain references to protection orders, procedures and victims’ rights. Moreover, public-awareness materials, institutional websites, social media channels and the free-of-charge victim support helpline 116006 disseminate information about recognising signs of violence and how to access support and protection. In addition, the Ministry of Justice has prepared a victim rights information summary in simplified and accessible language, distributed to all investigative authorities.

161. GREVIO notes that notwithstanding the aforementioned procedural rights and measures, the provision of information on support services depends largely on institutional practice on a case-by-case basis and is not offered based on a systematic, uniform approach. Moreover, the effectiveness of existing measures is difficult to assess in the absence of evidence on if and how information is systematically provided in practice, including in a language that victims understand. GREVIO notes with regret that under-reported forms of violence, including sexual harassment, stalking and technology-facilitated abuse, do not appear to be systematically addressed in information campaigns, potentially limiting women’s ability to identify such conduct and seek protection and support. Women’s rights organisations and civil society experts have drawn GREVIO’s attention to the fact that awareness of available support and remedies remains limited among women victims in Latvia and that the provision of information is variable in practice and not consistently guaranteed, suggesting that current awareness raising and information measures may not reach all victims effectively.¹³⁰

162. GREVIO also notes limited evidence of sustained, targeted outreach strategies aimed specifically at women exposed to multiple forms of discrimination, such as migrant women, women with disabilities, women belonging to minority groups and women in rural areas. In this context, GREVIO notes reports indicating that some women victims of violence that are part of the Russian-speaking population in Latvia may experience difficulties in accessing information about their rights and available support services.¹³¹ GREVIO notes that, in line with the principle of equality before the law and equal protection of the law, insufficient proficiency in the state language should not constitute an obstacle to effective access to rights.¹³²

163. GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to strengthen efforts to ensure that all women victims receive timely, accessible and comprehensible information, including in relevant languages, and to ensure that the information provided covers all forms of violence against women under the Istanbul Convention, together with clear guidance on available legal remedies and support services.

C. General support services (Article 20)

164. The Istanbul Convention distinguishes between general support services (Article 20), which are not exclusively designed for victims but serve the public at large, and specialist support services (Article 22), underlining that they are complementary. General support services refer to public social welfare services such as social services, housing services, (un)employment services, public education and training services, public psychological and legal counselling services, financial

128. Sections 11 and 60.2 of the Criminal Procedure Law, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/id/107820-kriminalprocesa-likums.

129. Ibid., section 104.2.

130. Submission by the MARTA Centre, pp. 14-15.

131. Ibid., p. 14.

132. See Chapter I, Fundamental rights, equality and non-discrimination (Article 4).

support services and healthcare services. Such services must address the specific needs of women victims of gender-based violence and ensure that they are treated in a supportive manner.

1. Social services

165. Latvia has established a state-funded system of general social services for victims of violence, regulated by separate cabinet regulations for adults and children.¹³³ The services provided are generally referred to as “social rehabilitation services”, a term that is used to describe a variety of state-run support for victims of violence, as well as state-ensured work with perpetrators, mainly offered in the context of domestic violence. The system is structured around a central role for municipal social services, which act as the primary entry point and co-ordinating authority. Municipal social workers conduct risk assessments, determine the form and intensity of intervention and decide on access to services, based on an internal assessment framework for high-risk situations. Access is possible through multiple referral pathways, including direct contact by victims and referrals from police, schools, health services, neighbours, crisis centres or other providers. The model allows for proactive outreach when victims are reluctant to engage. Decisions may be challenged before the local government council and subsequently the administrative court, ensuring oversight.

166. In terms of the services provided, adult victims are entitled to state-funded residential and non-residential services. Residential services, including crisis accommodation, is provided for up to 30 days and may be extended, and includes psychological, social and legal counselling.¹³⁴ Alternatively, victims may receive these types of counselling in a non-residential format of up to 10 45-minute consultations, extendable to 20, delivered in person or online. If a person’s health and life are endangered, they may receive a crisis apartment service for up to 180 days together with any of their children under 18 and other household members, up to 120 consultations with a psychologist, social worker and lawyer or alternatively up to 50 hours of support from a trusted person, as well as up to 180 days of a “social rehabilitation course” in a dedicated institution with accommodation. This flexible structure is aimed at accommodating different levels of risk. According to information provided by the authorities, the number of adult beneficiaries has increased steadily in recent years, with women representing approximately 90-95% of recipients annually.¹³⁵ While this upward trend may reflect improved accessibility and awareness, the absence of data on unmet demand, geographical distribution and waiting times limits an assessment of adequacy and coverage.

167. GREVIO welcomes the existence of these general support services but notes that the standard duration of residential support may be insufficient in complex cases of domestic violence, especially where housing insecurity and economic dependency intersect, and that longer-term stabilisation pathways are not clearly regulated within this framework. As GREVIO has had occasion to note in its previous reports, housing schemes for victims of domestic violence are of fundamental importance to enable them to rebuild their lives.¹³⁶ In a similar vein, it is crucial to ensure their access to the labour market by developing specific schemes such as co-operation with public or private-sector employers, and to provide them with vocational training opportunities, to fast-track their reintegration into the workforce and thus contribute to their economic independence.

168. The absence of clear national provisions linking support for women victims of domestic violence to sustainable housing and economic empowerment raises concerns as to victims’ full recovery and long-term independence. GREVIO further regrets that the general support system does not appear to distinguish systematically between women victims of domestic violence and other social assistance beneficiaries, nor is it clearly grounded in an understanding of the specific

133. For adult victims, Cabinet Regulation No. 790 of 23 December 2014, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/id/271251-socialas-rehabilitacijas-pakalpojumu-sniegšanas-kartiba-no-vardarbibas-cietusam-un-vardarbibu-veikusam-pilngadigam-personam. For child victims, Cabinet Regulation No. 1613 of 22 December 2009, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/id/202912-kartiba-kada-nepieciessamo-palidzibu-sniedz-bernam-kurs-cietis-no-prettiesiskam-darbibam.

134. A list of services provided to adult victims is available at: www.lm.gov.lv/lv/social-rehabilitation-services-adult-victims-violence.

135. State report, p. 18. The number rose from 585 in 2019 to 639 in 2020, 714 in 2021 and 726 in 2022.

136. See GREVIO’s baseline evaluation reports on Austria, paragraph 95; Portugal, paragraph 127; and Serbia, paragraphs 110 and 115.

dynamics of such violence or tailored to the distinct needs of its victims and their children. The lack of disaggregated data on service use limits the ability to assess effectiveness and identify systemic gaps. While services are formally accessible to all victims, there is limited evidence of culturally tailored or specialised support addressing the needs of women belonging to minority groups, including women with disabilities, migrant communities or other groups exposed to multiple forms of discrimination. Finally, given the central role of municipalities, service quality and accessibility may vary depending on local resources and expertise, and it remains unclear to what extent uniform standards are applied nationwide. Although social services are financed from the state budget, municipalities bear responsibility for their implementation and complementary measures. In the absence of detailed information on earmarked funding and long-term budgetary planning, it is difficult to assess whether resources are sufficient to ensure sustainable, high-quality support across the country.

169. Last, the obligation arising under Article 20 of the Istanbul Convention requires a comprehensive and interconnected system of public welfare services that integrate housing services, employment or unemployment services, vocational training or job integration services, public psychological and legal counselling services and financial support services to address, when necessary, the specific needs of victims of all forms of violence covered by the scope of the convention, beyond domestic violence.¹³⁷

170. GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to develop dedicated programmes addressing the specific needs of women victims of all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention, particularly in the areas of employment and vocational training, with a view to promoting their recovery, economic independence and empowerment. To achieve this, the authorities should:

- a. establish clear national provisions linking victim support to prioritised and sustainable housing solutions, targeted employment schemes and vocational training opportunities;**
- b. ensure that services are tailored to the specific needs of victims and their children, including those exposed to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination;**
- c. guarantee uniform standards and adequate, sustainable funding across municipalities so as to ensure consistent, high-quality support throughout the country.**

2. Healthcare services

171. As healthcare professionals are often the first point of contact for women victims of violence, their ability to identify victims, respond sensitively to their needs and ensure appropriate referral is crucial.¹³⁸ This can be achieved through training initiatives for practitioners in public and private healthcare settings, to turn medical professionals into knowledgeable points of first contact for victims.¹³⁹ GREVIO has therefore repeatedly emphasised the active role that health services must play in responding to all forms of violence against women covered by the convention, including domestic and sexual violence.¹⁴⁰

172. Against this background, GREVIO notes that in Latvia the health sector has not yet assumed such a consistently proactive and structured role in the protection and support of women victims. GREVIO welcomes the existence of certain formal mechanisms that may contribute to monitoring and injury documentation concerning victims of violence against women. Pursuant to Cabinet

137. Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, paragraph 126.

138. In its 2024 fact sheet on violence against women, the World Health Organization emphasised that, within a multisectoral response to violence against women, the health sector plays a key role by advocating its recognition as a public health issue, delivering comprehensive and survivor-centred care, identifying and referring victims, promoting gender equality through education and generating evidence on prevalence and effective interventions: www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women.

139. See GREVIO's baseline evaluation report on Denmark, paragraph 110.

140. See GREVIO's baseline evaluation report on Estonia, paragraphs 115-116.

Regulation No. 746, medical professionals in inpatient and outpatient institutions are required to complete a standardised trauma and injury information card, which is transmitted to the Centre for Disease Prevention and Control and entered into a national electronic registry. On the basis of these data, aggregated statistics are compiled. GREVIO notes that the available data from the Ministry of Health reflect only cases recorded in emergency or hospital settings and submitted by medical institutions, and therefore reflect only those women who sought emergency medical care and whose cases were formally recorded.¹⁴¹ This underlines the importance of strengthening systematic identification and reporting mechanisms within the health sector. Furthermore, guidelines developed in co-operation with the World Health Organization assist general practitioners, nurses and other health professionals to identify violence,¹⁴² primarily in relation to violence and neglect against children, and a reporting form (“algorithm”) has been established by the Child Protection Centre for suspected child abuse.

173. GREVIO regrets the absence of national or regional protocols establishing standardised care pathways for women victims of the different forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention. Section 56.1 of the Medical Treatment Law establishes a mandatory obligation for medical institutions to report signs of violence detected during medical care to the State Police, and authorities report that sequential action provisions exist governing the competence of relevant institutions. However, information received by civil society organisations points to a lack of systematic screening tools, structured diagnostic guidance or comprehensive care pathways for women experiencing domestic or sexual violence specifically.¹⁴³ In practice, the involvement of general practitioners in identifying and referring women victims to appropriate support appears to rely to a significant extent on individual awareness and initiative, beyond the reporting obligation established by law. Moreover, the available information does not indicate the existence of comprehensive protocols ensuring the identification of victims of all forms of violence covered by the convention, consistent documentation of injuries, risk assessment, timely medical care and co-ordinated referral to specialist support services within a multi-agency framework. In the absence of such standardised procedures, the health sector’s capacity to operate as an effective first-line response, as required under Article 20 of the convention, remains very limited. In this regard, GREVIO emphasises that the collection and preservation of medical evidence, as well as the victim’s free and timely access to medical documentation, including medical certificates and forensic reports documenting their injuries, are of central importance to enabling victims to make informed decisions about seeking justice and support. With a view to empowering victims, such documentation should be made available directly to them irrespective of their willingness to report to the authorities. GREVIO further notes that, in line with its findings made throughout the baseline evaluation procedure, parties should circumscribe the obligation to report an incident of violence to cases in which there are reasonable grounds to believe that a serious act of violence covered by the scope of the convention has been committed and further serious acts are to be expected. In such cases, reporting may be made contingent on certain appropriate conditions, such as the consent of the victim, with the exception of some specific cases, for example where the victim is a child or is unable to protect her/himself because of disabilities. GREVIO 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.

174. GREVIO urges the Latvian authorities to ensure that all healthcare services are equipped to respond effectively to all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention, notably by developing and implementing comprehensive, gender-sensitive protocols in the public and private healthcare sectors establishing standardised care pathways for women victims of violence. Such protocols should include screening and systematic identification, diagnosis, treatment, documentation of injuries, risk assessment and referral to appropriate specialist support services while promoting multi-agency co-operation between the healthcare sector and specialist and social services.

141. State report, p. 18. According to these data, 158 women victims of violence were assisted in healthcare facilities in 2022 and 174 in 2023.

142. www.spkc.gov.lv/lv/ieteikumi-arstniecibas-personam-vardarbibas-gadjumu-kuros-cies-berni-atpazisanai/ieteikumi_rstniecibas_personam_vardarbbas_gadjumu_kuros_cie_brni_atpazani1.pdf.

143. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

D. Specialist support services (Article 22)

175. The aim of specialist support is to ensure the complex task of empowering victims through optimal support and assistance catered to their specific needs. Much of this is best ensured by women's organisations and by support services provided, for example, by local authorities with specialist and experienced staff with in-depth knowledge of gender-based violence against women. It is important to ensure that these services are sufficiently spread throughout the country and are accessible to all victims. Moreover, these services and their staff need to be able to address the different types of violence covered by the scope of the Istanbul Convention and to provide support to all groups of victims, including hard-to-reach groups.

176. In Latvia, specialist support services for women victims of violence are provided primarily by non-governmental organisations operating with state funding or under state-commissioned schemes. Within the framework of the service "State-guaranteed compensation for victims", the Court Administration has concluded a co-operation agreement with the NGO Skalbes. Under this arrangement, Skalbes provides non-residential emotional and psychological support to victims of all types of crime, primarily through a nationwide hotline,¹⁴⁴ offers information on procedural rights (including rights in criminal proceedings, compensation and damages) and maintains an online information portal.¹⁴⁵ While these arrangements may provide a nationwide and remotely accessible entry point for victims, including women victims of violence, the service is not specifically tailored to violence against women. As described under Article 20, women victims in acute crisis situations, including experiences of gender-based violence, may seek support from crisis centres and family support centres, which provide state-financed general support services. Support for victims of trafficking in human beings and for third-country nationals, including refugees and asylum seekers, is also provided by NGOs under state funding, which may indirectly benefit women victims of violence in the context of trafficking and migration.¹⁴⁶ However, none of these services specialise in violence against women as such and therefore cannot substitute for a comprehensive network of women's specialist services covering all forms of violence against women as required under Article 22.

177. Against this background, GREVIO notes that specialist, women-centred support services specifically tailored to victims of violence against women and domestic violence remain very limited in Latvia. For example, the MARTA Centre provides multidisciplinary assistance through psychologists, social workers and legal advisers, including safety planning, advocacy and support in judicial proceedings, and operates branches in Riga, Liepāja and Rēzekne, where it also manages anonymous crisis facilities.¹⁴⁷ GREVIO notes that state-funded support services are also available to women victims of violence, among other beneficiaries, through local government social services and a number of NGO-run crisis and family support centres, offering individual consultations with psychologists, social workers and lawyers, and that these services are available to and may benefit women victims of violence. However, these services are general in nature and not specifically tailored to the needs of women victims of violence against women and domestic violence as required under Article 22 of the Convention. While GREVIO commends this example of positive co-operation and the state's support for, and reliance on, the expertise of women's NGOs in delivering specialist services, it notes with concern the very limited availability and geographic distribution of such in-person, non-residential specialist services. The current situation renders provision largely dependent on the capacity and staffing of women's NGOs, raising questions as to sustainability, long-term continuity and consistency of specialist support provision. Outside major urban areas, women victims of violence largely depend on remote services or on general social services,

144. See Chapter IV, Telephone helplines (Article 24).

145. www.cietusajiem.lv.

146. This service is provided by the NGO Shelter Safe House: www.patverums-dm.lv/en/. For additional regulatory details, see Cabinet Regulation No. 344 of 16 July 2015, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/id/308253-noteikumi-par-kartibu-kada-cilveku-tirdzniecibas-upuri-sanem-socialas-rehabilitacijas-pakalpojumu-un-kriterijiem-personas-atzisanai-par-cilveku-tirdzniecibas-upuri.

147. See Chapter IV, Shelters (Article 23).

which may not always provide the expertise and tailored support required under Article 22 of the convention.

178. GREVIO further notes that specialist support services are not equally developed for all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention. Beyond domestic violence, there is limited evidence of dedicated non-residential support structures addressing stalking, sexual harassment, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, forced sterilisation or forced abortion. Victims of these forms of violence appear in practice to be channelled into general victim support mechanisms, which may not guarantee specialised, long-term psychological care and empowerment-based advocacy. With regard to specific groups of women victims, GREVIO welcomes the availability of services in multiple languages, including Russian, reflecting the significant Russian-speaking population. It also commends efforts undertaken to respond to the needs of displaced Ukrainian women, including assistance to Ukrainian psychologists in obtaining recognition of their professional qualifications to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate counselling.¹⁴⁸ Nevertheless, GREVIO notes with concern the absence of clearly articulated and systematic measures to ensure equal and effective access for women facing multiple forms of discrimination, including women with disabilities, elderly women, Roma women and women with addiction issues. In particular, women with addiction issues may encounter barriers to accessing women-specific support for their experiences of gender-based violence and risk being referred primarily to addiction-treatment programmes, without sufficient recognition as victims of gender-based violence.

179. As concerns the digital dimension of violence against women, GREVIO notes that there are no dedicated specialist counselling services explicitly addressing technology-facilitated forms of violence against women. While certain service providers demonstrate awareness of digital manifestations of violence and may address them within broader counselling activities, and while Latvia has internet safety structures primarily oriented towards children and young people, there is no specific support structure in place to provide dedicated and specialist support services for women who experience online or technology-facilitated violence against women.¹⁴⁹

180. Recalling the important role that specialist support services play in addressing the different forms of violence covered by the scope of the Istanbul Convention by providing tailored support to all groups of victims, GREVIO urges the Latvian authorities to ensure the availability of adequate specialist support services for women victims of all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention throughout the country, grounded in a clear understanding of the specific dynamics of violence against women and the particular needs of its victims, including women facing multiple forms of discrimination.

E. Shelters (Article 23)

181. State-funded residential crisis accommodation in Latvia is provided through several pathways operated by NGOs and/or local governments and is available to, and reportedly frequently used by, women victims of violence alongside other people in vulnerable or crisis situations, such as those experiencing homelessness, social deprivation or addiction. For example, the Dardedze centre provides specialist support to children and mothers who have experienced violence, including counselling and social services, and while it may offer crisis intervention and referral in cases involving domestic violence, it is not structured as a dedicated domestic violence shelter for women victims and their children.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, the Talsi Women's and Children's Crisis Centre provides 24-hour accommodation and support services to persons in crisis, including women and children affected by violence, but it functions as a general crisis intervention centre rather than an exclusively women-only domestic violence shelter.¹⁵¹ In trafficking cases, the NGO Shelter Safe House provides

148. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

149. The NGO-run Safer Internet Centre (www.drossinternets.lv/en) offers information, awareness-raising and helpline/hotline services primarily aimed at children and young people without a dedicated focus on violence against women.

150. www.dardedze.lv/.

151. www.krizucentrs.lv/.

state-funded support services, including a residential pathway that may indirectly benefit women victims of violence in the context of trafficking and migration.¹⁵² At municipal level, additional forms of residential accommodation exist to provide temporary relief and basic support, but they are also not designed to offer secure, confidential refuge or specialist support services to women fleeing violence. For example, the Liepāja Social Service Night Shelter functions primarily as a homelessness/crisis accommodation facility rather than a specialist violence against women shelter, and the Agape Centre in Liepāja provides social assistance, including a soup kitchen and municipally funded sobering-up services.¹⁵³

182. While GREVIO notes the network of residential options that are available to and may benefit women victims of violence, it regrets the absence of specialist domestic violence shelters tailored specifically to the needs of women victims of such violence and their children within the meaning of Article 23 of the Istanbul Convention. GREVIO has previously had the opportunity to clarify that generalist structures cannot replace specialist shelter spaces for women victims of violence, and that preference must be given to the establishment and expansion of the latter rather than adapting the former.¹⁵⁴ Against this background, GREVIO welcomes the introduction in July 2023 of a state-funded crisis apartment scheme for victims of violence, which in practice is used predominantly by women victims of domestic violence and their children. The scheme offers flexible placements financed by the state for 30 days, extendable up to 180 days, in municipal premises, NGO-owned apartments, hotel accommodation or privately rented apartments. It is administered by municipal social services in co-operation with NGOs and is free of charge. Anonymous crisis apartments are operated by multiple local government social services and NGOs across Latvia. In addition to safe accommodation, beneficiaries may receive state-funded general support services, including counselling and psychological support, as described under Article 20 of the Istanbul Convention.

183. GREVIO notes with interest the establishment of this flexible mechanism, including its formal availability irrespective of place of residence and reported accessibility to foreign nationals, but notes several shortcomings in this model. Despite the commitment to extend the scheme nationwide, which GREVIO welcomes, it is currently implemented only by individual municipalities from their own resources.¹⁵⁵ Moreover, the number of available places appears to be extremely limited and to fall below the recommended benchmark of one family place per 10 000 inhabitants as set out in the convention's explanatory report.¹⁵⁶ GREVIO notes with grave concern that uneven geographical distribution and reliance on project-based municipal implementation may affect consistent access across the territory.¹⁵⁷ Accordingly, the relatively low number of beneficiaries during the initial phase raises questions as to women's awareness of such shelters, referral practices and practical accessibility.¹⁵⁸ In addition, there is no information on how the scheme ensures effective access for women exposed to multiple forms of discrimination, including migrant or asylum-seeking women, women with disabilities, women with male children above a certain age, women with substance abuse issues, Roma women and women belonging to other minority groups. GREVIO notes that the crisis accommodation scheme is defined in the Law on Social Assistance and Social Services and has been fully financed from the state budget since 1 July 2023 – a development, which GREVIO welcomes. Nevertheless, questions remain as to whether this funding framework ensures sufficient

152. www.patverums-dm.lv/en/. See also Cabinet Regulation No. 344 of 16 June 2015.

153. www.agape.lv/.

154. See the GREVIO evaluation report on France, paragraph 154.

155. www.eng.lsm.lv/article/society/society/27.06.2023-crisis-housing-to-be-available-throughout-latvia.a514465/.

156. Article 23 of the Istanbul Convention requires parties to ensure that there are appropriate, easily accessible shelters in sufficient numbers to provide safe accommodation for women and children. Paragraph 135 of the Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention provides guidance to parties on how to assess whether the current number of shelters is sufficient. More specifically, it refers to the Final Activity Report of the Council of Europe Task Force to Combat Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence (EG-TFV (2008)6), which recommends that there should be one family place per 10 000 head of population. A "family place" is defined in the Council of Europe publication "Combating violence against women: minimum standards for support services", EG-VAW-Conf (2007) Study rev., as "an adult plus the average number of children". This notwithstanding, it is important to note that the explanatory report clarifies that the number of shelter places should be adapted to the actual need/demand in the country.

157. The exact overall number of available family units under this scheme is unclear. According to information obtained during the evaluation visit, in Liepāja there are six crisis apartments in total.

158. According to information obtained during the evaluation visit, between July 2023 and December 2024, 11 women and 15 children benefited from the crisis apartment scheme.

capacity and consistent nationwide implementation in practice, and GREVIO notes that the long-term sustainability of the scheme will depend on the maintenance of adequate and stable budget allocations and the consolidation of implementation capacity across municipalities. Furthermore, it is unclear to what extent the long-term sustainability of the existing crisis accommodation scheme is ensured via stable funding and legal guarantees.

184. Crucially, while the crisis apartment model represents a welcome step towards closer alignment with the Istanbul Convention, GREVIO notes that its current design and distribution does not meet the standards of Article 23 of the convention. This requires immediate, round-the-clock access to safe accommodation in dedicated and specialist structures that provide not only housing but also comprehensive, multidisciplinary support and empowerment services. Shelters are intended to offer secure, confidential environments accessible at any time of day and night, staffed by trained professionals capable of addressing the multiple and interrelated consequences of violence against women and of supporting women and their children towards long-term recovery and independent living.¹⁵⁹ Crisis apartments, although flexible and useful as an emergency measure, do not appear to systematically provide the same level of specialist, holistic, round-the-clock support required under Article 23 and therefore cannot fully substitute for a structured network of specialist shelters for women victims of violence.

185. GREVIO urges the Latvian authorities to establish and sustainably fund a nationwide network of dedicated, specialist shelters for women victims of violence and their children, ensuring immediate, round-the-clock access to safe accommodation and comprehensive, multidisciplinary support in line with the Istanbul Convention's standards.

F. Telephone helplines (Article 24)

186. GREVIO notes with concern that although Latvia has established several helplines providing support to victims of violence and persons in crisis, it does not currently operate a dedicated, state-wide 24/7 helpline specifically for women victims of violence. The victim support helpline 116006, established in 2016 in the context of implementing Directive 2012/29/EU, provides emotional support and legal information to victims of all types of crime, including domestic violence.¹⁶⁰ However, it operates only from 12 p.m. to 10 p.m. and is not a specialised women's service. The 24/7 crisis helpline 116123, run by the non-governmental organisation Skalbes, is staffed by approximately 110 trained specialists offering general emotional support to anyone in crisis in Latvian, Russian and English.¹⁶¹ A separate 24/7 helpline (116111) serves children and adolescents and does not constitute a women-specific service within the meaning of Article 24 of the Istanbul Convention. The only helpline specifically dedicated to women victims of violence is operated by the MARTA Centre (67378539), which provides free specialised support to women victims of domestic and sexual violence and trafficking; however, it operates only on weekdays from 10 a.m. to 18 p.m. and is not available around the clock.

187. GREVIO further notes reported plans for the Latvian authorities to assume responsibility for the operation of the 116123 crisis helpline with a view to transforming it into a telephone helpline compliant with Article 24.¹⁶² In the absence of detailed information on the means of this transition, including arrangements to retain trained staff and to ensure quality assurance, confidentiality and anonymity, the implications of such a transition remain unclear in terms of achieving greater compliance with the requirements of the Istanbul Convention. In this regard, GREVIO points to the need for the new services established to ensure the involvement of trained professionals and

159. See the Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, paragraph 133; and the Mid-term horizontal review of GREVIO baseline evaluation reports, 2021, paragraph 267.

160. Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA, available at: [www.eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32012L0029](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32012L0029).

161. According to information received during the evaluation visit, approximately 23% of calls handled by the two general helplines (116006 and 116123) in 2022 concerned violence, including domestic violence.

162. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

women's rights organisations experienced in working with victims of violence against women in order to ensure the accessibility and quality of support for women victims throughout the country. Notwithstanding these efforts, GREVIO reiterates that Article 24 requires parties to guarantee the availability of a round-the-clock helpline specifically addressing violence against women and domestic violence; while general crisis lines may complement specialist services, they cannot replace the obligation to provide a dedicated service staffed by personnel trained in the specific dynamics of gender-based violence against women.

188. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to ensure that in addition to the many different and specialist helplines there is a state-wide helpline that serves as a single first point of contact providing advice to women victims of all forms of violence against women and domestic violence, operated by trained professionals throughout the country, round the clock, free of charge and with due regard for the language barriers that women belonging to minority groups, refugee and migrant women, and other callers may face, as well as with due respect for the confidentiality and anonymity of all callers. In addition, sustainable funding levels for the available helplines must be ensured.

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

189. Latvia does not currently operate clearly identifiable, dedicated specialist support services for victims of sexual violence within the meaning of Article 25 of the Istanbul Convention. While certain NGOs provide psychological and legal assistance to victims of sexual violence, there are no specialist rape crisis centres or sexual violence referral centres offering integrated, trauma-informed and multidisciplinary support.

190. Forensic/medical expert examinations used for evidentiary purposes in cases of sexual violence are conducted within the criminal procedural framework upon a formal decision by the authority directing the proceedings, such as the investigating police or the prosecutor, and are carried out by certified experts, including those from the State Centre for Forensic Medical Examination.¹⁶³ During working hours, examinations take place in forensic units, while outside business hours they are carried out in hospitals by gynaecologists with the participation of forensic experts. GREVIO notes with satisfaction reports that forensic evidence is preserved for 10 years, and for 30 years in cases involving children.¹⁶⁴ However, the requirement of a prior decision by the authority directing the proceedings to trigger a forensic examination may, and often does, constitute a barrier for victims who are not ready to engage with law-enforcement agencies, thereby risking delays in evidence collection and placing undue pressure on victims at an early stage. GREVIO recalls that the lifting and storage of, as well as victim's free access to, forensic evidence should be ensured irrespective of the victim's willingness to report to the authorities, in line with Article 25 of the Istanbul Convention. As regards financial accessibility, there is no indication that injury documentation or forensic examinations conducted within criminal proceedings entail costs for victims, as these appear to be covered by the state. Nevertheless, GREVIO notes that access to emergency contraception following rape may depend on hospital-level funding arrangements, potentially resulting in inconsistent regional practice. Clear and uniform guarantees of free-of-charge medical and forensic care, including emergency contraception, are essential to ensure equal access and compliance with the convention.

191. GREVIO notes with satisfaction that Latvia's National Action Plan 2024-2029 foresees the establishment of assistance centres for victims of rape and sexual violence in order to move towards compliance with the Istanbul Convention. According to the authorities, a working group has been convened, drawing on the experience of Estonia's specialist centres and adapting their guiding principles to the context in Latvia. The necessary funding has reportedly been calculated at approximately €1 million, and the authorities have expressed the intention to have the first centres operational by the end of 2026. While GREVIO welcomes these efforts as a positive step towards

163. Section 33, Criminal Procedure Law.

164. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

ensuring greater compliance with Article 25 of the convention, it notes that since the centres are not yet operational, their geographical distribution, range of services and implementation timeline and methods remain to be clarified in detail before further assessment can be undertaken. GREVIO reiterates that Article 25 requires parties to ensure the establishment of easily accessible rape crisis centres or sexual violence referral centres in sufficient numbers, with one centre per 200 000 inhabitants as a minimum benchmark, providing immediate, short- and long-term support to victims of sexual violence.¹⁶⁵ Such centres should offer integrated, victim-centred and trauma-informed services, including immediate medical care, psychological counselling by specially trained staff, legal information and advocacy, as well as the lifting and secure storage of forensic evidence irrespective of the victim's willingness to report to the authorities. Among the medical services provided, emergency contraception and the testing for and prevention of sexually transmitted infections should be made available. Access must be free of charge, confidential and available without undue procedural barriers, ensuring that victims may receive comprehensive support without being compelled to engage in criminal proceedings at an early stage.

192. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to:

- a. pursue the existing process of establishing dedicated rape crisis and/or sexual violence referral centres throughout the country, in line with the benchmark of one centre per 200 000 inhabitants, operating on a victim-centred, integrated basis and staffed by trained specialists;**
- b. ensure that these centres provide immediate medical care, trauma support, forensic examinations based on recognised standards¹⁶⁶ and short- and long-term psychological counselling, as well as legal counselling, irrespective of the victim's willingness to report;**
- c. strengthen co-ordination and referral pathways between health, forensic and support services and guarantee free-of-charge access to medical and forensic care.**

H. Protection and support for child witnesses (Article 26)

193. The obligation set out in this article is to ensure that whenever children have witnessed domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment or other forms of violence covered by the convention, the services provided to direct victims also cater for the needs and rights of any children exposed to such violence. While this is most relevant to domestic violence cases, it is important to bear in mind that children may also be exposed to other forms of violence.

194. Research has shown that children who witness one of the parents assaulting the other one in the home often develop emotional problems, cognitive functioning disorders and accept attitudes around violence that need to be addressed in the long term.¹⁶⁷ It is thus of crucial importance to ensure their access to psychological counselling and therapy as soon as they come to the attention of the authorities.

195. The Law on the Protection of Children's Rights recognises children as independent rights-holders entitled to protection and assistance, including in situations of violence. Its statutory definition of violence expressly covers emotional violence and violence directed against a person close to the child in the child's presence may be recognised as such.¹⁶⁸ According to the authorities, in practice, violence committed against a mother in the presence of a child may be treated as

165. See the Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, paragraph 142; and the Mid-term horizontal review of GREVIO baseline evaluation reports, 2021, paragraph 277.

166. See the Guidelines for medico-legal care for victims of sexual violence, World Health Organization, 2003: www.iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/67468e99-5b64-40d9-b68b-c0e55923f32e/content.

167. J. L. Edleson, Problems associated with children's witnessing of domestic violence, VAW Net, available at www.vawnet.org/material/problems-associated-childrens-witnessing-domestic-violence

168. See Section 1.11 and Section 50¹.2 of the Law on the Protection of Children's Rights, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/id/49096-bernu-tiesibu-aizsardzibas-likums.

violence against the child for protective purposes. Under the Criminal Procedure Law, children who have suffered from a criminal offence are automatically recognised as specially protected victims, which entails enhanced procedural guarantees, including child-sensitive conditions for the conduct of any testimony or interviews for the collection of evidence from the child, limitations on repeated interviews and the involvement of specially trained professionals.¹⁶⁹

196. GREVIO also notes with interest the creation of methodological guidance and training materials by the Child Protection Centre for the Orphans and Custody Courts and interinstitutional co-operation models aimed at strengthening child-protection responses.¹⁷⁰ While these initiatives contribute to professional capacity building and improved procedural guarantees, there is no indication that they include evidence-based therapeutic interventions specifically tailored to traumatised child witnesses, as required by Article 26 of the Istanbul Convention.

197. Children who have suffered from violence are entitled to state-funded support services free of charge, which may include up to 20 individual psychological counselling sessions provided either at the child's place of residence or in a residential centre for up to 30 days, with the possibility of extension where necessary based on specialist assessment.¹⁷¹ In addition, the NGO Dardedze provides specialist psychosocial support and crisis intervention services for children affected by violence, including psychological counselling and assistance to child victims and their families.¹⁷² A 24/7 child helpline (116111), operated by the Child Protection Centre, offers emotional support, crisis counselling and referral to municipal social services.¹⁷³ Authorities report that cases in which children contact the helpline to report witnessing violence by one parent against the other are referred to municipal social services, thereby triggering follow-up intervention under the municipal child-protection framework.¹⁷⁴ GREVIO also notes with interest the introduction of the Barnahus model in Latvia as a co-ordinated, child-friendly approach, noting that between December 2023 and December 2025 a total of 432 children victims of sexual violence and severe forms of physical violence were admitted to the programme, including 171 in 2024 alone, with a range of forensic and psychological services provided.¹⁷⁵

198. Overall, while GREVIO welcomes Latvia's establishment of a multilayered child-protection system and its demonstration of institutional commitment to combating violence against children, the system remains primarily oriented towards children who are direct victims of abuse rather than conceptualising child witnesses as a distinct category with specific therapeutic needs. There is no indication of a uniformly implemented, nationwide system of structured, evidence-based trauma interventions specifically tailored to child witnesses of violence against their mothers and access to protection and support may be further affected by geographical disparities. This is particularly acute in relation to the lack of dedicated specialist domestic violence shelters, which, according to the Istanbul Convention's standards, are intended to offer protection and support to women victims and their children, including support to child witnesses of domestic violence against their mothers.

199. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to ensure the availability of dedicated support services for children who are victims or witnesses of all forms of violence against women, including age-appropriate psychosocial counselling from professionals trained in interviewing children, with due regard for the best interests of the child.

169. Sections 96¹.1, 151¹ and 152 of the Criminal Procedure Law.

170. See Cabinet Regulation No. 241 of 16 April 2024, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/id/351326-noteikumi-par-kartibu-kada-apgustamas-specialas-zinasanas-bernu-tiesibu-aizsardzibas-joma-so-zinasanu-saturu-un-apjomu. Methodological materials and guidelines are available at: www.bac.gov.lv/lv/rokasgramata-barintiesam.

171. See Section 51.2 of the Law on the Protection of Children's Rights, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/id/49096-bernu-tiesibu-aizsardzibas-likums; Cabinet Regulation No. 1613 of 22 December 2009.

172. www.centrsdardedze.lv/en/pakalpojumi/.

173. Child Helpline 116111: www.childhelplineinternational.org/latvia-uzticibas-talrunis-child-and-adolescent-helpline-116-111.

174. Sections 58-60 of the Law on the Protection of Children's Rights.

175. The legal framework for the interinstitutional co-operation programme Barnahus is established by Cabinet Regulation No. 745

I. Reporting by professionals (Article 28)

200. Article 28 aims to ensure that where confidentiality rules are imposed by domestic law on certain professionals, such rules do not constitute an obstacle to the possibility, under appropriate conditions, of their reporting to the competent organisations or authorities if they have reasonable grounds to believe that a serious act of violence has been committed and further serious acts of violence are to be expected. On the other hand, the provision also requires that the wishes and the autonomy of a woman who is a victim of violence are respected, thereby requiring that her consent is sought for the reporting of a (suspicion of) violence, save in situations in which there are reasonable grounds to believe that a serious act of violence covered by the scope of the Istanbul Convention has been committed and further serious acts are to be expected, or where the victim is a child or is unable to protect her/himself because of disabilities or for other reasons.

201. The Latvian legal framework establishes mandatory reporting obligations in situations involving violence, particularly with regard to children and healthcare professionals. Under the Law on the Protection of Children's Rights, every person, including public officials, is required to inform the police or other competent authorities of violence or other criminal offences committed against a child. The police are further obliged to notify the Orphans and Custody Court where protective measures, including emergency barring orders, are taken.¹⁷⁶

202. In the healthcare sector, medical professionals are required to report, without delay (effectively within 12 hours), to the competent authority any suspicion that bodily injury resulted from a violent act, irrespective of whether the victim is a child or an adult.¹⁷⁷ This obligation applies irrespective of the victim's consent and includes cases of rape and intimate partner violence against adults. While this ensures prompt law-enforcement involvement, medical professionals have indicated that the automatic nature of reporting may, and often does, deter some victims from seeking medical assistance, particularly in cases of sexual violence.¹⁷⁸ In this connection, GREVIO notes with concern that the current framework does not appear to sufficiently balance mandatory reporting obligations with respect for victim autonomy in cases involving adult victims, which may hinder full compliance with Article 28 of the Istanbul Convention, which does not require an obligation to report.

203. As GREVIO has noted on other occasions, while the imposition of reporting obligations on professionals does not run counter to Article 28 of the Istanbul Convention, blanket reporting obligations may raise issues around the provision of victim-centred and gender-sensitive support services.¹⁷⁹ Mandatory reporting may in fact constitute a barrier to seeking help for women victims who do not feel ready to initiate formal procedures and/or fear the consequences of reporting for them or for their children (for example, retaliation from the abuser, financial insecurity, social isolation or the removal of children from their care). Where the authorities have introduced mandatory obligations for professionals, GREVIO notes that these should allow for the balancing of the victim's protection needs – including those of her children – with respect for the victim's autonomy and empowerment and should thus be circumscribed to cases in which there are reasonable grounds to believe that a serious act of violence covered by the scope of the convention has been committed and further serious acts are to be expected. In these cases, reporting may be made subject to certain appropriate conditions, such as the consent of the victim, with the exception of some specific cases, for example where the victim is a child or is unable to protect her/himself because of disabilities.

204. Furthermore, GREVIO notes that it is unclear whether reporting obligations in Latvia are specifically adapted to situations involving adults with impaired decision-making capacity or persons unable to protect themselves due to physical disabilities. Nor does it indicate the existence of harmonised, cross-sectoral criteria guiding reporting of violence against women by professionals across education, healthcare and social services.

176. Ibid., section 73.

177. Section 56.1.1 of the Medical Treatment Law, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/44108.

178. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

179. See the GREVIO baseline evaluation report on Estonia, paragraph 141.

205. Recalling the principle of women's empowerment mainstreamed throughout the Istanbul Convention, GREVIO urges the Latvian authorities to:

- a. review and align their system of reporting by professionals in relation to the forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention, including through making available harmonised criteria and guidance for reporting;**
- b. ensure that the duty to report imposed on professionals is tempered by full and sensitive information being provided to the victim to allow her to make an informed decision herself, and that informed consent is sought from a victim of violence for the reporting of a suspicion of a criminal act, outside of those cases where there is a reasonable suspicion that there is an imminent danger to the victim or another person, or where the victim is a child or unable to protect themselves.**

V. Substantive law

206. Chapter V of the Istanbul Convention covers a range of provisions related to substantive law, in the area of both civil and criminal law. Their aim is to help create, in all parties to the convention, the necessary legislative framework to prevent violence against women, protect them from further victimisation and to ensure robust intervention and prosecution by law-enforcement agencies. In the interest of prioritisation, this section of the report addresses several but not all provisions of Chapter V of the convention.

A. Civil law

1. Civil remedies against the state – ensuring due diligence (Article 29)

207. A core aim of the Istanbul Convention is to end impunity for acts of violence against women. This not only requires that individual perpetrators be held accountable through criminal law and other measures but also that legal avenues be available to challenge and address any failure of state actors to comply with their due diligence obligation to prevent, investigate and punish acts of violence (Article 5, paragraph 2, of the convention).

208. Section 34 of the Law on Administrative Liability provides that a person who has suffered harm due to the conduct of a public body is entitled to compensation in accordance with state compensation rules under administrative violation proceedings.¹⁸⁰ In addition to seeking compensation from the state body, the harmed person may request compensation from the public official responsible for the violation under the Civil Procedure Law.

209. Where damage has been caused to a private person in criminal proceedings due to negligent conduct by state authorities and courts, such as failure to fulfil procedural duties, victims may turn to the state for compensation according to the Law on Compensation for Damage Caused in Criminal Proceedings and Administrative Offence Proceedings.¹⁸¹ Where an official has breached professional duties, disciplinary liability may apply, and in certain circumstances, liability may extend to criminal prosecution under the Criminal Law.

210. The Law on Compensation for Losses Caused by State Administration Institutions also allows individuals to seek compensation for loss or non-pecuniary harm from a wide range of public authorities, including prison and probation services, where their administrative acts or factual conduct is unlawful.¹⁸²

211. Beyond these formal procedures, individuals are entitled to submit complaints regarding general misconduct or omissions by state authorities. Article 92 of the constitution guarantees the right to individual complaints in such cases. While internal investigations are conducted, these appear to remain isolated examples rather than indicative of systematic oversight. It is unclear to what extent they are being used in relation to omissions linked to the protection of women from gender-based violence.

212. GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to systematically examine and address any practical and institutional barriers that impede the effective use that women victims of the different forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention make of existing civil and administrative law remedies for holding state officials accountable for failures to fulfil their obligations to diligently prevent, investigate and punish acts of violence covered by the

180. Law on Administrative Liability, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/id/303007-administrativas-atbildibas-likums.

181. Law on Compensation for Damage Caused in Criminal Proceedings and Administrative Offence Proceedings, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/295926-law-on-compensation-for-damage-caused-in-criminal-proceedings-and-administrative-offence-proceedings.

182. Law on Compensation for Losses Caused by State Administration Institutions, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/110746.

Istanbul Convention. Progress in this area should be monitored and evaluated through the systematic collection of data on the number of cases filed by victims and their outcomes.

2. Compensation (Article 30)

213. In Latvia, victims formally recognised in criminal proceedings have the right to seek compensation directly from the perpetrator within the criminal process. The decision to recognise a person as a victim is adopted *ex officio* or upon the person's request. A victim is entitled to both a substantive entitlement to compensation for material damage, non-material (moral) harm and physical suffering, and has the procedural right to be informed of available compensation mechanisms, including state compensation.¹⁸³ In cases of domestic violence and sexual violence, such recognition is of particular importance, as victims are automatically considered persons in need of special procedural protection.¹⁸⁴ Compensation claims may be submitted at any stage of the criminal proceedings until the commencement of the judicial investigation before the court of first instance, either in writing or orally, with oral applications formally recorded. The amount of compensation is determined by the court or, where applicable, by the prosecutor and is included in the final decision.¹⁸⁵ Where the victim considers the awarded amount insufficient, civil proceedings remain available under general tort law,¹⁸⁶ with any amount already awarded taken into account and with an exemption from state court fees. In the absence of information on the number of compensation claims filed by victims against perpetrators and their outcome, it is not, however, possible to assess whether the scheme effectively ensures compensation of women victims of violence from their perpetrators.

214. In parallel, Latvia operates a state-guaranteed compensation scheme administered by the State Court Administration, providing lump-sum financial support in narrowly defined categories of intentional criminal offences.¹⁸⁷ Eligibility is strictly consequence-based and limited to cases resulting in death, severe or moderately severe bodily injury, violation of sexual integrity or morality (including rape and sexual violence), trafficking in human beings or infection with HIV or hepatitis B or C. State compensation is not linked to actual expenses incurred and is capped at the equivalent of six minimum monthly wages.¹⁸⁸ In cases of rape and sexual violence, a differentiated 90% compensation tier applies within this overall cap following legislative amendments. A feature of the scheme that GREVIO welcomes is that compensation may be granted before the conclusion of criminal proceedings, once the person has been formally recognised as a victim, and irrespective of whether the perpetrator has been identified or convicted. Applications must be submitted within three years of victim recognition or awareness of the relevant facts, and decisions are taken within one month, with compensation paid as a single lump-sum transfer. Where compensation has already been received from the perpetrator, the state payment is reduced accordingly, and the state subsequently seeks recovery from the offender where possible.

215. GREVIO welcomes the availability of state guaranteed compensation for certain categories of eligible victims of violence against women and notes with satisfaction that the system is designed to ensure timely support. It notes in this regard that, under Latvian law, the effects of psychological harm — including mental disorders and trauma with permanent or long-term consequences affecting social adaptation — can legally amount to the effects of bodily injury for the purposes of criminal law, meaning that victims of psychological violence may also be eligible for state compensation. GREVIO also welcomes the authorities' efforts to raise awareness of the scheme through the dissemination of clear, comprehensive and accessible information materials, including leaflets distributed in public institutions and police stations, as well as through a free hotline providing information and guidance.¹⁸⁹ At the same time, GREVIO notes with concern that the restrictive eligibility criteria and

183. Section 97 of the Criminal Procedure Law.

184. *Ibid.*, Section 96.1. For further details, see Chapter VI, Measures of protection (Article 56).

185. Sections 350 and 351 of the Criminal Procedure Law.

186. Section 1635 of the Civil Law, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/225418-the-civil-law.

187. Sections 3 and 7 of the Law on State Compensation to Victims, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/en/id/136683-on-state-compensation-to-victims.

188. As of 1 January 2025, the statutory minimum monthly wage in Latvia was €780: www.lm.gov.lv/en/minimum-monthly-wage.

189. Hotline number 800018010.

capped amounts may considerably limit the scheme's capacity to address the full range of victims of violence against women and the harm they suffer. Victims that do not meet the threshold of having suffered at least moderate bodily injury or sexual violence fall beyond this scope, which excludes cases involving long-term psychological trauma – a frequent consequence of intimate partner violence. GREVIO recalls that under Article 29 of the Istanbul Convention, state compensation should be awarded in situations where the victim has sustained serious bodily injury or impairment of health, which includes serious psychological damage caused by acts of psychological violence, as referred to in Article 33.¹⁹⁰

216. In this regard, GREVIO notes that available studies indicate that psychological violence against women in Latvia is significantly under-recognised and under-recorded in official statistics, despite survey evidence pointing to its prevalence.¹⁹¹ This under-recognition may affect victims' access to criminal-law status and, consequently, to compensation mechanisms that are contingent on formal recognition as victims of a criminal offence. Moreover, GREVIO notes that a Constitutional Court judgment in 2024 finding statutory compensation caps incompatible with the constitutional right to appropriate redress in cases of death, and the resulting legislative amendments scheduled for 2026, highlight ongoing concerns as to the adequacy of compensation in the most serious cases of harm.¹⁹² GREVIO notes with concern that the statutory cap, combined with the lump-sum and non-expense-linked nature of state compensation, may prevent victims of violence against women from obtaining compensation commensurate with the actual harm suffered, including financial, medical and care-related losses, as well as non-material harm. Gaps seem to exist between the legal framework on compensation and its effective and adequate implementation in practice in relation to cases of the different forms of violence against women.¹⁹³

217. Last, GREVIO notes that according to additional data provided by the authorities, a substantial majority of requests for state compensation result in a decision granting compensation.¹⁹⁴ Most of these concern sexual crimes.¹⁹⁵ At the same time, GREVIO regrets that there are no disaggregated data on recipients of state compensation and that statistical reporting is organised primarily by legal offence categories, which makes it impossible to assess the extent to which women victims of violence effectively benefit from the state compensation scheme in practice. Moreover, data on compensation awarded to family members of deceased victims are not available.

218. **GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to:**

- a. **assess the adequacy and effectiveness of the compensation mechanisms available under Latvian law for victims of any of the forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention with a view to expanding its scope to cover all forms of violence against women where the criterion of serious bodily injury or impairment of health is met;**
- b. **systematically collect, analyse and take into account, for the purposes of such assessment, data on the number of criminal and civil proceedings in which perpetrators have been ordered to pay compensation to such victims, as well as the number of cases in which state compensation has been awarded, including to the dependants of women who have died as a result of such violence.**

190. Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, paragraph 166.

191. EIGE, Gender-based violence: Latvia – Country profile, available at: www.eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence/countries/latvia.

192. Constitutional Court of Latvia, Judgment of 27 June 2025, Case No. 2024-07-01, available at: www.satversmestiesa.lv/en/case-no-2024-07-01.

193. Submission by the MARTA Centre, p. 18.

194. 592 out of 715 applications in 2023, 636 out of 763 in 2024 and 613 out of 692 in 2025 up to October.

195. 241 cases in 2023, 200 cases in 2024 and 249 cases in 2025 up to October.

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

219. 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 Istanbul Convention seeks to ensure that incidents of violence covered by the convention, in particular domestic violence, are taken into account in decisions on custody and visitation rights to ensure that the exercise of these rights does not harm the rights and safety of the victim or children.¹⁹⁶

220. Latvia's civil procedure framework requires courts, when adjudicating disputes concerning custody or visitation rights with children, to take into account all instances in which the person seeking such rights has used violence against the child or the child's parent.¹⁹⁷ Additional safeguards may enhance the protection of victims of violence against women and their children by preventing courts from adjourning divorce proceedings for reconciliation purposes where the divorce is related to violence against the spouse requesting the divorce or against a child, thus limiting procedural delays that could prolong victims' exposure to harm.¹⁹⁸ Courts may also order urgent and enforceable protective measures at any stage of civil proceedings, including prior to or during divorce proceedings, as a safeguard for victims and their children.¹⁹⁹ GREVIO welcomes these provisions, as they recognise violence against a parent as a legally relevant factor in divorce proceedings and related determinations of parental responsibilities, thereby reflecting the well-established link between intimate partner violence and risks to children and prioritising the safety of victims over reconciliation considerations. The Civil Law further reinforces these safeguards and broadens the recognition of violence in family law by allowing for accelerated divorce on grounds of violence against the spouse and/or the child (section 74.1 of the Civil Law), excluding persons who have committed violence from adoption (section 163.4.1) and guardianship (section 242.5), and permitting the termination of parental custody rights where violence has occurred (section 203.1.5). Custody and access disputes are adjudicated by courts of ordinary jurisdiction, which are required to examine all family-related claims together, which may enable a holistic assessment of violence, child welfare and protective measures.²⁰⁰

221. In practice, and in support of family law courts, the Orphans and Custody Courts occupy a pivotal position in the implementation of Article 31 of the Istanbul Convention.²⁰¹ As municipally established administrative bodies, they conduct family risk assessments, gather information from schools, health professionals and police, interview children – often with psychological support – and submit written opinions to courts proposing solutions in the child's best interests, including in the context of family separation after domestic violence. GREVIO notes that while such opinions formally constitute one piece of evidence among others, they carry significant practical weight. Orphans and Custody Courts also exercise direct protective powers, including ordering the immediate removal of a child from the family where violence against the child is identified, subject to judicial review within short statutory time limits. They thus perform functions related to child-protection services. According to information provided by the authorities, the Child Protection Centre has developed a regularly updated handbook for Orphan's Courts, consolidating 25 methodological recommendations covering various aspects of child rights protection.

196. In the case of *Bizdiga v. the Republic of Moldova* (Application No. 15646/18, 17 October 2023, available at <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/?i=001-228152>), 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 weighed in the assessment of 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, available at <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/?i=001-228151>), 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. Please note that these two judgments have not yet become final at the time of the adoption of this report.

197. Section 244.9 of the Civil Procedure Law, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/en/id/50500-civil-procedure-law.

198. *Ibid.*, section 240.2 and Chapter 30.5 on temporary protection against violence.

199. *Ibid.*, Chapter 30.5 on temporary protection against violence.

200. *Ibid.*, section 238.1.

201. These bodies are regulated in the Law on Orphans and Custody Courts, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/139369.

222. Women's rights organisations have alerted GREVIO to the fact that Orphans and Custody Courts face serious shortcomings in their response to domestic violence, including the absence of consistent specialist training on domestic abuse and a victim-centred approach. They further report that even where violence is well documented, decisions may exclude children from protection measures or allow custody or visitation arrangements that expose victims and children to ongoing risk, reflecting a systemic failure to understand the cyclical nature of domestic violence, which may continue in the form of post-separation violence, with separation from an abusive intimate partner representing an increased risk for women and their children.²⁰² GREVIO notes that while the Child Protection Centre provides regular training for Orphan's and Custody Court employees on child rights and violence identification, this does not appear to systematically address the specific dynamics of domestic violence as required under the Istanbul Convention.

223. With regard to custody and visitation arrangements in contexts of domestic violence, courts may order safeguards such as the temporary suspension of visitation rights, supervised visitation ensured by the Orphans and Custody Courts or contact in the presence of a designated contact person. Contact persons may be professionals or trusted family members and may also facilitate child handovers to avoid direct contact between the victim parent and the perpetrator. While GREVIO welcomes the availability of these measures, it notes structural vulnerabilities that may undermine compliance with Article 31 of the convention, including reliance on informal or family-based supervision and the limited ability to restrict contact in situations of coercive control or post-separation abuse.

224. The Ombudsman's Office has highlighted persistent shortcomings in the enforcement of custody and access decisions, noting ongoing difficulties in ensuring children's access rights, inadequate involvement and guidance for social services, the uneven implementation of methodological materials for working with high-conflict families, and a continued lack of effective action by the responsible ministries despite repeated recommendations.²⁰³ GREVIO notes information provided by the authorities that the Ministry of Welfare has developed a methodology for social work with families with children, and that training on this has been delivered to over 300 social workers in municipal social services, with 2,036 social work specialists having improved their professional competence in 2024. However, mandatory application of the methodology across all municipal social services is not foreseen until January 2028, meaning that implementation remains uneven in the interim period.

225. Women's rights organisations and experts in the field have alerted GREVIO to the fact that custody and visitation decisions frequently fail to adequately account for domestic violence, with protection measures sometimes excluding children or allowing unsupervised contact with abusive parents, and that courts or social services may encourage "reconciliation" in cases of violence, leading victims to consent out of fear – particularly of losing custody of their children – thereby allowing abuse to continue.²⁰⁴ GREVIO notes with concern that these practices point to systemic shortcomings in the understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence, which are marked by dominance and control, frequently by a male partner against a woman, and the use of children as instruments of continued control in post-separation contexts.

226. Moreover, GREVIO notes with grave concern that children who witness domestic violence may be left without adequate protection and may nonetheless be required to maintain contact with the perpetrator, facilitated by their families. While violence against a parent is formally a relevant factor in custody and access decisions and may be treated as a violation of the child's rights for protective purposes, the legal framework establishes a strong presumption in favour of maintaining contact with both parents. The Civil Law enshrines the child's right to personal relations and direct contact with both parents, requires that any restriction of these rights be justified and assessed as being in the child's best interests, and permits limitations on parental rights primarily in cases

202. Submission by the MARTA Centre, pp. 11-12.

203. Ombudsman's Office, Annual Report 2024, 66-67, available at: www.tiesibsargs.lv/en/about-us/annual-reports/.

204. Submission by the MARTA Centre, pp. 18, 24.

involving violence directed against the child.²⁰⁵ This creates a normative hierarchy that prioritises child-directed violence over partner violence and may significantly limit protection for children exposed to violence against their mothers, contrary to the Istanbul Convention's recognition that witnessing domestic violence constitutes serious harm to children.

227. GREVIO further notes with concern references by the authorities and professionals to concepts such as “mutual violence”, which risk obscuring patterns of coercive control and power asymmetry inherent in domestic violence. Such framing may lead to treating victims and perpetrators as equally responsible, thereby undermining risk assessment, identification of the primary aggressor and the prioritisation of child and victim safety. The Istanbul Convention's obligation enshrined in Article 31 to ensure that incidents of domestic violence be considered in any decisions regarding child custody and visitation after separation would require a thorough primary aggressor analysis, as well as the screening for any cases for a history of abuse. It is essential to establish the existence of a history of intimate partner violence in order to ensure outcomes that secure the safety and rights of both women victims and their children. In this context, GREVIO notes that on occasion the concept of parental alienation is invoked before the courts to explain the reluctance of children who witness intimate partner violence by one parent against the other to visit the perpetrator. It emphasises that reliance on such concepts risks disregarding intimate partner violence and the associated dangers to women and children, as repeatedly highlighted in other GREVIO evaluation reports²⁰⁶ and international expert documents.²⁰⁷

228. Last, GREVIO notes with concern that protection for women victims of domestic violence and their children may be undermined in practice by abusive litigation or harmful use of procedural avenues open to the perpetrator. For example, perpetrators may file repeated complaints or applications, obliging victims to repeatedly recount their experiences and exposing them to secondary victimisation.

229. GREVIO urges the Latvian authorities to take the necessary measures to ensure that all judicial and administrative bodies involved in determining custody and visitation rights systematically and effectively take into account incidents of violence against women, including situations where children are exposed to such violence, notably by:

- a. ensuring the systematic screening of all custody and visitation cases by courts and Orphans and Custody Courts to identify whether domestic violence, including coercive control and post-separation abuse, has occurred or has been reported;**
- b. ensuring that allegations or indications of violence are duly investigated and assessed through strengthened co-operation between family courts, Orphans and Custody Courts, criminal courts, law-enforcement agencies, health and education authorities and specialist support services;**
- c. incorporating structured risk-assessment procedures into custody and visitation proceedings, explicitly addressing the risks arising from children's exposure to violence against a parent;**
- d. ensuring that only professionals with specialist training and demonstrated expertise in domestic violence and the requirements of the Istanbul Convention are appointed to provide opinions or assessments in custody and visitation cases with a history of violence;**

205. Sections 181, 182 and 203.1.5 of the Civil Law.

206. See for example GREVIO's first thematic evaluation report on Denmark, paragraph 116; and on Serbia, paragraph 144.

207. See the Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences, 13 April 2023, available at: www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc5336-custody-violence-against-women-and-violence-against-children. See also the Communique on Parental Alienation of the Committee of Experts of the MESECVI and the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and Girls of the UN, 12 August 2022: www.ohchr.org/en/edvaw/violence-against-women-and-child-custody-issues; and the statement of December 2017 by the European Association for Psychotherapy (EAP), which draws attention to the fact that the concepts of “parental alienation syndrome” (PAS) and “parental alienation” (PA) are unsuitable for use in any psychotherapeutic practice. This statement by the EAP, which is made up of 128 psychotherapy organisations from 41 European countries, acts as a guiding principle for European psychotherapists.

- e. preventing the use, by courts, experts and social services, of concepts that obscure power imbalances, minimise violence or place responsibility on victims for the consequences of abuse;
- f. ensuring the appropriate and effective use of legal provisions allowing the restriction, suspension or subjecting to safeguards of custody and visitation rights where violence is identified, including by ensuring that children exposed to domestic violence are systematically covered by protection measures and that supervision arrangements prioritise safety and independence;
- g. measuring progress in this area through the systematic collection and analysis of data and case law, demonstrating how incidents of violence are assessed and how decisions on custody and visitation rights are reasoned in light of such violence.

4. Civil consequences of forced marriages (Article 32)

230. The aim of Article 32 of the Istanbul Convention is to ensure that women and girls who free themselves from marriages concluded without their free and full consent do not suffer adverse consequences with regard to their civil status.

231. Under Latvia's Civil Law, a spouse may contest a marriage if it was concluded under the influence of criminal threats.²⁰⁸ Such an action must be brought within six months of the end of the influence of the threats. This constitutes a court-based civil procedure resulting in the annulment of the marriage, which is then deemed void *ab initio*. GREVIO notes with concern that the requirement to demonstrate "criminal threats", rather than a broader lack of free and full consent, may place a high evidentiary and legal burden on victims, requiring proof of the existence, seriousness and causal influence of such threats on consent. Moreover, in the context of forced marriage, this six-month time limit may constitute a significant obstacle, particularly where victims remain under ongoing control, experience trauma or face practical difficulties in leaving the marriage.

232. Underage marriage may also constitute grounds for annulment. Marriages involving persons below the age of 16 are absolutely prohibited and considered invalid and marriages involving 16 and 17 year olds without the required consent of parents or guardians and authorisation of the Orphans and Custody Court may likewise be declared invalid by a court.²⁰⁹ The right to seek annulment in such cases is not limited to the minor spouse and may be exercised by the child concerned (once capable of acting independently), parents or guardians, the prosecutor acting in the public interest, or the Orphans and Custody Court as the child-protection authority. Unlike annulment on the grounds of criminal threats, no limitation period applies in these cases.

233. In terms of financial costs associated with marriage annulment, minors are generally exempt from court fees under Latvian law. Where proceedings are initiated by the prosecutor or the Orphans and Custody Court, the child bears no procedural costs, and state-ensured legal aid is available and commonly used in cases involving children. In cases not involving children, persons who are granted state-ensured legal aid are exempt from court fees and related procedural costs,²¹⁰ subject to means- or status-based eligibility criteria laid down in the Law on State-Ensured Legal Aid.²¹¹

234. GREVIO notes that in the absence of information on the practical application of these annulment provisions, it cannot further assess whether and to what extent they are used in cases of forced marriage and with what outcomes. It is also unclear to what extent women and girls are aware of the possibility of seeking annulment of a marriage under the Civil Law. In this regard, GREVIO points to the importance of effective dissemination of information on legal remedies available to victims of all forms of violence against women.

208. Section 67 of the Civil Law.

209. Sections 32 and 33 of the Civil Law.

210. Section 57 of the Civil Procedure Law.

211. See Chapter VI, Legal aid (Article 57).

B. Criminal law

1. Psychological violence (Article 33)

235. GREVIO notes with satisfaction that the ratification of the Istanbul Convention has prompted Latvia to establish a specific criminal offence for psychological violence that reflects the definition provided in Article 33 of the convention. In July 2024, section 174.¹ was introduced into the Criminal Law, criminalising cruel or violent treatment of a close or intimate partner resulting in physical or psychological suffering.²¹²

236. This reform establishes psychological violence as a distinct criminal offence, without requiring evidence of accompanying physical harm or reliance on general offences such as coercion or threat. In doing so, the provision recognises psychological violence, including as a stand-alone form of abuse, as a manifestation of violence against women. The prescribed penalties range from deprivation of liberty for up to three years to short-term deprivation of liberty or probation supervision. For cases involving encouragement or assistance of suicide or attempted suicide, cruel treatment of the victim or the systematic degradation of a person's dignity, deprivation of liberty for up to five years may be imposed, replacing the previous maximum of three years. Where the victim is materially or otherwise dependent on the perpetrator, the maximum sentence increases to seven years' deprivation of liberty, excluding the possibility of temporary deprivation of liberty, probationary supervision or community service.

237. While the legislation allows for the prosecution of treatment causing psychological suffering, it does not explicitly refer to a course of conduct in addition to single incidents. It appears, nevertheless, to allow for an interpretation capable of capturing the pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour characteristic of psychological violence, given its reference to treatment resulting in mental suffering. This aligns with the standard of Article 33 of the Istanbul Convention, which aims to criminalise intentional conduct that seriously impairs a person's psychological integrity through coercion or threats, and which is intended to capture ongoing patterns of abusive behaviour rather than isolated acts.²¹³ GREVIO commends Latvia for adopting legislation that recognises psychological violence as a distinct and standalone criminal offence, marking a significant step forward in the implementation of the Istanbul Convention.

238. Information received by GREVIO indicates that the recently introduced section 174.¹ has been increasingly applied in practice since its entry into force. A total of 185 criminal proceedings under this provision were initiated in 2024, and a further 213 proceedings (encompassing 224 offences) were initiated in the first eight months of 2025.²¹⁴ These figures suggest an increased willingness among victims to report psychological violence following the introduction of the new legislation, underscoring the significance of establishing a clear legal basis for its criminalisation. GREVIO notes, however, that it lacks sufficient information to assess how this provision is implemented in practice by police, prosecutors and the courts.²¹⁵

239. GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to ensure the effective investigation, prosecution and sanctioning of acts of psychological violence by making full and consistent use of Article 174.¹ of the Criminal Law, including in cases involving patterns of coercive and controlling behaviour.

2. Stalking (Article 34)

240. In 2017, a specific criminal offence of stalking was introduced into the Criminal Law, which GREVIO welcomes. Section 132.¹ criminalises conduct consisting of repeated or continuous tracking and surveillance of another person, the expression of threats towards that person or unsolicited communication, where the victim has reasonable grounds to fear for their safety or that of their

212. Criminal Law, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/88966.

213. Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, paragraphs 179-181.

214. Submission by the MARTA Centre, p. 20.

215. See Chapter VI, General obligations (Article 49) and Immediate response, prevention and protection (Article 50).

relatives. Its formulation captures a broad spectrum of behaviours typically associated with stalking, including repeated threatening conduct, and reflects the Istanbul Convention's emphasis on patterns of behaviour that while not necessarily criminal when taken in isolation become so when assessed cumulatively for their capacity to instil fear. As such, the provision encompasses the forms of conduct envisaged in Article 34 of the Istanbul Convention and complies with the standards set therein.

241. In 2023, further legislative amendments strengthened the sanctions applicable to stalking in the context of domestic and intimate partner violence, increasing the maximum penalty for such conduct to three years' imprisonment. The amendments clarify that aggravated penalties apply where the offence is committed against a person related to the perpetrator in the first or second degree of kinship, a spouse or former spouse, a current or former intimate partner, or a person with whom the perpetrator shares or has shared a household. By reinforcing the applicable sanctions for stalking in these circumstances, the reform recognises the gravity and specific nature of stalking, further contributing to effective and dissuasive punishment and the Criminal Law's alignment with the Istanbul Convention. GREVIO further welcomes the extension of the scope of the provision to behaviour jeopardising not only the perceived safety of the victim but also that of their relatives, reflecting patterns frequently observed in stalking cases in which perpetrators target individuals close to the victim as a means of exerting coercive control or instilling fear.

242. GREVIO notes that following a ruling of the Supreme Court, the Latvian Parliament (Saeima) issued a statement in 2025 clarifying that the intention to create fear – which had been described in the explanatory memorandum to the original draft law as part of the subjective element of the offence – does not constitute a mandatory requirement under section 132.¹²¹⁶ This statement may guide judicial interpretation when applying the provision. GREVIO has had occasion to note across its evaluation reports that moving towards a behaviour-based definition, centred on the perpetrator's conduct rather than on proof of a specific result, constitutes a promising practice in the criminalisation of stalking and is in line with the approach envisaged by the Istanbul Convention.²¹⁷ At the same time, GREVIO emphasises the importance of providing clear interpretative guidance to ensure effective implementation in practice and cautions that ambiguities in this regard may create difficulties for law-enforcement bodies and the judiciary.

243. Finally, as regards the applicability of section 132.¹ to cases of stalking committed online or through digital technologies, GREVIO notes that the provision does not explicitly reference digital forms of stalking, but is worded broadly enough to encompass such conduct.

3. Physical violence (Article 35)

244. GREVIO welcomes the 2024 introduction of section 174.¹ into the Criminal Law, which criminalises physical violence – alongside psychological violence – in the context of domestic and intimate partner violence as a specific offence. This provision applies to cruel or violent treatment of a close or intimate partner resulting in physical harm where the harm inflicted does not reach the thresholds of serious, moderate or minor bodily injury, which are punishable under sections 125, 126 and 130 of the Criminal Law. Each of these general offences recognises the domestic or intimate relationship between the perpetrator and the victim as an aggravating circumstance when the harm is inflicted upon a person related to the perpetrator in the first or second degree of kinship, a spouse or former spouse, a current or former intimate partner, or a person with whom the perpetrator shares or has shared a household.

245. By criminalising physical violence both as a stand-alone offence in situations of domestic and intimate partner violence and as an aggravating factor within the general offences of bodily injury, Latvia's legal framework captures a wide spectrum of behaviours, irrespective of the severity of the harm caused. This approach strengthens protection against domestic violence by ensuring that even lower-level physical harm triggers a criminal-law response. These reforms comply with Article 35 of

216. The Announcement of the Parliament of Republic of Latvia on application of Section 132.1 of the Criminal Law", 16 October 2025, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/id/363792-par-kriminallikuma-132sup1sup-panta-piemerosanu.

217. See GREVIO's baseline evaluation report on Albania, paragraph 130.

the Istanbul Convention, which requires the criminalisation of any intentional act of physical violence against another person, regardless of the context in which it occurs.²¹⁸

246. GREVIO recalls that Article 35 also encompasses acts of physical violence resulting in the death of the victim. In this respect, GREVIO notes that the Criminal Law does not provide for an aggravated form of homicide where the killing is committed against a current or former spouse or intimate partner, or another person with whom the perpetrator shares or has shared a household. Consequently, the data collected on murders of women do not distinguish cases that occurred in the context of domestic or intimate partner violence, which significantly hampers the ability to identify gender-related killings of women and girls and to assess systemic shortcomings in their prevention and prosecution when applying the legal framework.

247. In the absence of disaggregated data, it is difficult to assess how law-enforcement bodies and the judiciary apply the recent legislative changes in practice or exercise their discretion when imposing penalties, which in the case of section 174.¹ vary greatly, ranging from probation supervision to deprivation of liberty of up to three years.²¹⁹ Moreover, GREVIO has been alerted to the fact that in some regions law-enforcement authorities continue to apply administrative penalties rather than initiating criminal proceedings, contrary to legislation implementing the standards of the Istanbul Convention.²²⁰

248. GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to ensure the practical application of Section 174.¹ of the Criminal Code with a view to imposing effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions.

4. Sexual violence, including rape (Article 36)

249. Sexual violence is criminalised in section 159 (rape) and section 160 (sexual assault) of Latvia's Criminal Law. Section 159 defines rape as sexual intercourse committed either by exploiting the victim's state of helplessness or against the will of the victim through violence, threat or abuse of trust, authority or other influence. Sanctions range from four to 10 years' imprisonment, extending up to life imprisonment for certain aggravated forms. Section 160 covers a broader category of sexual acts involving physical contact, committed under the same coercive or abusive circumstances, and provides for penalties of up to nine years' imprisonment for the basic offence and up to life imprisonment for aggravated forms. Both sections 159 and 160 include aggravated circumstances when the victim is a minor, with more severe penalties where the victim is under the age of 16.

250. In addition, section 161 criminalises sexual intercourse or other sexual acts involving physical contact between an adult and a person under the age of 16, where such acts occur without the coercive or abusive elements required under sections 159 and 160, and irrespective of the victim's consent. Latvia's Criminal Law also criminalises non-contact sexual acts directed at a minor under 16 or at a person in a helpless state when committed by an adult or under coercion (section 162). It further criminalises grooming a minor under 16 to engage in sexual activities or arranging to meet for such purposes, using information and communication technologies or other means of communication (Section 162.¹).

251. Moreover, sexual violence committed against a (former) spouse or intimate partner, and in situations of domestic violence, is explicitly criminalised and treated as an aggravating circumstance. This follows from section 48.1.15 of the Criminal Law.²²¹

252. GREVIO regrets that both sections 159 and 160 of the Criminal Law require that the perpetrator use violence or threats, or take advantage of the victim's helplessness or of a position of

218. See the Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, paragraph 187.

219. According to information provided by the authorities, disaggregated data on the completion of pre-trial criminal proceedings under Section 174.¹ is not currently available in a ready-made report format but may be developed in future.

220. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

221. See Chapter V, Sanctions and measures (Article 45).

trust, authority or other influence. GREVIO recalls that, pursuant to Article 36 of the Istanbul Convention, provisions on rape and sexual violence must be grounded in the principle that consent must be given voluntarily as the result of a person's free will, assessed in the context of the surrounding circumstances. GREVIO further emphasises that research on the neurobiology of sexual trauma, including studies of rape victims, demonstrates that "freezing" (tonic immobility) is a common physiological response, closely associated with subsequent post-traumatic stress disorder and severe depression.²²²

253. GREVIO acknowledges that the Latvian definition of rape reflects an awareness of the importance of consent by referring to sexual intercourse carried out against the will of the victim in section 159 of the Criminal Law. At the same time, this is qualified by requiring that the lack of consent be assessed through the perpetrator's use of violence or threats, or by taking advantage of the victim's helplessness, or of a position of trust, authority or other influence. In this regard, GREVIO underscores that the Convention's standard requires the conceptualisation of the criminal offence of sexual violence and rape solely as an act of a sexual nature without the victim's consent, without requiring statutory elements of violence, threats, helplessness, a position of trust or other.²²³ Prosecution would require a context-sensitive assessment of the evidence in order to establish, on a case-by-case basis, whether the victim has freely consented to it.

254. The concept of "helplessness" in Latvian law may be interpreted broadly to capture various forms of vulnerability that would, in practice, preclude valid consent. Similarly, a wide interpretation of the requirement to abuse trust or authority over the victim against the victim's will could take into account the power dynamics, subordination and psychological control that often accompany and facilitate rape. Such dynamics can indeed prevent a victim from expressing free and voluntary consent in the same way as physical force or explicit threats. However, despite the possibility of a sufficiently broad interpretation of the abusive element required under section 159, the offence continues to centre on the perpetrator's use of coercive means or exploitation of vulnerability rather than on the absence of freely given consent. Moreover, GREVIO notes that judicial practice sets a high threshold for establishing "helplessness". The Senate of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Latvia has held that helplessness is characterised by a cumulative set of physical and mental criteria, requiring that the victim either does not understand the nature and significance of the acts committed and therefore cannot offer resistance, or that she understands the acts but is physically unable to protect herself. This dual element narrows the interpretive possibility of encompassing all situations that must be criminalised as rape under the Istanbul Convention due to the lack of free will of the victim, including those involving psychological paralysis or tonic immobility, which might be present even if the victim has, in theory, sufficient cognitive (or physical) ability to understand the behaviour (and resist it). According to information provided by the authorities, Criminal Law commentaries interpret trust, authority and other influence broadly to encompass situations of psychological pressure and subordination and treat these elements as tools for establishing that the victim did not participate voluntarily. While recognising the interpretive reach of these concepts, GREVIO notes that reliance on broad interpretation of perpetrator-conduct elements cannot substitute for the structural anchoring of the offence in the principle of freely given consent, and that the commentary definition of helplessness — requiring that the victim was unable to understand the acts or to resist — continues to risk excluding situations of tonic immobility or psychological paralysis where the victim understands what is occurring but is physiologically unable to respond.

255. In view of the above, GREVIO calls for legislative measures to align the definition of rape with the Istanbul Convention by affirming that rape is rape, and that the decisive element is the absence of the victim's freely given consent. Where the circumstances involve particular abuse — such as the exploitation of helplessness, authority or trust — these could be treated as aggravating circumstances to ensure sanctions commensurate with the gravity of the offence.

222. Research studies show that a substantial number of victims do not resist the perpetrator in any way: tonic immobility is described as an involuntary, temporary state of motor inhibition in response to situations involving intense fear. In various studies, significant immobility was reported by 37% to 52% of sexual assault victims. See Moller A., Sondergaard H. P. and Helstrom L. (2017), "Tonic immobility during sexual assault – A common reaction predicting post-traumatic stress disorder and severe depression", *Acta Obstetrica et Gynecologica Scandinavica*, 96, pp. 932-993.

223. Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, paragraph 191.

256. GREVIO also notes with concern that, according to civil society representatives, rape remains one of the most under-reported crimes in Latvia, as many women refrain from reporting to the police due to fear of disbelief, shame, social stigma or the risk of secondary victimisation during criminal proceedings.²²⁴ Concerns have also been raised that victims' experiences may not be taken seriously, particularly in smaller municipalities where confidentiality cannot always be ensured and where law-enforcement personnel may lack specialist training in handling sexual violence cases.

257. **GREVIO urges the Latvian authorities to:**

- a. **fully incorporate the notion of freely given consent into sections 159 and 160 of the Criminal Law, in line with Article 36 of the Istanbul Convention;**
- b. **ensure adequate sanctions for all sexual acts committed without such consent, including in situations where the circumstances of the case preclude valid consent.**

5. Forced marriage (Article 37)

258. Latvia's Criminal Law does not provide a separate offence for forced marriage; instead, certain situations of forced marriage are prosecuted as a form of human trafficking under section 154.¹. Under section 154.².1, human trafficking is defined to include the recruitment, transport, transfer, concealment, accommodation or receipt of a person for the purpose of exploitation, carried out by means of violence or threats, deception or by exploiting a person's dependence, vulnerability or helplessness, or by giving or receiving material or other benefits to gain consent. Section 154.¹.2 clarifies that trafficking in minors is criminalised even when those "means" are not present. Section 154.².3 provides a broader definition of "exploitation" – it includes forcing a person into prostitution or other sexual exploitation, compelling them to work or to commit crimes or holding them in slavery or servitude. GREVIO notes with interest the amendments to the Criminal Law adopted on 19 March 2026 and entering into force on 4 April 2026, which expressly include forced marriage within the definition of exploitation. The punishment ranges between confiscation of property and the deprivation of liberty for up to eight years, or up to 12 years if the victim is a minor.

259. GREVIO recognises the potential overlap between forced marriage and trafficking in human beings. Forced marriage may be linked to sexual exploitation or labour exploitation and to financial or other benefits accruing to the wider family, such as immigration sponsorship. While the Istanbul Convention does not require parties to establish specific offences for each form of violence against women, its aim is to help them create the necessary legal framework to ensure robust intervention and effective prosecution by law-enforcement authorities. GREVIO has therefore pointed to the benefit of creating stand-alone offences for all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention.

260. While welcoming the amendments to Section 154.² of the Criminal Law, which expressly include forced marriage within the definition of exploitation in the context of trafficking in human beings and which may facilitate greater legal clarity and consistency in practice, GREVIO recalls, that Article 37 of the Istanbul Convention requires the criminalisation of all forms of conduct related to forced marriage, including forcing an adult or child into a marriage and luring an adult or child abroad for that purpose. On the one hand, certain forced marriage situations could fall under section 154 on trafficking, especially where they involve servitude or "other slavery-like" exploitation and where coercion or deception is used (the latter not being required for minors). At the same time, GREVIO notes that some forced marriage cases – particularly those involving psychological pressure, family or community coercion, or so-called family honour – may prove difficult to address solely within the trafficking framework, which requires the establishment of specific constituent elements, including the purpose of exploitation as defined in the provision.

261. GREVIO further notes the importance of ensuring that conduct covered by Article 37, paragraph 2, of the convention, including luring a person abroad for the purpose of forcing that

224. Submission by the MARTA Centre, p. 22.

person into marriage, can be effectively investigated and prosecuted in practice, including in situations involving psychological or family coercion and where exploitation may be difficult to establish independently from the intended marriage itself.

262. While the number of incidences of forced marriage in Latvia is estimated to be relatively low, the absence of data on the number of reports made to either social services or law-enforcement bodies makes it difficult to assess the true prevalence of this form of violence. GREVIO therefore calls attention to the need of engaging in research and awareness-raising activities relating to this form of violence and of empowering women and girls to seek support, including from social services and healthcare professionals.

263. GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to ensure that all forms of conduct covered by Article 37 of the Istanbul Convention, including forcing an adult or child into a marriage and luring an adult or child abroad for that purpose, are effectively and operationally addressed by law-enforcement authorities and courts.

6. Female genital mutilation (Article 38)

264. While Latvian legislation does not contain any specific offence criminalising female genital mutilation (FGM), the physical act of mutilation, as described in Article 38, paragraph *a*, of the Istanbul Convention, may be prosecuted as a form of serious bodily injury under section 125 of the Criminal Law. According to paragraph 14.2 of Annex 3 to the Law on the Procedures for the Coming into Force and Application of the Criminal Law, loss of an organ or its function constitutes serious bodily injury. Paragraph 16.3.c of the same law defines loss of an organ or its function as the full or partial removal of external genital organs, including infibulation, unless carried out for medical reasons. GREVIO welcomes the explicit inclusion of this conduct in the definition of serious bodily injury, in compliance with Article 38, paragraph *a*, of the convention.

265. However, the conduct of coercing, procuring or inciting someone to undergo female genital mutilation (as described in Article 38, paragraphs *b* and *c*) does not appear to be criminalised under other existing legal provisions. While Latvia's Criminal Law allows for punishing the aiding and abetting of the commission of the act of FGM itself (the conduct covered by Article 38, paragraph *a*), under the general provisions on joint participation (section 20 of the Criminal Law) in the offence of FGM as a form of serious bodily injury, this aligns only with the obligation set out under Article 41 of the convention – namely, to criminalise the offence of aiding and abetting corresponding to Article 38, paragraph *a*.

266. GREVIO has repeatedly pointed out that paragraphs *b* and *c* of Article 38 also demand the specific criminalisation of behaviour involving the intentional exercise of influence or coercion over a girl (or woman) who does not herself intend to undergo FGM.²²⁵ In practice, this aims to ensure that relatives or community members who incite, coerce or procure a girl to undergo FGM – even if they do not actively ensure the procedure is carried out – can incur criminal liability. In contrast, the crime of aiding and abetting under Latvian law requires the actual commission of the physical act of FGM; coercion or procurement of an adult woman (Article 38, paragraph *b*) or the incitement, coercion or procurement of a girl (Article 38, paragraph *c*) may involve conduct that falls below that threshold – and regardless of whether the harmful procedure is finally performed. Such conduct therefore remains outside the scope of any specific offence.

267. When it comes to the application of this provision in practice, it appears that very few cases exist and no convictions have been reached. This might be related to the low number of women and girls from communities that practise female genital mutilation residing in Latvia. It is vital to raise awareness about and obtain more knowledge on the subject of FGM as part of a more comprehensive effort to understand and address the situation of women belonging to the various migrant communities present in Latvia. This includes their specific issues and their exposure to the

225. See GREVIO's baseline evaluation reports on: Andorra, paragraphs 167-168; Finland, paragraphs 176-177; Serbia, paragraphs 191-192; and Spain, paragraphs 232-234.

risk of specific forms of violence, such as female genital mutilation, as well as any possible obstacles to seeking help and reporting.

268. GREVIO invites the Latvian authorities to align its Criminal Law with the requirements of Article 38, paragraphs *b* and *c*, of the Istanbul Convention. This would ensure that coercing or procuring a woman or girl, or additionally inciting a girl to undergo any of the acts listed in Article 38, paragraphs *b* and *c*, of the convention, is also punishable.

7. Forced abortion and forced sterilisation (Article 39)

269. Forced abortion is criminalised as a separate offence in section 136 of the Criminal Law. This provision foresees the temporary deprivation of liberty, probation supervision, public work or a fine for the intentional conduct of compelling a pregnant woman to have an abortion, if an abortion is performed as a result. GREVIO notes, however, that while the provision criminalises coercion, it does not fully capture all cases in which an abortion occurs without the woman's freely given and informed consent. As such, the law only partially aligns with Article 39 of the Istanbul Convention, which requires protection of reproductive autonomy in all situations where free and informed consent is absent. GREVIO further notes Section 135(4) of the Criminal Law, which establishes criminal liability for the unauthorised performance of an abortion against the will of a pregnant woman, with penalties of up to twelve years' deprivation of liberty. While welcoming this provision as an additional layer of protection, GREVIO notes that the standard of acting "against the will" of the woman does not fully correspond to the convention's requirement of freely given and informed consent, which encompasses not only situations of overt coercion but also those where consent is compromised by insufficient information, institutional pressure or abuse of authority, particularly in medical settings.

270. While forced sterilisation is not a separate offence, conduct under Article 39, paragraph *b*, of the convention may, as with female genital mutilation, be prosecuted as a form of serious bodily injury under section 125 of the Criminal Law. Paragraph 16.3.c of Annex 3 to the Law on the Procedures for the Coming into Force and Application of the Criminal Law defines loss of reproductive capacity (including the ability to have sexual intercourse, to fertilise or be fertilised, and to give birth) as a form of loss of an organ or its function, which constitutes serious bodily injury according to paragraph 14.2 of Annex 3 to the aforementioned law. The legislative framework of Latvia thus criminalises the conduct envisaged under Article 39, paragraphs *a* and *b*, of the Istanbul Convention.

271. GREVIO notes that no data have been made available regarding complaints or convictions for forced abortion under section 136 of the Criminal Law. As for forced sterilisation, it is unclear whether any of the convictions relating to causing serious bodily injury concern cases of this form of violence against women; therefore, it is difficult for GREVIO to assess the effective implementation of this provision of Latvia's Criminal Law.

272. GREVIO draws particular attention to the situation of women with disabilities living in residential institutions and those under guardianship, who may be especially vulnerable to forced abortion and sterilisation. It is crucial to ensure that medical interventions genuinely reflect the woman's own will to the greatest extent possible, rather than merely the guardian's judgment, and are not obtained in contexts of coerced consent or abuse of authority, including outside of formal state systems.

8. Sexual harassment (Article 40)

273. In 2024, Latvia prohibited sexual harassment as an administrative offence with the introduction of section 11.² into the Law on Administrative Penalties for Offences in the Field of Administration, Public Order and Use of the Official Language.²²⁶ This provision defines sexual harassment as any unwanted physical, verbal or written conduct of a sexual nature directed at

226. Law on Administrative Penalties for Offences in the Field of Administration, Public Order and Use of the Official Language, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/314808-law-on-administrative-penalties-for-offences-in-the-field-of-administration-public-order-and-use-of-the-official-language.

a person with the purpose or effect of violating his or her dignity and placing him or her in an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment, and imposes punishment of a fine of up to 140 penalty units. Prior to this change in legislation, sexual harassment was only addressed in the employment context, under section 29 of the Labour Law, which prohibits discrimination, including “harassment and instructions to discriminate”, on grounds such as sex (among other protected characteristics) and establishes employer liability for such prohibited behaviour.²²⁷ Furthermore, where harassment in any context escalates to a level constituting stalking, criminal liability may arise under section 132.¹ of the Criminal Law. Administrative proceedings for sexual harassment are conducted by the state police, which also has the institutional competence to investigate criminal sexual offences under the Criminal Law.

274. GREVIO notes with satisfaction the introduction of the administrative offence of sexual harassment following the ratification of the Istanbul Convention and its close alignment with the text of Article 40 of the convention. GREVIO welcomes this development as an important step towards a comprehensive prohibition of sexual harassment, which broadens the scope of regulation beyond the labour context, offering protection in public and private spaces and thus better aligning with the standards of the convention.

275. GREVIO acknowledges that the problem of sexual harassment in higher education settings in Latvia has prompted research and initiatives to understand its prevalence, including a large-scale study assessing its legal, psychological and sociological dimensions – with implementation recommendations addressed to all higher education institutions in Latvia.²²⁸ Nevertheless, GREVIO stresses that state authorities – not only educational institutions – must address all forms of sexual harassment in every context: labour, institutional, online and beyond.

276. In terms of the practical implementation of the legal framework, stakeholders have underscored that despite increased attention on workplace harassment, many victims still lack confidence to come forward and file complaints, often due to fear of retaliation, difficulties in proving the behaviour or the emotional and procedural burden associated with pursuing a case. GREVIO notes the occurrence of sexual harassment in institutional environments, including allegations involving women with disabilities in social care institutions, and incidents occurring in the context of asylum procedures.²²⁹ Given the heightened vulnerability of individuals in such contexts, which often entail power imbalances and dependency, it must be stressed that the authorities bear heightened responsibility to prevent and respond to such conduct effectively.

277. The newly introduced provision on sexual harassment is phrased broadly and without reference to context and thus could apply equally to offline and online harassment. However, GREVIO stresses the importance of ensuring that the law is applied in practice to the digital dimension of sexual harassment, acknowledging the distinct characteristics and risks posed by online environments.

278. GREVIO notes with regret that data on the number of complaints, the number of administrative proceedings initiated, sanctions imposed or their outcomes are unavailable. This, however, would be essential to assess the effectiveness of the new legal framework. As GREVIO has had the opportunity to establish in other evaluation reports, limited reporting, narrow contextual applicability of offences and inadequate data collection are among the main hindrances to the adequate evaluation of effectiveness.²³⁰

227. Labour Law, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/26019.

228. Ombudsman's Office, Study – Sexual harassment in higher education, 2024/2025, available at: www.tiesibsargs.lv/resource/izpete-seksualas-uzmaksanas-tematika/?utm.

229. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

230. See GREVIO's baseline evaluation reports on: Albania, paragraph 155; and Monaco, paragraphs 122-123.

279. **GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to ensure the effective implementation of section 11.² of the Law on Administrative Penalties for Offences in the Field of Administration, Public Order and Use of the Official Language on sexual harassment, both in the workplace and beyond, including in institutional and digital contexts, and to establish systematic data collection enabling the monitoring of its practical application and effectiveness.**

9. Unacceptable justifications for crimes, including crimes committed in the name of so-called honour (Article 42)

280. Article 42 of the Istanbul Convention includes a clear prohibition of historically used justifications for acts of violence against women, including domestic violence. Accordingly, the criminal law and criminal procedure law of states parties should not permit claims by the accused that their conduct was committed to prevent or punish a victim's suspected, perceived or actual transgression of cultural, religious, social or traditional norms or customs. The *ratio legis* underpinning this provision is that any victim-blaming attitude should be disallowed.²³¹

281. GREVIO notes with concern that Latvia's Criminal Law, in section 47.1.5, allows for mitigating circumstances when the offence has been committed under the influence of the "immoral behaviour" of the victim. This broad and ambiguous formulation could lead to unacceptable mitigation due to victim-blaming in cases of violence against women. As GREVIO has had the opportunity to note with concern, mitigating factors based on "motivations of positive moral and social values" have been used in parties to the convention to justify violence and blame the victim by invoking negative stereotypes about appropriate behaviour for men and women, potentially perpetuating the understanding that violence against women, including sexual violence, can be justifiable.²³² These are prejudices rooted in notions of women's inferiority or stereotyped roles that the convention aims to eradicate.

282. **GREVIO urges the Latvian authorities to align the relevant provisions of Latvia's Criminal Law with Article 42 of the Istanbul Convention and to take steps to ensure that the circumstances set out in Section 47.1.5 of the Latvian Criminal Law relating to the alleged immoral behaviour of the victim are not considered as mitigating circumstances in cases of violence against women.**

10. Sanctions and measures (Article 45)

283. The 2024 legislative reform in Latvia strengthened the sanctioning framework for crimes committed in the context of intimate partner and domestic violence. By introducing section 174.¹ into the Criminal Law, the minimum threshold of applicable sanctions for physical or psychological violence committed between persons related in the first or second degree of kinship, spouses or former spouses, persons who are or have been in a permanent intimate relationship or persons sharing a joint (undivided) household has been raised. Such conduct is punishable by probationary supervision or imprisonment for up to three years, unless the acts result in serious or moderate bodily injury, in which case the higher penalties provided under sections 125 and 126 of the Criminal Law apply.²³³

284. Furthermore, the 2024 amendments extended criminal liability for several other offences committed in intimate partner or domestic contexts, as defined above – including intentional bodily harm, threats to commit murder or serious bodily harm, and stalking. Under the new rules, these crimes are no longer punishable by community service or fines only, but must now carry more severe sanctions, ranging from probationary supervision to deprivation of liberty. GREVIO welcomes this

231. See GREVIO's baseline evaluation reports on: Albania, paragraphs 157-159; Italy, paragraphs 202-205; Portugal, paragraphs 176-178; and Türkiye, paragraphs 252-258.

232. See GREVIO's baseline evaluation report on Albania, paragraphs 157-159.

233. In cases of minor bodily injury under section 130, which carries a lower maximum penalty (up to one year of imprisonment), Section 174.1 may apply as the *lex specialis* where its elements are fulfilled.

development, which follows the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, so that Latvia's legislation can now be regarded as largely providing adequate sanctions for acts of violence against women, in line with the requirements of Article 45 of the convention.

285. However, GREVIO notes with concern that the minimum penalty for sexual harassment remains a fine. In this regard, GREVIO has had occasion to note that the sanction of fines when used in cases of violence against women, particularly domestic violence, can have a negative impact on the victim and create additional, financial insecurities for women and children as victims.²³⁴ Forced marriage, prosecuted as human trafficking under Section 154.1, carries a principal penalty of imprisonment of up to eight years, with confiscation of property as an additional sanction. As regards forced abortion, a distinction must be drawn between two separate offences: Section 136 of the Criminal Law criminalises the coercion of a pregnant woman into undergoing an abortion — where the woman is pressured into a form of coerced consent — and provides for a minimum penalty of a fine; Section 135(4) criminalises the performance of an abortion against the woman's will, as well as cases resulting in her death or other serious consequences, and provides for imprisonment of three to twelve years as the only applicable sanction. GREVIO notes with concern that the fine minimum for the coercion offence under Section 136 does not reflect the seriousness of the violation of reproductive autonomy involved.

286. Moreover, GREVIO notes that the absence of sufficient data makes it difficult to assess whether courts, in practice, impose sanctions proportionate to the seriousness of the offence. It is not known how many of the reported cases do not reach the courts, for example because public prosecutors apply pretrial conditional measures, and are therefore never adjudicated. Where cases do go to court, it is difficult to establish whether judges utilise the full range of available punishments, or whether more severe sanctions such as imprisonment are imposed only rarely. Similarly, there is no comprehensive data on how many sentences result in suspensions rather than active sanctions. This lack of information hinders any robust evaluation of the effectiveness and deterrent effect of the legal framework in practice.

287. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to ensure, through legislative and other appropriate measures, that sentences and measures imposed for domestic violence offences are effective, proportionate and dissuasive, including by collecting relevant data on sentences imposed and reviewing sentencing practices with a view to developing clear criteria consistent with the requirements of Article 45 of the Istanbul Convention.

11. Aggravating circumstances (Article 46)

288. Section 48.1 of the Criminal Law of Latvia provides a list of aggravating circumstances. These include recidivism (repeated offences); offences committed by a group of persons; offences committed by abusing a position of authority or trust; offences that caused serious consequences; offences committed against a minor or against a person by exploiting their helplessness or immaturity; offences committed against a person whose dependence on the perpetrator is exploited; offences committed using weapons; and offences committed in the presence of a minor when the offence concerns a person's health, morality or sexual inviolability. Notably, section 48.1.15 of the Criminal Law treats as an aggravating circumstance any violent offence, threat of violence or offence against morality and sexual inviolability when committed against a close relative (first or second degree), a spouse or former spouse, a person with whom the perpetrator has had a permanent intimate relationship or a person with whom the perpetrator shares a household.

289. GREVIO notes that Latvia's framework of aggravating circumstances mostly aligns with the requirements of Article 46 of the convention. A notable exception is the criteria for an intimate relationship, which under Latvian law must be permanent. This would not include offences against anyone the perpetrator has had an intimate relationship of a lesser duration or intensity with, which

234. See GREVIO's baseline evaluation reports on: Albania, paragraph 160; Finland, paragraph 183; Monaco, paragraph 130; Montenegro, paragraph 198; and Türkiye, paragraph 260.

might however occur in the context of dating relationships, or as revenge against a woman ending a short-term relationship early.

290. Moreover, GREVIO notes that several offences – such as stalking and psychological, physical or sexual violence – provide for aggravated forms where the acts are committed within a close relationship or domestic context. In these cases, the relational element operates as a constituent element of the aggravated offence, in addition to the general aggravating circumstances listed in section 48.1 of the Criminal Law. By contrast, the provisions on murder and manslaughter (Chapter XII of the Criminal Law) do not expressly recognise the domestic or intimate relationship context as an aggravating circumstance. Ensuring that the full range of aggravating circumstances applies to all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention, including physical violence resulting in the death of the victim, would be essential to allow courts to impose the full sentencing range in cases relevant to violence against women. GREVIO notes that this is particularly pertinent in the context of gender-related killings of women and girls.

291. Furthermore, the lack of data makes it difficult to assess how often and how effectively aggravating circumstances are applied by the judiciary for all forms of violence covered under the Istanbul Convention. In this regard, GREVIO notes the recurring challenge resulting from limited efforts to inform the judiciary of the full set of aggravating circumstances listed in Article 46 of the convention – for instance through sentencing guidelines or training.²³⁵

292. **GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to take appropriate measures to ensure that all circumstances listed in Article 46 of the Istanbul Convention are, in practice, considered as aggravating circumstances by the courts.**

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

293. In Latvia, alternative dispute resolution (often referred to mediation in the Latvian context) is available in both criminal and civil law proceedings, but it is not mandatory in any context. Under the legal framework, mediation is not mandatory in either case but framed as a right of the victim, and victims are routinely informed of the possibility of mediation. In certain circumstances, courts are obliged to refer parties to civil proceedings to the possibility of mediation but there is no obligation for parties to accept or engage in mediation if they choose not to do so.

294. Under Latvian criminal procedure, victim–offender mediation has been available since 2005 and is carried out by the State Probation Service.²³⁶ Mediation is framed as a fundamental right of the victim to settle with the person who caused harm and to receive information on the process and its consequences.²³⁷ Officials inform victims of this right, but there is no legal obligation to offer mediation at a fixed stage of proceedings; the process is initiated only if the victim and the perpetrator agree to participate. Mediation may be conducted at any point in the criminal proceedings, including after conviction while the offender is serving a sentence, but it does not replace the criminal process and does not affect the state's duty to prosecute.

295. In civil proceedings, judges are required to offer parties the option of mediation at several stages of the proceedings.²³⁸ Courts send both parties information on mediation opportunities, and any party may apply for mediation at any time during the case, including after commencement of a case, when preparing a case for trial and at the preliminary case hearing, and also during legal proceedings, until the examination on the merits is completed. In family disputes, particularly those involving child custody and visitation rights, courts are obliged to propose mediation. However,

235. See GREVIO's baseline evaluation reports on: Denmark, paragraph 181; Montenegro, paragraph 204; and Sweden, paragraph 194.

236. Section 381 of the Criminal Procedure Law.

237. Section 97.1.4 and section 97.7 of the Criminal Procedure Law.

238. Section 148.1.3 and sections 149.2 and 151.3 of the Civil Procedure Law. For more details, see European e-Justice Portal, Mediation in EU countries – Latvia, available at: www.e-justice.europa.eu/topics/taking-legal-action/mediation/mediation-eu-countries/lv_en.

neither the court nor any other authority may force parties to enter mediation, and both must consent voluntarily for the process to proceed. Moreover, Orphans and Custody Courts can also suggest mediation in family disputes involving children. To facilitate the use of alternative dispute resolution, Latvia adopted the Mediation Law in 2014, which emphasises parties' autonomy to decide whether to participate, whom to select as a mediator and to discontinue or terminate mediation at any time, with or without reaching an agreement.²³⁹ Courts may stay proceedings if both parties agree to mediation, and the obligation of civil courts to inform parties about mediation may, due to the authority of the court, be experienced by some litigants as an encouragement or as implying greater significance than a purely informational notice.

296. Latvia promotes mediation and disseminates information widely, including through the Mediation in Family Disputes project and materials developed by the Ministry of Justice and the Council of Certified Mediators.²⁴⁰ State-funded programmes provide free mediation sessions for families with disputes involving children, and such support is available even after court proceedings have begun.

297. While mediation is formally voluntary,²⁴¹ GREVIO notes with concern that it is actively encouraged and supported in practice in both criminal and civil law procedures, including in cases of violence against women and domestic violence. As GREVIO has had the opportunity to note, caution is required when proposing mediation, as practices that encourage victims and perpetrators to reach agreements or amicable settlements, particularly where refusal may entail the risk of adverse consequences for the victim, may lead victims to perceive mediation as the only viable course of action.²⁴² Domestic violence by a male partner against his female spouse or partner is inherently indicative of a power imbalance that can compromise the ability to negotiate fairly. A woman who has experienced domestic violence may not be able to enter the mediation process on an equal footing with the abuser, whether in criminal or family law contexts. Victims of violence against women and domestic violence may face heightened risk of intimidation or domination in alternative dispute resolution processes if sufficient safeguards are not systematically in place. As GREVIO has had the opportunity to note, professionals involved in voluntary mediation proceedings must be trained to recognise and respond to the gendered nature of power imbalances, especially in cases involving violence against women.²⁴³ GREVIO notes information provided by the authorities that training for judges and mediation professionals has been carried out in 2025, including with emphasis on the unsuitability of mediation in domestic violence cases. Accordingly, GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to build on these efforts by ensuring the systematic and sustained provision of adequate training for mediation professionals and judges,²⁴⁴ and the development of clear protocols and guidance for professionals.²⁴⁵

298. Moreover, GREVIO emphasises the importance of ensuring the active screening of cases proposed for mediation for a history of domestic violence. GREVIO notes with concern that such precautions do not seem to be applied systematically across institutions and stakeholders in Latvia.

299. Moreover, women's rights and civil society organisations have alerted GREVIO to the fact that courts sometimes encourage mediation in disputes involving custody rights or visitation, even where there is a history of violence, and that victims may agree out of fear, for example of losing custody or to "please" the court, potentially allowing violence to continue.²⁴⁶

239. Mediation Law, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/266615.

240. www.sertificetimediatori.lv/mediacijas-pakalpojumi-gimenes-stridu-risinasana/; www.e-justice.europa.eu/topics/taking-legal-action/mediation/family-mediation/family-mediation/lv_en.

241. Section 13 of the State Probation Service Law (available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/82551) stipulates that specialists from the State Probation Service shall ensure that the victim and a probation client can voluntarily engage in the process of mediation.

242. See GREVIO first thematic evaluation reports on: Spain, paragraph 132; and Italy, paragraph 114.

243. See GREVIO's baseline evaluation reports on: Belgium, paragraph 168; France, paragraph 211; and the Netherlands, paragraph 242.

244. See GREVIO's baseline evaluation reports on: Belgium, paragraph 170; France, paragraph 212; Serbia, paragraph 208; and Türkiye, paragraph 270.

245. See GREVIO's baseline evaluation reports on: Finland, paragraph 193; and the Netherlands, paragraph 247.

246. Submission by the MARTA Centre, p. 24.

300. At the same time, GREVIO welcomes efforts by the Latvian authorities to mitigate some of these risks for victims of violence against women. According to the authorities, mediation in cases of violence should remain exceptional and criminal proceedings are initiated *ex officio* in serious crimes such as sexual abuse or intimate partner violence, regardless of whether mediation has been requested by both parties. Additionally, GREVIO welcomes Latvia's ongoing efforts to develop screening indicators to assess cases for suitability for mediation and to reduce the use of mediation in the context of violence against women, recognising that perpetrators may otherwise exert control as a result of power advantages. However, available information on the practical implementation, progress and effectiveness of these efforts is limited, preventing a comprehensive assessment at this stage.

301. Last, GREVIO notes the authorities' assurance that certified mediators receive training that includes awareness of power dynamics such as those present in cases of domestic violence. In this regard, GREVIO notes that such standards must be consistently and uniformly upheld across all proceedings and that the existence of non-certified mediators, for whom such training is not legally required, may hinder these efforts.

302. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to uphold and effectively enforce the prohibition of mandatory reconciliation in family law proceedings, particularly those concerning child custody where there is a history of violence against women and domestic violence; to ensure that the voluntary nature of mediation is properly understood by institutions and victims; and to continue developing and implementing robust guidelines and training on screening family law cases for domestic violence.

VI. Investigation, prosecution, procedural law and protective measures

303. 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 of the various forms of violence covered therein.

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

304. 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.

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

305. In Latvia, law-enforcement functions are carried out by the state police and municipal police. Both services play a role in responding to incidents of domestic violence, including in line with the obligations set out in Articles 49 and 50 of the Istanbul Convention.

306. GREVIO welcomes the law-enforcement authorities' stated commitment to a zero-tolerance approach to domestic violence and its increasing treatment as a public concern rather than a private matter, which appears to be progressively internalised across the law-enforcement sector. The prevention of domestic violence, covering emotional, physical and other forms of harm, is formally identified as a priority of the state police and reportedly pursued in collaboration with social services and other institutions.²⁴⁷ The legislation governing the police contains relevant provisions in this regard, notably by imposing an obligation on officers to prevent immediate threats in situations where a person in or near a dwelling is likely to endanger the life, liberty or health of a person permanently residing there, pending judicial consideration of temporary protection against violence.²⁴⁸

307. Since 2014, Latvia has introduced a series of legislative reforms aimed at establishing a more comprehensive system of protection against violence, including in situations where law-enforcement authorities lack sufficient grounds to initiate criminal or administrative proceedings. These reforms have primarily focused on general violence prevention and the protection of children and include amendments to the Criminal Procedure Law, Law on Police, the Law on the Protection of Children's Rights, the Orphans and Custody Courts Law and the Criminal Law, among other fields of law.

308. While GREVIO acknowledges the overall relevance of these measures, given that violence against women and domestic violence frequently occur in broader contexts of family violence and in connection with child-protection concerns, it stresses that the different forms of violence against women, including intimate partner violence against women, present distinct challenges that require dedicated and targeted responses from law-enforcement agencies that are fully informed of the specific vulnerabilities and dependencies of women and the cyclical nature of abuse in intimate relationships. Law-enforcement officials frequently approach instances of domestic and sexual violence, if perpetrated by a family member or intimate partner, as an issue adjacent to, or subsumed under, child-protection concerns, or framed primarily within the context of alcohol abuse. While such factors may be present in some cases, this framing risks contributing to the normalisation of intimate partner violence against women or the invisibility of more concealed, yet widespread, forms of violence not typically associated with child-protection concerns. GREVIO has on other occasions stressed that low awareness of the dynamics and root causes of violence against women often leads

247. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

248. Section 10.21 of the Law on Police, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/67957.

to its being perceived not as a manifestation of unequal power relations between women and men, but rather as an individual problem linked to alcohol or substance addiction, mental health conditions, personality traits or poverty.²⁴⁹ GREVIO underlines the need to intensify efforts to challenge such assumptions and attitudes, in particular among frontline professionals.

309. Against this background, GREVIO welcomes the recently introduced section 174.¹ of the Criminal Law on violence against a close person, which enables police intervention in cases where physical violence cannot be readily established, thereby allowing law-enforcement officials to address the broader range of harm that women victims may experience.

310. GREVIO also welcomes the introduction of a formal reporting duty through regulation amendments that established a mandatory questionnaire for police officers responding to “family conflict situations”.²⁵⁰ This builds on a pilot project carried out in the city of Liepāja, in the Kurzeme region, which sought to enhance police response through training, procedural co-ordination and communication with social services and NGOs.²⁵¹ The project was associated with a marked increase in emergency barring orders, suggesting improved identification and initial protective measures. The use of a standardised evaluation form and mandatory electronic reporting has the potential to facilitate risk assessment, rapid response and co-ordinated follow-up with social services, representing a welcome step towards systematised multi-agency co-ordination. In practice, officers are required to compile a report for each call, noting the presence of children or other vulnerable persons, to share it with social services and to gather relevant information from hospitals, general practitioners and emergency services. Police may also follow up at victims’ residences to ensure safety. These new initiatives seem to have prompted a slight increase in reported incidents of “family violence”, which is how domestic violence is recorded in the state information system’s Single Event Register. At the national level, 8 229 events were registered as “family conflicts” in 2022, increasing slightly to 8 243 events in 2023.²⁵² Moreover, national media reporting suggests a trend of significantly increased reporting in the more recent past.²⁵³ At the same time, the strong focus on child protection persists, with guidance addressing violence that adult women experience at the hands of their male partners, particularly where children are not involved, remaining comparatively limited. Moreover, a substantial number of registered incidents of domestic violence do not result in investigations or other formal action undertaken.²⁵⁴ This pattern may reflect broader systemic challenges, including resource constraints, regional disparities in response capacity, uneven training on all forms of violence against women and the potential under-prioritisation of cases that do not trigger a child-protection response. The low level of specialisation among police officers in Latvia in relation to any of the forms of violence against women covered by the convention, including in their digital dimension, may be among the reasons for such systemic challenges. While officers trained to respond to domestic violence exist, police officers generally handle all types of cases without any formalised specialisation. In Latvia, all police stations are competent to deal with domestic violence cases and complaints may be lodged nationwide. Under law-enforcement regulations, police are required to respond within 15 minutes in cities and 25 minutes in smaller towns and rural areas to events posing threats to safety, health, life, sexual inviolability or property, with domestic violence falling within this category.²⁵⁵ It is unclear, however, whether these response times are consistently met in practice and whether interventions are carried out swiftly and without delay, as required by the Istanbul Convention.

249. See GREVIO’s baseline evaluation report on Montenegro, paragraph 265.

250. Cabinet Regulation No.161 of 25 March 2014, Procedures for the Prevention of Threats of Violence and Ensuring of Temporary Protection against Violence, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/id/265314-kartiba-kada-novers-vardarbibas-draudus-un-nodrosina-pagaidu-aizsardzibupret-vardarbibu.

251. www.2014-2020.latlit.eu/in-search-for-better-solutions-to-provide-assistance-to-victims-of-domestic-violence-in-liepaja/.

252. Additional data provided upon request by the authorities.

253. www.eng.lsm.lv/article/society/crime/12.02.2024-number-of-domestic-violence-reports-doubled-last-year-in-latvia.a542564/.

254. According to data from the Single Electronic Events Log provided by the authorities, no follow-up was recorded in 286 out of 342 cases in 2023, 382 out of 466 cases in 2024 and 247 out of 323 cases during the first 10 months of 2025.

255. Cabinet Regulation No. 190 of 20 March 2012, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/245629-regulations-regarding-the-procedures-for-registration-of-events-and-reaction-time-of-the-police.

311. GREVIO further notes that the level of under-reporting of incidents of violence against women in Latvia is unknown, although it remains a widespread phenomenon across Europe.²⁵⁶ The Latvian police enjoy relatively high levels of public trust and are consistently identified as one of the most trusted state institutions, with a high proportion of women police officers and the legal possibility for victims to request a police officer of the same sex.²⁵⁷ At the same time, the prevalence of domestic violence in Latvia remains high: 30.1% of ever-partnered women aged 18 to 74 have experienced physical violence or threats, sexual violence and/or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner during their lifetime.²⁵⁸

312. While Latvia's law-enforcement authorities are demonstrating increasing operational focus on domestic violence, which GREVIO welcomes, significantly less attention is devoted to other forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention. In particular, GREVIO notes significant gaps in law-enforcement specialisation, training and response in relation to sexual violence and digital manifestations of violence against women, which deepens the aforementioned concern about uneven capacity and geographical disparities in adequate response to such instances of violence.

313. Since Latvia's criminal law is formally technology-neutral, law-enforcement authorities acknowledge that responses to technology-facilitated forms of violence against women are rendered more complex in practice. In particular, where conduct is classified as an administrative offence, police face limitations in accessing data from internet service providers. GREVIO notes with concern that these constraints risk undermining the effectiveness of the newly introduced administrative offences of sexual harassment and underlines the need for dedicated training, clearer procedures and strengthened investigative capacity in relation to the digital dimension of violence against women. GREVIO notes with interest that on 5 February 2026 the Latvian Parliament adopted amendments to Section 112 of the Administrative Liability Law, granting officials conducting administrative proceedings the right to request subscriber identity data and IP address identification from electronic communications providers. This development has the potential to address the investigative limitation identified above and may strengthen the capacity to pursue administrative offences committed in the digital environment, including sexual harassment. GREVIO welcomes these efforts as a meaningful step towards ensuring that the digital dimension of violence against women is treated with the same investigative rigour as other forms. It encourages the authorities to monitor the implementation of these amendments and ensure that they are accompanied by dedicated training and clear operational guidance, so that law-enforcement authorities are equipped to make full and consistent use of them in cases of technology-facilitated violence against women.

314. **GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to:**

- a. ensure timely and consistent police response to all reports of violence against women within the remit of the Istanbul Convention, including in rural areas;**
- b. take measures to reduce the secondary victimisation of women who report any of the forms of violence against women, including intimate partner violence, sexual violence and rape, stalking and online violence against women, including by**

256. Across the 27 EU member states, including Latvia, only 13.9% of women who have experienced physical violence or threats and/or sexual violence over their lifetime reported the incident to the police, according to EIGE, EU Gender-based Violence Survey: Key Results, 2024, available at: www.eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/eu-gender-based-violence-survey-key-results?language_content_entity=en.

257. According to the OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions 2024, approximately 52% of respondents in Latvia reported high or moderately high trust in the police: www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-survey-on-drivers-of-trust-in-public-institutions-2024-results-country-notes_a8004759-en/latvia_b5b59158-en.html. A government-commissioned public opinion survey in 2025 found that 72% of respondents trusted the state police, making it one of the most trusted public institutions in Latvia: www.eng.lsm.lv/article/society/society/30.01.2025-government-is-latvias-least-trusted-state-institution.a585644/. According to Eurostat data reported by national media, on average between 2017 and 2019 Latvia had the second-highest share of female police officers in the EU at around 39.2%: www.eng.lsm.lv/article/society/crime/latvia-among-eu-leaders-on-women-police-and-judges.a420043. According to section 13(6) of the Law on Police, persons must be searched by a police officer of the same sex prior to detention or placement in temporary detention premises.

258. EIGE, EU Gender-based Violence Survey: Key Results, p. 23.

- increasing the degree of specialisation of law-enforcement officers across the country and guaranteeing access to adequately trained female officers;**
- c. address geographical and capacity disparities to ensure uniform access to trained law-enforcement personnel and specialist interventions across the country.**

2. Effective investigation and prosecution

315. Latvia's prosecution service is a centralised authority responsible for overseeing criminal investigations, conducting pretrial proceedings, and bringing and maintaining public prosecutions on behalf of the state. GREVIO notes with satisfaction that the authorities' zero-tolerance approach to violence is increasingly reflected in prosecutorial practice and understanding, with a growing commitment to devoting specific attention to combating violence against women and domestic violence. The prosecution service adopts an annual list of priority cases for serious crimes, including sexual violence against children and, following ratification of the Istanbul Convention, intimate partner violence and other forms of violence encompassing conduct covered by the convention. In such priority cases, prosecutors are to be involved from the outset, supervising investigations and guiding investigators with a view to strengthening case building and reducing delays.

316. GREVIO also notes with interest that authorities have reported the existence of cybercrime units and ongoing training at the Academy of Justice of Latvia aimed at keeping judges and prosecutors up to date on online and technology-facilitated offences. It appears that investigations and prosecutions for stalking have increased in recent years,²⁵⁹ while it is unclear as to whether other forms of technology-facilitated violence against women, such as image-based sexual abuse or online harassment, are systematically addressed.

317. While GREVIO recognises the commitment to assign cases of violence against women and domestic violence to experienced prosecutors, it notes that no formally dedicated or specialised units exist. Rather, expertise is applied on a *de facto* basis, with cases assigned, where possible, to prosecutors who have received training, depending on individual experience. Although this approach may strengthen individual case handling, the absence of a formalised structure or clear allocation criteria may affect consistency, foreseeability and equal treatment of cases across the country.

318. Moreover, GREVIO notes with regret the limited availability of data on the progression of cases through the criminal justice system, including on the number of cases referred to prosecution, the proportion brought before the courts or the criteria guiding decisions to pursue prosecution as opposed to issuing injunctions. Similarly, there is insufficient information on investigations opened or closed, or on the reasons why cases of violence against women and domestic violence reported by the police may be dismissed. This lack of data significantly limits the ability to assess the practical impact of the legal and policy frameworks on preventing and punishing all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention that Latvia has criminalised. It is therefore not possible to identify and address any challenges, such as limited professional capacity and awareness, lack of guidance on case building and over-reliance on victim testimony as primary evidence,²⁶⁰ or, in cases of sexual violence and rape, the influence of bias and stereotyping.

319. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to strengthen the investigation and prosecution of all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention, in particular intimate partner violence against women, sexual violence, stalking and technology-facilitated violence, including online harassment and image-based sexual abuse, through adequate degrees of specialisation achieved on the basis of dedicated training and resources and made available across the country.

259. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

260. See GREVIO's baseline evaluation reports on: Malta, paragraph 203; and Serbia, paragraph 216.

3. Conviction rates

320. The absence of sufficiently disaggregated data, as previously discussed in this report, reduces the clarity of available information on conviction rates for offences related to violence against women as covered by the Istanbul Convention. Data provided by the authorities for the period 2022-2024 concern aggregated numbers of court judgments and prosecutorial penalty orders for clusters of criminal offences, including murder and homicide and various forms of bodily injury and rape where the victim was a woman or a relative of the perpetrator. While the statistics indicate the types of sanctions imposed, such as deprivation of liberty, community service, fines and probation, they do not allow an assessment of what proportion of these cases relate to gender-based violence against women within the meaning of the convention, nor how many concern specific forms of violence covered by it. GREVIO notes, however, that most of these cases resulted either in custodial sentences (predominantly of up to five years) or in community service or probation. Since the highly mediatised Jēkabpils killing of a woman by her former husband, courts have increasingly applied pretrial detention in high-risk cases.²⁶¹

321. GREVIO notes the increasing use of the newly introduced section 174.¹ of the Criminal Law on violence against relatives, including psychological violence, which points to growing reporting and recourse to this provision, suggesting an unmet need for legal recognition of such forms of abuse.²⁶² At the same time, additional data provided upon request indicate that while the vast majority of victims recorded under this offence are women related to the perpetrator, it is unclear whether these are offences committed against an intimate partner, limiting assessment of the provision's application to violence against women under the Istanbul Convention.²⁶³ GREVIO further notes with concern that only a limited number of cases prosecuted under this new offence reportedly result in convictions or prosecutorial penalty orders and that, where sanctions are imposed, they rely predominantly on probationary or other non-custodial measures. Taken together, these elements raise questions as to whether the sanctioning framework operates in a manner that is sufficiently effective, proportionate and dissuasive in practice.²⁶⁴

322. Regarding the recently introduced administrative offence of sexual harassment, GREVIO notes that 89 proceedings were initiated in 2025, with a penalty imposed in 45 cases and compulsory educational measures for minor perpetrators applied in four cases.²⁶⁵ However, the absence of information on the total number of complaints, the number of cases dismissed and the grounds for dismissal, and the full range, frequency and nature of sanctions, prevents, at this stage, further assessment of the effectiveness of enforcement of this measure.

323. GREVIO notes with interest that electronic monitoring was introduced in 2024 through amendments to the Criminal Procedure Law as a preventive measure in high-risk cases, such as repeated domestic violence or serious threats.²⁶⁶ This measure is intended to strengthen enforcement of no-contact and area-avoidance orders. The first application of electronic monitoring in a domestic violence case reportedly took place in 2025, with only one additional device recently becoming operational.²⁶⁷ While GREVIO welcomes this development and recognises its potential to enhance victim protection, its practical use remains extremely limited. GREVIO notes with regret that this significantly restricts its impact, which is of concern in light of the high number of women killed in Latvia in the context of domestic violence or post-separation abuse.

261. Submission by the MARTA Centre, p. 25.

262. The publicly available statistics provided by the Information Centre of the Ministry of Interior – available at www.ic.iem.gov.lv/lv/kriminala-statistika – relate to the category of “certain types of criminal offences”.

263. In 2024, 99 cases were initiated; 95 victims were women related to the perpetrator.

264. In 2024, 26 convictions and 16 prosecutorial penalty orders were issued; sanctions included 14 custodial sentences (half of which were conditional with probation) and 27 probationary supervisions.

265. According to information provided by the authorities upon request, the compulsory educational measures concern minor perpetrators and are applied based on the Law on the Imposition of Compulsory Measures of a Correctional Nature on Children, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/68489.

266. Section 243.5 of the Criminal Procedure Law.

267. Information obtained during the evaluation visit. National media reporting available at: www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/04.09.2025-piemerota-pirma-elektroniska-uzraudziba-aizdomas-par-vardaribu-pret-laulato.a613016.

324. Additional restraining measures may be applied, including court-ordered pretrial detention in high-risk cases involving danger to the victim or a risk of reoffending or flight. Amendments adopted in 2023 strengthened sanctions for stalking, threats and breaches of protection orders, allowing for pretrial detention of up to nine months.²⁶⁸ Moreover, intoxicated perpetrators may be placed in police custody for up to 12 hours until sober, which is supervisory rather than detention and does not require a court order.

325. Last, in the absence of further information, GREVIO is unable to assess whether and how the authorities ensure that cases falling under the Istanbul Convention are systematically handled by prosecutors and judges who have received adequate and specialist training, including through the available voluntary in-service training on violence against women and domestic violence.

326. **GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to:**

- a. **address any/all factors that contribute to attrition in all cases of violence against women and domestic violence covered by the Istanbul Convention;**
- b. **expand the practical use of electronic monitoring in high-risk cases, ensuring geographically even application in line with risk assessments and victim protection needs.**

B. Risk assessment and risk management (Article 51)

327. Concern for the victim's safety must lie at the heart of any intervention in cases of all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention. Article 51 thus establishes 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.

328. In Latvia, there is no standardised, single mandated instrument for risk assessment that is used in practice by all relevant authorities and in all regions when responding to instances of violence against women and domestic violence. Latvia does not currently apply the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) model as a formal, nationwide domestic violence risk-assessment system. GREVIO welcomes, however, that this is explicitly recognised in Latvia's National Action Plan for the Prevention and Combating of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence 2024-2029, which envisages a feasibility assessment as regards the introduction of the MARAC model in Latvia. GREVIO further notes that the State Probation Service already operates Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) in post-conviction contexts, which represents relevant existing experience in multi-agency co-ordination that could inform the wider implementation of MARAC.

329. At the level of law-enforcement authorities, current regulations require police to assess the risk of violence and lethality in cases of domestic violence, typically on a case-by-case basis, using questionnaires and information provided by the victim, with the results shared with social services for further support and follow-up.²⁶⁹ Information is collected on potential threats to life and health, including economic, physical and sexual forms of violence. Municipal police carry out risk assessments in response to domestic violence incidents in co-ordination with the state police. The possession of firearms by the perpetrator, verified through address checks of registered arms, is taken into account. Risk is assessed both during the initial response to evaluate immediate danger and later during criminal proceedings to determine appropriate safety measures, including the likelihood of reoffending or interference with criminal justice processes. Risk assessments are conducted by police officers using structured questionnaires, drawing on information provided by the victim, observations at the scene and existing records. While victims are typically asked to respond to specific questions, the assessment itself is completed by the police. It remains unclear to what

268. Sections 171-175 of the Criminal Procedure Law.

269. Risk assessment is regulated by Cabinet Regulation No. 161 of 25 March 2014.

extent victims are systematically informed of the assessment outcome or actively involved in safety planning at this stage. Assessments are conducted twice for each case: initially by police at first contact and subsequently in greater depth by municipal social services. GREVIO further notes information provided by the authorities that the State Probation Service uses three risk and needs assessment tools — covering general recidivism risk, violence recidivism risk, and sexual offence recidivism risk — for convicted offenders under supervision, and organises MAPPA for persons convicted of serious or especially serious violent or sexual offences. During the supervision period, the State Probation Service maintains regular contact with victims and, in co-operation with other institutions, both assesses the support measures needed for the victim and imposes control measures on the probation client.

330. Since 2014, police training on risk assessment has been implemented nationwide and violence prevention is included in ongoing police vocational training – a development which GREVIO welcomes.²⁷⁰ GREVIO notes with regret, however, that there is currently no monitoring or evaluation system to measure the effectiveness of any of the existing risk-assessment practices.

331. In this context, GREVIO points to the fact that the 2014 mandatory police form for “family conflict situations” supports risk-assessment procedures by documenting the victim, alleged perpetrator, their relationship and the incident context. It records visible injuries, fear of harm, children’s presence, prior incidents, substance use and criminal history, as well as protective measures imposed and referrals to social services, facilitating both immediate and longer-term support. However, by framing incidents under the broad term “family conflict”, the form risks placing disproportionate emphasis on general domestic disputes, which could obscure the distinct patterns of violence that women disproportionately experience from male partners, including psychological, sexual and economic abuse, coercive control and intimidation. Its focus is largely on visible physical threats and injuries, without systematically capturing ongoing patterns of abuse, prior incidents or contextual risk factors that indicate escalating or severe danger. The form also only partially addresses children’s exposure to violence. While it includes a reference to social services, there is limited integration of victim-centred approaches, gender-sensitive language or mechanisms to document the victims’ specific needs and preferences. As a result, although the form is operationally useful for immediate enforcement, it may not fully protect women from the broader, often hidden, dimensions of domestic violence or from potential escalation when red flags such as strangulation attempts are missed.

332. Further, GREVIO regrets the absence of domestic violence homicide reviews in Latvia and reiterates the importance of establishing such mechanisms as a means of systematically analysing lethal cases and assessing the effectiveness of existing risk-assessment and protection practices.²⁷¹ In the context of the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, such retrospective analysis of all cases of gender-related killings, attempted killings and suicides of women and girls could identify any possible failure of protection with a view to their prevention in the future, and to hold to account both the perpetrator and statutory agencies that come into contact with the victim. Indeed, GREVIO has underlined the importance of including in such systematic reviews gender-based violence-related suicides and forced suicides of women and girls, as they also represent a lethal end point for those who are on the receiving end of acts of violence against women.²⁷²

333. **GREVIO urges the Latvian authorities to:**

- a. develop and implement a standardised, nationwide risk-assessment instrument for all cases of violence against women, to enable structured, multi-agency, victim-centred risk response and follow-up, ensuring consistent application across regions and authorities;**

270. EIGE, Risk assessment and management of intimate partner violence in the EU, 2019, p. 57, available at: www.eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/risk-assessment-and-management-intimate-partner-violence-eu.

271. See GREVIO’s baseline evaluation reports on: Belgium, paragraph 196(c); Italy, paragraph 233(d); Malta, paragraph 214(c); and Portugal, paragraph 206.

272. See the 5th General Report on GREVIO’s Activities, October 2024, paragraph 74.

- b. ensure risk assessment systematically captures psychological, sexual and economic violence, coercive control, patterns of abuse, prior incidents and children's exposure to violence;**
- c. integrate victim-centred approaches and gender-sensitive language into risk-assessment procedures, including mechanisms to record victims' needs, preferences and safety concerns;**
- d. strengthen multi-agency co-ordination and follow-up, linking police, social services, health services and specialist support providers to ensure timely and effective protection measures based on up-to-date knowledge regarding escalating risk factors and child-protection considerations.**

C. Emergency barring orders (Article 52)

334. GREVIO notes with satisfaction that in 2014 Latvia introduced police decisions on separation, granting law-enforcement authorities the power to temporarily evict a person from the home and impose an emergency barring order (EBO). These measures are broadly in line with the requirements of Article 52 of the Istanbul Convention. GREVIO notes that their consistent and effective application is of particular importance in enabling Latvia to achieve even closer alignment with the standards of the Istanbul Convention and to ensure the practical protection of victims.

335. These orders operate as immediately enforceable administrative measures that may be imposed by both the state police and municipal police in situations where there is an immediate threat of violence against a person in need of protection.²⁷³ They may be issued *ex officio*, without a prior request from the victim. The measure obliges the alleged perpetrator to leave the shared residence and to maintain a specified distance, and may include a prohibition on contact through direct, electronic or third-party communication. Police may apply the measure even in the absence of a clearly identifiable criminal offence, for example in situations of repeated conflict or where the assessed risk of harm is high.

336. A separation order or EBO enters into force immediately at the scene and remains valid for up to eight days. During this period, the victim may apply for a court-ordered temporary protection order, examined further under Article 53 below, which can extend protection for a longer duration. The police maintain records of persons subject to separation orders, as well as of individuals upon whom courts have imposed protection orders.²⁷⁴ Where a criminal offence is identified, the alleged perpetrator may be detained and criminal proceedings initiated. While police separation orders cannot be extended, they may bridge the period until judicial protection orders are issued, which remain in force until the judgment becomes final and, in certain cases, for up to one year thereafter.²⁷⁵

337. Police EBOs or separation orders may be applied to protect any woman at risk of domestic violence or to any person present in a dwelling where there is an imminent danger, including children exposed to such violence. Exceptions exist only where the alleged perpetrator is a child. Victims receive a copy of the incident report together with information on available assistance and protection, including public-awareness materials such as the police booklet "Stop! Recognise violence! Call for help!", which provides accessible and comprehensive information on forms of violence against women, victims' rights and protection mechanisms, and which GREVIO welcomes. However, GREVIO notes with concern that the orders may allow for limited exceptions linked to what are considered legitimate obligations, such as work. In the absence of information on how such exceptions operate in practice, how frequently they are granted and whether guidance is provided to police officers, GREVIO stresses that such exceptions may be misused by perpetrators to circumvent protection measures, including by invoking work-related justifications, thereby potentially compromising victim safety and undermining the effectiveness of protection orders.

273. These rules are set out in section 12.1 of the Law on Police and detailed in Cabinet Regulation No. 161.

274. Sections 12 and 12.1 of the Law on Police.

275. Section 250.58.8-9 of the Civil Procedure Law.

338. GREVIO also notes that the number of EBOs is increasing, a development welcomed by civil society as significantly enhancing the ability to provide immediate and urgent protection to victims at the scene.²⁷⁶ In the vast majority of cases, these orders are issued against male perpetrators and protect female victims, underscoring their particular relevance for cases of intimate partner violence against women. According to the Information Centre of the Ministry of the Interior, police adopted 706 EBOs or separation orders in 2022, of which 674 protected women, rising to 1 028 orders in 2023, with 955 female protected persons. GREVIO also notes with satisfaction the rising use of this measure at the municipal level in Liepāja, with 33 orders issued in 128 reported “family violence” cases in 2023, 36 out of 90 in 2024 and 25 out of 59 during the first 10 months of 2025, according to data from the local authorities. However, because of the lack of comparable data from other regions, it is not possible to assess whether its application is geographically balanced, particularly in rural areas, where capacity appears more limited than in the capital and wealthier regions.

339. Disaggregated data for 2022 provided upon request by the authorities give an insight into the relationship between perpetrators and victims as protected persons, distinguishing, *inter alia*, current or former spouses, co-resident women and mothers of a perpetrator’s child – categories that largely correspond to domestic and intimate partner violence under the Istanbul Convention. These categories constituted the majority of cases in 2022 in which separation orders were issued.²⁷⁷ However, the current level of data disaggregation limits the assessment of the application of such measures in relation to children, in particular whether perpetrators subject to an EBO or separation order against the mother are allowed to maintain contact with their children. This may constitute a protection gap, as GREVIO has previously highlighted, since the protective purpose of emergency barring orders – to create physical and emotional distance between victim and perpetrator – is undermined where victims are required to facilitate contact between the abuser and children.²⁷⁸

340. Last, GREVIO draws attention to the reported practice among law-enforcement officers of issuing emergency barring orders primarily when the perpetrator is physically present at the scene.²⁷⁹ Where perpetrators leave before police arrival, officers reportedly do not systematically conduct active searches to locate and enforce removal, allowing perpetrators to return to the dwelling and placing victims at renewed risk. In view of the increasing use that is being made of such orders and the overall positive contribution EBOs are making to the law-enforcement response to domestic violence, GREVIO points to the need to ensure that solutions are found to serve EBOs on perpetrators who have left the scene of an incident, such as follow-up visits, continued monitoring and renewed risk assessment.

341. **GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to:**

- a. **ensure that any exceptions to emergency barring orders prohibiting contact, including for work-related reasons and to ensure contact with children, are strictly regulated, clearly guided and applied only where they do not compromise victim safety;**
- b. **strengthen the ability of law-enforcement officers to serve an emergency barring order on a perpetrator, including by ensuring systematic follow-up and active searches where perpetrators leave the scene prior to police arrival.**

276. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

277. Data provided upon request by the authorities on EBOs (police separation decisions) and court-imposed protection orders for the years 2022 and 2023.

278. See GREVIO’s baseline evaluation reports on Albania, paragraph 184; Austria, paragraph 180; Denmark, paragraph 201; Finland, paragraph 224; and Sweden, paragraph 228.

279. Submission by the MARTA Centre, p. 26.

D. Restraining or protection orders (Article 53)

342. In addition to the emergency barring orders described above, the Latvian legal system provides for protection orders to be issued by courts upon requested by the victim, their legal representative or *ex parte* by the police, who are legally required to assist victims in submitting applications for protection.²⁸⁰ Additionally, pursuant to Section 250.55(2), an application in the interests of a child may be submitted by one of the child's parents, their guardian, the Orphan's Court, or the prosecutor. The available measures ordered comprise banning the respondent from the shared dwelling; no-go orders and no-contact obligations, including via direct, indirect or electronic communication. Courts may also restrict access to the victim's personal data, require participation in perpetrator programmes and impose other obligations deemed necessary to ensure adequate protection. Decisions may be issued without prior notification to the respondent, and judges retain discretion regarding the scope and exact duration of the measures imposed. In this regard, the law establishes stage-specific maximum time limits.²⁸¹ Prior to the bringing of an action, protection may be granted for up to one year or 30 days where a cohabiting respondent is ordered to leave the shared dwelling, with the exception of the obligation to complete a social rehabilitation course aimed at reducing violent behaviour, which remains in force until its completion or until the conclusion of criminal proceedings on non-exonerating grounds, pursuant to Section 250.58(8¹). During proceedings, measures remain in force until the judgment becomes final, and may, where justified, continue for up to one additional year thereafter (or 30 days in cases involving removal from a jointly occupied dwelling). Once issued, protection orders remain in force until revoked and are immediately communicated to the state police. Measures may also be replaced or withdrawn upon reasoned application, leaving courts discretion within these statutory limits.

343. Judges are required to decide applications for temporary protection within one working day. Where the court considers that additional evidence is necessary, the decision may be taken within 20 days. GREVIO welcomes the possibility for victims to obtain a longer-term protection order as follow-up to the EBO, and the short time frame for decisions to be made. According to information provided by the authorities, Section 250.58 of the Civil Procedure Law provides that where delay could cause significant infringement of the plaintiff's rights, the court must decide within one working day and may grant the application on the basis of the certification in the application alone, even in the absence of sufficient evidence. GREVIO welcomes this urgency provision as an important safeguard against protection gaps during the extended decision-making period. Nevertheless, GREVIO notes the absence of data on how frequently courts rely on the 20-day extended period in practice and encourages the authorities to monitor the consistent application of the urgency provisions to ensure that protective measures remain prompt and effective in line with the convention.

344. A recently introduced form for "family conflict" situations is intended to ensure the smooth co-operation between law-enforcement officers and courts issuing protection orders. This form provides clear and detailed information on how to obtain judicial protection orders and on victims' rights and the applicable procedures, aimed at informing both police officers and victims and enhancing awareness. While GREVIO notes the positive contribution judges consider that the use of these standardised and user-friendly forms is making, reports from women's rights organisations working directly with victims suggest that protection orders are, in practice, sometimes issued solely in respect of the adult victim, without extending protection to children, thereby potentially leaving them exposed to ongoing risks in situations of domestic violence.²⁸²

345. Moreover, GREVIO notes that judges have identified initial challenges in applying protection orders in cases involving psychological or economic violence. While judges report that these challenges are increasingly being addressed through specialist, interdisciplinary and multi-agency training, which GREVIO welcomes, it regrets that the absence of disaggregated statistical data on the forms of violence addressed by protection orders limits an assessment of whether such

280. Chapter 30.5 (sections 250.43-250.64) of the Civil Procedure Law.

281. Section 250.58.7-9 of the Civil Procedure Law. Section 250.58.10-12 regulates termination of protection where the claim is refused, proceedings are terminated or no action is brought within the set time limit.

282. Submission by the MARTA Centre, p. 19.

measures consistently cover all forms of violence against women under the Istanbul Convention, including stalking, forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

346. As regards the enforcement of court-ordered protection orders, these are supervised by designated police officers, who notify perpetrators and explain the consequences of non-compliance, including potential criminal liability. According to information provided by the authorities, pursuant to Section 250.62 of the Civil Procedure Law, failure to serve the decision on the defendant does not affect its legal consequences, meaning that protection orders are legally in force and enforceable from the moment of issue regardless of whether notification has been successfully effected.

347. Data from the Judicial Information System of the Court Administration indicate a steady increase in the number of protection orders issued: 737 in 2021; 1 150 in 2022; 1 367 in 2023; and 1 467 in 2024. GREVIO welcomes this upward trend, which may reflect increased use of the mechanism and improved victim protection. Data provided by the authorities confirm that the vast majority of beneficiaries of protection orders are women and perpetrators men, a finding corroborated by judicial practice and which underscores the relevance of these protective measures for women victims of violence at the hands of their current or former partners or spouses. Additional information provided by the authorities upon request identifies categories such as current or former wives, co-resident women and mothers of the perpetrator's child, which constitute the majority of cases. However, the current level of disaggregation does not allow assessment of how protection orders apply in relation to children, including whether perpetrators are permitted to maintain contact with their children when a court order is issued to protect their mother.

348. Breaches of court-issued protection orders may result in criminal liability under section 168 of the Criminal Law. Data indicate that breaches frequently lead to criminal proceedings: in 2022, 567 breaches were detected and 484 proceedings initiated; in 2023, 894 breaches were detected and 750 proceedings initiated.²⁸³ However, there are no data on the outcomes of these proceedings, including the sanctions imposed.

349. **GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to:**

- a. **ensure that police officers consistently fulfil their statutory duty to assist victims in applying for judicial protection orders, including through clear guidance and supervision;**
- b. **ensure that the full range of protection orders are made use of in practice and in relation to all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention;**
- c. **take the necessary measures to systematically take into consideration the safety concerns of women victims of domestic violence and their children, on a case-by-case basis, when deciding on rights of contact for the duration of protection orders issued;**
- d. **address enforcement gaps by developing procedures to prevent evasion of service of protection orders and ensure timely implementation of protection measures;**
- e. **monitor the outcomes of breaches of protection orders to ensure that sanctions imposed are effective, proportionate and dissuasive, in line with the Istanbul Convention.**

E. *Ex parte* and *ex officio* proceedings (Article 55)

1. *Ex parte* and *ex officio* proceedings

350. Article 55, paragraph 1, of the Istanbul Convention places on parties the obligation to ensure that investigations into a number of categories of offences shall not be wholly dependent upon the report or complaint filed by a victim and that any proceedings underway may continue even after the victim has withdrawn her statement of complaint.

283. State report, p. 44.

351. Under Latvian law, criminal proceedings are generally conducted in the public interest and do not depend on the victim's will, except in narrowly defined cases.²⁸⁴ Proceedings may be initiated when information indicating a possible offence is submitted to, or acquired by, the competent authorities, such as the state police, prosecutors or a court.²⁸⁵

352. Offences involving violence or threats against close relatives, spouses, former spouses, current or former intimate partners, or household cohabitants, as well as offences against morality, sexual inviolability and medium or serious bodily harm, are prosecuted in the public interest and do not require a victim's submission. This framework means that most offences constituting violence against women and domestic violence under the Istanbul Convention are pursued regardless of the victim's willingness or ability to initiate proceedings. Because these are public-interest cases, withdrawal of a complaint does not lead to a termination of the proceedings in such cases.²⁸⁶ GREVIO notes that Latvia has entered a reservation under Article 78, paragraph 2, of the Istanbul Convention, reserving the right not to apply Article 55, paragraph 1, with regard to minor offences of physical violence under Article 35.²⁸⁷

353. GREVIO notes, however, concerns expressed by women's rights organisations and experts in the field that, in practice, victims may at times still be expected to submit formal complaints or take procedural steps to advance proceedings, notwithstanding the *ex officio* legal framework. This risks placing a disproportionate burden on victims to initiate or sustain criminal proceedings, particularly in repeat or high-risk cases, and may be compounded by limitations in law-enforcement capacity or awareness, as well as insufficient support in the application of protection measures, thereby undermining the effective pursuit of cases.²⁸⁸

354. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to ensure the consistent application of the law so that all cases of physical violence against women, sexual violence (including rape), forced marriage, female genital mutilation and forced sterilisation or forced abortion are subject to *ex officio* initiation of criminal proceedings and may continue even if the victim withdraws her complaint.

2. Victim support in legal proceedings

355. With a view to empowering victims and to encouraging them to go through with criminal proceedings, paragraph 2 of Article 55 requires parties to ensure that victims' organisations, specifically trained domestic violence counsellors or other types of support/advocacy services may assist and support victims during investigations and judicial proceedings.

356. As per the legislation in place in Latvia, NGO representatives, counsellors and sworn advocates may assist victims in criminal proceedings. Under section 96.¹ of the Criminal Procedure Law, victims entitled to special protection may be accompanied by a trusted person, which may include NGO representatives.²⁸⁹ With the victim's explicit delegation and subject to legal requirements, NGO representatives may act formally on behalf of the victim, submitting applications, receiving procedural information and safeguarding procedural rights throughout investigation and trial. If the NGO representative is a sworn advocate under the Advocacy Law, they may provide legal aid and formally represent the victim in criminal proceedings, including making submissions, examining evidence and participating in hearings. GREVIO notes with satisfaction that this framework facilitates victims' access to both supportive and professional assistance, including legal representation by specialist NGOs.

284. Section 7 of the Criminal Procedure Law.

285. *Ibid.*, section 369.

286. According to section 377.11 of the Criminal Procedure Law, a victim's withdrawal of their application before the completion of the pretrial investigation is a ground for terminating proceedings in cases that are initiated and prosecuted on the basis of the victim's application.

287. www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=declarations-by-treaty&numSte=210&codeNature=2&codePays=LAT.

288. Submission by the MARTA Centre, pp. 24, 27.

289. See Chapter VI, Measures of protection (Article 56).

357. However, there is no evidence that similar NGO or counsellor support is consistently available in civil or administrative proceedings, such as for compensation claims or protective measures, nor that psychosocial support in the form of a supportive person for children providing testimony is systematically ensured.

F. Measures of protection (Article 56)

358. In Latvia, victims of sexual violence and victims of violence or threats of violence committed by a member of the immediate family, a former spouse or a person with whom the victim is or has been in a continuous intimate relationship are legally recognised as specially protected victims entitled to enhanced procedural protection throughout the criminal justice process.²⁹⁰ As such, some groups of victims of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention benefit from heightened procedural protection in Latvia.

359. However, the requirement of a “continuous” intimate relationship for a woman victim to benefit from this status sets a high threshold, which risks excluding women from procedural protection where continuity or permanence of the relationship cannot be readily established.²⁹¹ GREVIO further regrets that victims of other forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention, beyond sexual and domestic violence, are not explicitly included among the listed categories. At the same time, GREVIO notes that the list of specially protected victims is not exhaustive, allowing other persons to be granted special protection on the basis of an individual vulnerability assessment. Nevertheless, in the absence of information on when, under what circumstances and how often such status is granted in practice in cases involving all forms of violence against women covered by the convention, GREVIO is unable to assess the practical application of this mechanism at this stage.

360. Recognition as a specially protected victim triggers a range of concrete procedural safeguards, including questioning by specially trained officials; limiting the number of interviews; conducting interviews in specially adapted premises; the presence of a trusted person, psychologist or legal representative; avoidance of confrontation with the accused; audiovisual recording of testimony to prevent repeated questioning; and special rules governing court hearings.

361. A specially protected victim also has the right, upon request, to receive information concerning the release or escape of an arrested or convicted person from a place of imprisonment or temporary detention.²⁹² While GREVIO welcomes this provision as an important step towards alignment with Article 56 of the convention, it notes that placing the burden on the victim to actively request such information may be onerous in practice, particularly for victims experiencing fear, trauma or limited awareness of their procedural rights. GREVIO further notes that the granting of such notification is subject to an assessment of both a threat to the victim and the absence of risk of harm to the detained or convicted person, a threshold which may, in practice, unduly restrict access to this safeguard.

362. Victims are afforded additional rights and protections during criminal proceedings at both the pretrial and trial stages, including the right to receive information on available support services and medical assistance, as well as to request information on the progress of proceedings.²⁹³ GREVIO notes with satisfaction that victims may request participation in court hearings by technical means (telephone or videoconference), thereby reducing the risk of secondary victimisation, in line with the objectives of Article 56 of the convention. To protect victims’ privacy, their consent is required for the publication of images or video recordings relating to criminal proceedings. However, it is unclear how often these measures are applied in practice.

290. Sections 96.1.1.3 and 96.1.1.4 of the Criminal Procedure Law.

291. See further comments under Chapter I, Scope of application of the convention and definitions (Articles 2 and 3).

292. Section 96.1.1 of the Criminal Procedure Law.

293. Ibid., sections 97-102.

363. Protective measures may extend not only to victims and witnesses but also to their property and close relatives, a safeguard of particular relevance in domestic violence cases where threats frequently target family members.²⁹⁴ In addition, heightened “special procedural protection” is granted in proceedings concerning serious or especially serious crimes, including cases of aggravated bodily harm, aggravated sexual violence (including rape) and repeated or aggravated domestic violence.²⁹⁵

364. With regard to child victims and child witnesses, all children are granted special protected victim status,²⁹⁶ complemented by additional guarantees under the Law on the Protection of Children’s Rights. In cases involving children, support services and multi-agency co-operation mechanisms are in place, involving the Child Protection Centre, Orphans and Custody Courts and social services. GREVIO notes the existence of interinstitutional co-operation initiatives such as Barnahus,²⁹⁷ as well as reports of specialist training, facilities and infrastructure adapted to the needs of children involved in criminal proceedings. However, available information primarily concerns child victims, and it remains unclear whether, and under what circumstances, heightened protection is also afforded to children who are not directly subjected to physical violence by the perpetrator but who witness or live in contexts of violence against their mothers. GREVIO reiterates its previous emphasis on the need to ensure that children are interviewed by trained staff and able to testify without the presence of the perpetrator.²⁹⁸

365. **GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to:**

- a. ensure that heightened procedural protection is consistently granted to victims of all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention, including psychological violence, stalking, forced marriage, female genital mutilation and forced sterilisation or abortion;**
- b. strengthen the automatic provision of information and safeguards, including notification of the release or escape of perpetrators, by reducing reliance on victim-initiated requests and ensuring that protection is granted wherever a risk assessment indicates a potential threat;**
- c. guarantee that women victims of violence are not excluded from special protection due to restrictive interpretations of permanence or duration of the relationship;**
- d. expand the systematic application of special procedural protection to all child victims and child witnesses of violence during police investigations and criminal proceedings, including in situations where children are exposed to violence against women within the family context, regardless of whether they are direct victims of physical harm.**

G. Legal aid (Article 57)

366. Victims of violence against women and domestic violence have access to Latvia’s state-funded legal aid system, both out of court and in court. This system is governed by the Law on State-Ensured Legal Aid and administered by the Court Administration.²⁹⁹ State legal aid covers civil, administrative and criminal proceedings, including legal consultations, preparation of procedural documents and court representation. Legal aid is available to individuals who are recognised as low-income or indigent, are under full state or local government support, or are in a “special situation”, defined as a sudden or exceptional circumstance beyond the individual’s control preventing them from securing their rights. According to information provided by the authorities, violence against a person may constitute such a “special situation”, enabling women who have suffered violence to access legal aid for the protection of their rights. Eligibility is assessed on a case-by-case basis.

294. Ibid., section 24.

295. Ibid., section 299.

296. Ibid., section 96.1.1.1.

297. www.eeagrants.org/en/fmo/news/together-against-child-abuse-latvian-barnahus.

298. See GREVIO’s baseline evaluation report on Portugal, paragraph 227.

299. The Law on State-Ensured Legal Aid, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/en/id/104831-state-ensured-legal-aid-law; Cabinet Regulation No. 585 of 20 September 2022, available at: www.vestnesis.lv/op/2022/185.9.

Similarly, victims may receive legal assistance within the framework of state-funded support services. GREVIO notes, however, that access to legal aid for victims of violence is not automatic but depends on the recognition of a “special situation” on an individual basis.

367. In civil and family proceedings, women and girls who have experienced violence may receive legal aid to protect their rights or interests in disputes, including domestic violence, divorce and separation, custody and visitation of children, and property division, provided they meet the eligibility criteria under the Law on State-Ensured Legal Aid. Legal aid may include legal consultations, drafting of procedural documents and court representation. Where state-funded legal aid is granted, recipients may be exempt from court fees in accordance with section 44 of the Civil Procedure Law, including in applications for court-ordered temporary protection against violence.³⁰⁰

368. In criminal proceedings, legal aid is governed by the Criminal Procedure Law and ensured by the person directing the proceedings. Certain categories of victims are automatically recognised as specially protected victims, including minors, persons with mental or health impairments affecting their procedural capacity, victims of offences against morality or sexual inviolability, victims of trafficking, victims of violence or threats of violence by a family member or intimate partner, and persons who have suffered serious bodily or mental harm. Specially protected victims are entitled to legal assistance through a State-appointed lawyer throughout the proceedings.³⁰¹ Legal aid is mandatory for minor victims in proceedings involving violence by a person on whom the minor is financially or otherwise dependent, or offences against morality or sexual inviolability. Beyond these automatic categories, the person directing the proceedings may also recognise as specially protected any victim who, due to the harm suffered, is particularly vulnerable and at risk of repeated threats, intimidation or retaliation.

369. Legal aid is also available in asylum and other administrative proceedings, including appeals against negative decisions on international protection or removal, as well as in cases concerning the protection of children’s rights, provided that the applicant meets the eligibility criteria set out in section 15 of the Law on State-Ensured Legal Aid.

370. Procedurally, women victims must submit applications for legal aid to the Court Administration, which assesses eligibility, assigns providers and manages payments. Lawyers are appointed from a list of approved providers based on professional qualifications and experience; however, no specific system of formal specialisation exists for cases of violence against women. In practice, the Court Administration specifies the category of cases when assigning providers, and providers indicate their areas of specialisation, with the aim of matching victims of violence with providers who have relevant experience. In addition to the Court Administration, police officers, social service providers and NGOs play a role in informing victims about the availability of legal aid and their right to access it, offering guidance on eligibility and application procedures. GREVIO welcomes the involvement of these actors in raising awareness and facilitating access but notes that the quality and consistency of information may vary across regions and institutions, potentially affecting victims’ ability to obtain timely and appropriate legal assistance.³⁰² GREVIO notes in this regard information provided by the authorities that the Court Administration organises seminars on legal aid for victims of violence and that information campaigns are implemented under the ESF+ framework targeting police, social service professionals and NGO representatives. At the same time, there is limited evidence on the practical allocation of legal aid, such as the number of cases requested and granted, outcomes, geographical distribution and quality of services, which prevents a full assessment of effectiveness.

371. GREVIO also notes with regret that due to the eligibility criteria and scope of the system, legal aid may not be equally accessible to all victims of violence against women; while victims of certain offences such as FGM and forced sterilisation may qualify under the serious bodily injury category and victims of sexual harassment may qualify under the morality and sexual inviolability

300. Section 44 of the Civil Procedure Law.

301. See Chapter VI, Measures of protection (Article 56).

302. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

category in criminal proceedings, this depends on interpretation and case-by-case assessment rather than explicit provision. Certain administrative or civil remedies beyond family law may also fall outside the system. GREVIO notes with concern the existing regional disparities and a lack of specialised expertise among legal aid providers in addressing gender-based violence against women, suggesting that both the quality and availability of legal assistance may vary significantly across the country.³⁰³

372. GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to take the relevant measures to increase the accessibility and the quality of legal aid for women victims of the different forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention.

303. Submission by the MARTA Centre, p. 28.

VII. Migration and asylum

373. In the area of migration and asylum, the main requirement of the Istanbul Convention is to ensure that residence status laws and asylum procedures do not turn a blind eye to the realities of women living in abusive relationships or subjected to sexual violence and exploitation and other forms of gender-based violence. Residence status laws shall provide for the possibility of obtaining autonomous residence permits for women in specific circumstances (Article 59). Asylum procedures, on the other hand, must be gender-sensitive and allow women to disclose their stories in full, and grounds for persecution shall be interpreted in a gender-sensitive manner. This can only be achieved if, in turn, reception procedures and support services for asylum seekers are sensitive to the needs of women victims or those at risk of violence (Article 60). Finally, the convention reinforces respect for the principle of *non-refoulement*, particularly for women in need of protection (Article 61).

A. Residence status (Article 59)

374. Article 59, paragraph 1, of the Istanbul Convention requires states to take legislative or other measures to ensure that migrant women whose residence status depends on that of a spouse or partner may access an autonomous residence permit in the event of particularly difficult circumstances, such as domestic violence.

375. Under Latvian legislation, entry and residence are governed by the Immigration Law.³⁰⁴ According to section 25, the spouse of a Latvian national or an EEA citizen residing in Latvia may be granted an initial temporary residence of one year. On renewal, this may be extended for a further four years. After five years of temporary residence, the spouse is entitled to apply for permanent residence. This provision is mirrored in section 26 that applies to spouses of third-country nationals who have permanent residence in Latvia.³⁰⁵

376. Under both provisions, if the marriage ends *before* the spouse obtains permanent residence, that is, during the initial five-year period, the temporary residence permit shall be cancelled. The only exception relates to cases involving custody of a child. GREVIO notes with concern that no exception exists under sections 25 and 26 of the Immigration Law that would allow the migrant spouse to retain their temporary residence permit or apply for an autonomous residence if the marriage ends during this initial five-year period because of difficult circumstances, such as experiences of domestic violence at the hands of the sponsoring partner. While the exception on the grounds of custody of a child might, in principle, apply to some women victims of domestic violence who are mothers, and serve as a basis to ensure their temporary residence permit upon dissolution of the marriage, it is unclear to what extent this is ensured in practice.

377. Applications for residence permits are handled by the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (OCMA) within the Ministry of the Interior, which may exercise a degree of discretion in relation to cases from migrant women victims of domestic violence and other forms of violence of relevance to Article 59 of the Istanbul Convention. In this regard, section 23.3 is noteworthy as it serves as a general provision for cases that do not otherwise fall within another category in the Immigration Law. It enables the OCMA to grant a temporary residence permit, for up to five years, if doing so “complies with international law or is related to humanitarian considerations”. Under this section, 88 applications were received in 2023, with 79 being granted, and 17 applications were received in 2024, with 15 being granted. According to the OCMA, none of the applications received to date under section 23.3 have been from dependent migrant women raising grounds of domestic violence as a reason for separating from their sponsoring spouse. According to the authorities, if such an application were made, domestic violence would fall within the scope of section 23.3, as it would either amount to “humanitarian considerations” or would result in the granting of a temporary

304. Immigration Law, available at: www.likumi.lv/ta/id/68522-imigracijas-likums.

305. There are no express measures in Latvia’s Immigration Law that provide for the granting of a temporary residence permit to civil partners of Latvian nationals or third-country nationals settled in Latvia.

residence permit to ensure that Latvia is complying with its international law commitments under Article 59 of the convention.

378. While GREVIO welcomes this measure that allows for wide discretion to be exercised in individual cases involving compelling circumstances, its general nature may mean that migrant women experiencing domestic violence at the hands of their spouse lack awareness or understanding that this application route is available to them. Indeed, women's rights organisations have alerted GREVIO to the fact that women whose residence status depends on their abusive partners do not easily benefit from this provision as they frequently lack awareness of these rights.³⁰⁶ Moreover, OCMA officials seem to require a more enhanced understanding of the heightened vulnerability of migrant women who derive their right to remain in Latvia exclusively from their abusive spouse as sponsor, and the relevance of section 23.3, for this group of women and their safety.³⁰⁷ GREVIO notes with concern that migrant women in such situations avoid reporting to the authorities for fear of losing their residence permit, because of the specific barriers they face in obtaining access to legal aid or information and interpretation in a language they understand in order to exercise their rights.³⁰⁸

379. Furthermore, GREVIO notes with concern that section 35.1.8 of the Immigration Law allows for a temporary residence permit to be revoked if the sponsor withdraws, in writing, the invitation to sponsor. In situations of domestic violence, and absent an accessible and dedicated application route for a migrant dependent spouse to apply for an autonomous residence permit to flee harm, this provision may empower abusers to threaten their dependent migrant spouse with revocation of their residence permit as a mechanism of control to prevent or deter escape from abuse. This in turn risks increasing the vulnerability of migrant spouses experiencing domestic violence, trapping them in harmful situations. GREVIO therefore emphasises the need for a clearly defined and accessible legal route through which dependent migrant women victims can apply for an autonomous residence permit to minimise the risk of such controlling and abusive behaviour by perpetrators.

380. As regards expulsion proceedings, these are governed by section 41 of the Immigration Law and are issued against foreign nationals residing in Latvia without valid residence. Section 35.2.2 of the Immigration Law clarifies that such expulsion equally affects a spouse, meaning that the residence permit of a dependent spouse would be revoked alongside that of their sponsoring spouse, rendering both liable to be expelled from Latvia. The only exception to this, stated in section 42 of the Immigration Law, allows the OCMA to authorise a foreigner to reside in Latvia, for no longer than a year, for humanitarian reasons. While this does provide some level of protection for migrant women whose circumstances are compelling, for example migrant women victims of domestic violence who would risk expulsion together with the abusive spouse, there is no reference to this exception or any guarantee that it applies to such experiences in practice.

381. In relation to the requirement set out in Article 59, paragraph 3, of the Istanbul Convention concerning the ability to gain a renewable residence permit for all migrant women who have experienced a form of violence against women or domestic violence to support criminal investigations or prosecutions, GREVIO welcomes the provision in the Latvian Immigration Law, in section 23.1.21, of the granting of a residence permit linked to criminal proceedings, which is therefore compliant with the convention.

382. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to take the necessary legislative and policy measures to ensure that migrant women victims of domestic violence who depend on their abusive spouse for their residence in Latvia are sufficiently informed of the legal avenues available to them and are guaranteed access to apply for an independent temporary residence permit upon dissolution of their marriage.

306. Submission by the MARTA Centre, p. 28.

307. Ibid.

308. Ibid. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

383. GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to take the necessary legislative and policy measures to ensure that expulsion proceedings initiated in relation to sponsoring spouses of dependent migrant women victims of domestic violence may be suspended in relation to the dependent spouse.

B. Gender-based asylum claims (Article 60)

384. Latvia has long been a transit country for asylum seekers, receiving relatively low numbers of applications for asylum, with significant numbers of applications not pursued as applicants transit through Latvia. In 2022, a total of 124 women applied for asylum in Latvia, of which 58 were granted refugee status, with three being granted subsidiary protection. In 2023, Latvia received 294 asylum applications from women, of which 25 were granted refugee status and none were granted subsidiary protection. In 2024, 135 asylum applications were received from women, of which 33 were granted refugee status and five granted subsidiary protection. However, the data collected are not disaggregated to identify the individual grounds for persecution upon which refugee status has been granted.

385. At the same time, the war of aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine has prompted a high influx of refugees from Ukraine, who in 2022 represented 2% of the Latvian population, many of whom are women.

1. Gender-sensitive asylum determination procedure

386. Asylum applications in Latvia are lodged with the Latvian State Border Guard and then transferred to the Asylum Affairs Department of the OCMA, who is responsible for determining asylum applications. Appeals against negative asylum decisions made by the OCMA are lodged in the Administrative District Court.

387. Latvia has acceded to the United Nations 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (the Refugee Convention) and its 1967 Protocol as well as the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons. In 2016, Latvia's Asylum Law entered into force.³⁰⁹

388. Section 37 of the Latvian Asylum Law enshrines in domestic law the requirements of Article 1A(2) of the Refugee Convention. Section 38.2 of the Asylum Law defines persecution as including physical, mental and sexual abuse. While GREVIO welcomes the inclusion of sexual abuse, the law makes no mention of wider forms of violence against women amounting to persecution, such as forced marriage or female genital mutilation. Sections 40 and 41 of the Asylum Law identify the conditions for humanitarian protection and define the concept of serious harm an applicant must be facing. However, GREVIO notes with regret that this concept does not specifically refer to the different forms of violence against women and domestic violence as covered by the Istanbul Convention.

389. While the individual circumstances of applicants and the forms of violence against women are said to be considered when assessing acts of persecution, there is currently no legislative or other measure that mandates this approach, which GREVIO regrets. Moreover, there is no obligation to consistently interpret, in asylum applications, experiences of persecution through the prism of women's specific vulnerabilities, including their high risk of sexual and other forms of violence, including domestic violence. Section 39 of the Asylum Law, on the assessment of persecution, contains no reference to such an approach, despite the Istanbul Convention's requirement to ensure a gender-sensitive interpretation of the existing refugee grounds as set out in Article 60, paragraph 2.

390. GREVIO therefore notes that Latvia does not have a national framework or guidelines for international protection claims involving violence against women, including sexual violence. It relies

309. Asylum Law, available at: www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=278986.

on the EUAA (European Union Agency for Asylum) guidelines, practical tools and training modules. Although the EUAA has published guidance on membership of a particular social group and claims involving sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and sex characteristics, it has not published guidelines on how to apply an interpretation to international protection claims guided by women's specific experiences and vulnerabilities, or how to identify gender-based violence against women as persecution or serious harm.³¹⁰ According to the authorities, OCMA staff have mostly undergone the EUAA advanced training module on these issues, although they are not subject to mandatory training requirements.³¹¹ It is unclear, however, to what extent State Border Guard officials and frontline workers have undertaken the advanced EUAA's training.

391. As regards the asylum procedure, GREVIO notes with satisfaction that several procedural measures that demonstrate sensitivity of the shame and stigma associated with experiences of violence against women and the specific needs of women and girl victims are enshrined in law. For example, asylum interviews are conducted confidentially and individually, away from family members, and women may request a same-sex interviewer and interpreter, pursuant to section 25 of the Asylum Law. GREVIO welcomes the fact that the majority of the OCMA caseworkers are women and therefore requests for a same-sex interviewer can be facilitated, but also notes that it is more difficult to secure a same-sex interpreter.

392. However, because of the capacity restraints among the OCMA, asylum interviews are frequently carried out remotely via video link. Even when face-to-face interviews are conducted, interpreters are rarely present in the room and only join remotely. These practices are not trauma-informed and risk inhibiting important disclosure from victims of violence against women. The conduct of asylum interviews in a manner that is mindful of women's specific and often very traumatic experiences of violence perceived to carry shame and stigma is critical to supporting disclosure. GREVIO points to the importance of ensuring that asylum interviews are conducted in a way that enables women to disclose their experiences because it increases the prospects of a positive decision and the granting of international protection.

393. Finally, Ukrainian women and girls are subject to a separate regime and are granted temporary protection in Latvia pursuant to section 61 of the Asylum Law. Initially this was granted for one year but has now been extended to three years. As of October 2024, a total of 29 712 Ukrainian women and girls had been granted temporary protection in Latvia. GREVIO welcomes the support package available to Ukrainian women and girls as an important contribution to supporting women and girls fleeing conflict. A support centre for women and girls from Ukraine was set up in Riga with access to the OCMA and municipal social services. Women and girls are granted fast-track access to abortion services and are provided with psychological support.

394. **GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to take the necessary legislative or other measures to:**

- a. **ensure that gender-based violence against women may be recognised as a form of persecution and serious harm and that a gender-sensitive interpretation is applied to *all* grounds of persecution as contained in the United Nations 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees;**
- b. **establish nationwide, uniform guidelines setting out procedures and trauma-informed criteria for the identification, within the asylum determination procedure, of women victims of gender-based violence, in order to ensure the systematic assessment of whether female asylum seekers have been exposed to, or are at risk of, gender-based persecution, and to reduce barriers to disclosure;**
- c. **ensure that all those involved in the asylum procedure (decision makers, interpreters and legal representatives) receive adequate training on gender-based persecution of women and girls.**

310. www.euaa.europa.eu/practical-tools-and-guides.

311. www.euaa.europa.eu/training-catalogue/training-modules.

2. Accommodation

395. Pursuant to section 6 of the Asylum Law, destitute asylum seekers may be accommodated by the state and are provided with financial support. The OCMA is responsible for managing reception centres.

396. The OCMA operates two open reception centres for asylum seekers in Latvia: one in Mucenieki close to Riga, and another in Liepna, close to the border with the Russian Federation. Across both centres, the OCMA, at the time of reporting, accommodates 108 women (of which 71 are accommodated in Mucenieki). The centre in Mucenieki comprises two buildings: one called “Mucenieki” and a second called “Bundulīši”. The latter was renovated in 2020 and is used to accommodate asylum seekers with special needs, such as asylum seekers with a disability, families with children, single families, unaccompanied minors and victims of any form of violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, or who have experienced armed conflict. Within Bundulīši, single women are accommodated in separate blocks similar to apartments with a communal kitchen and bathroom. A doctor and nurses are available onsite to provide initial and primary healthcare services. Access to mainstream secondary healthcare is via referral. There is a play area for children, a good-quality sports field and a recreational centre that delivers activities for both local residents and asylum seekers. GREVIO notes with satisfaction the delivery of activities that support integration and community cohesion with asylum seekers. It is unclear, however, to what extent standard operating procedures or protocols exist to ensure the safety of all asylum seekers in reception facilities, including the safety of women and girls from sexual harassment and sexual violence.

397. Moreover, GREVIO notes with concern the practice of the OCMA of placing unaccompanied children, including girls, in adult reception centres even if they are allocated separate rooms. According to the OCMA there are, at the time of reporting, currently 71 unaccompanied children in Mucenieki, including some girls aged between 16 and 17 years old. Although these children are under the supervision of the Orphans and Custody Courts, they are accommodated alone in self-catering facilities, among non-relative adults and in a setting that is not capable of fully safeguarding them.

398. In terms of vulnerability screenings for adult asylum seekers, pursuant to section 7.3 of the Asylum Law, the responsibility to identify special needs lies with the State Border Guard and the OCMA. Section 1.10 of the Asylum Law states that those considered to have special procedural or reception needs may include a person who has, among other things, suffered from torture, rape or other serious psychological, physical or sexual violence. GREVIO commends Latvia on expressly recognising in law that victims of such violence, including women, may present with special needs.

399. The State Border Guard conducts an initial brief interview to register a claim for asylum and, at the same time, uses the EUAA Tool for Identification of Persons with Special Needs.³¹² Any indicators of special needs or vulnerability are recorded on the central register and the information is transferred to the OCMA. Civil society organisations and experts in the field, however, have alerted GREVIO to the fact that officials frequently lack training and that, in practice, the responsibility for self-identifying and reporting vulnerabilities is placed on the individual.³¹³ GREVIO reiterates that early and effective vulnerability screening in the asylum process is critical to ensuring that women who have experienced sexual violence or other forms of violence against women benefit, at the earliest possible opportunity, from safe and appropriate accommodation and access to specialist support services and are supported to fully disclose their experiences in the asylum procedure through the implementation of special measures, where necessary.

400. In terms of providing asylum seekers with the necessary information on the procedure and their rights, GREVIO notes with satisfaction that the OCMA has produced a general information

312. EUAA tool: www.ipsn.euaa.europa.eu/ipsn-tool.

313. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

booklet related to the asylum procedure that is available in 13 languages.³¹⁴ This booklet confirms that if the Border Guard or the OCMA identify special procedural or reception needs, the applicant has the right to receive suitable and proper support throughout the asylum procedure (reflecting section 11.3 of the Asylum Law).

401. Moreover, asylum seekers are allocated a social worker and social mentor to provide additional support, which GREVIO notes with satisfaction. Section 11.2.8 of the Asylum Law guarantees asylum seekers the right to receive emergency medical assistance, primary healthcare and outpatient and inpatient psychiatric assistance in case of serious mental health disorders. However, it appears that referrals for specialist services are subject to delays caused by nationwide waiting lists.³¹⁵

402. **GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to take the necessary legislative or other measures to:**

- a. **incorporate specific questions regarding women's and girls' vulnerabilities, dependencies and their heightened exposure to violence against women in order to ensure the adequate screening for vulnerabilities of all female asylum seekers and to identify their special needs;**
- b. **ensure that all women and girls, including unaccompanied girls, are offered adequate and safe single-sex accommodation;**
- c. **introduce and implement standard operating procedures or safety protocols for the prevention of and protection of women and girls from violence perpetrated in in reception facilities.**

C. *Non-refoulement* (Article 61)

403. Article 61 of the Istanbul Convention entails the obligation under international law for states to respect the principle of *non-refoulement* in relation to women victims of gender-based violence who may fear persecution if returned. According to this principle, states shall not expel or return an asylum seeker or refugee to any country where their life or freedom would be threatened. Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights also prevents a person being returned to a place where they would be at real risk of being subjected to torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The *non-refoulement* principle also includes not prohibiting access to the territory of a country to asylum seekers who have arrived at its borders or who are prevented from accessing its borders.³¹⁶ The obligation to respect the *non-refoulement* principle applies equally to victims of violence against women who are in need of protection, irrespective of the status or residence of the women concerned.³¹⁷

404. Section 47 of the Immigration Law and section 3 of the Asylum Law enshrine the prohibition of *refoulement* in compliance with Article 61, paragraph 1, of the Istanbul Convention. In the absence of any data or other information regarding the practical measures taken to ensure respect for this prohibition, it is not possible to assess its implementation in more detail. As GREVIO has had the opportunity to note previously, the proper identification of victims of violence against women among asylum seekers and those presenting as such at the border is a fundamental cornerstone of ensuring protection against *refoulement*.³¹⁸ Moreover, any restrictions preventing access to a state's border may be considered to be tantamount to indirect *refoulement*. GREVIO therefore emphasises that adherence to the *non-refoulement* principle remains integral to the protection of women and girls from gender-based violence.

314. OCMA guidelines for asylum seekers in Latvia: www.pmlp.gov.lv/en/guidance-asylum-seekers-latvia.

315. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

316. Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, paragraph 320.

317. Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, paragraph 322.

318. See GREVIO's baseline evaluation reports on: Italy, paragraphs 263 and 275; Malta, paragraph 255; Spain, paragraph 301; and Greece, paragraph 358.

Concluding remarks

405. Numerous legislative and policy measures adopted in Latvia prior to and following the ratification of the Istanbul Convention demonstrate the country's commitment to combating violence against women, in particular domestic violence. GREVIO welcomes in particular the adoption in 2024 of the first national action plan dedicated to preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. It also notes important criminal-law reforms addressing violence in close relationships, including the criminalisation of psychological violence, the shift towards *ex officio* prosecution, the introduction of an administrative offence of sexual harassment and increased statutory penalties. GREVIO further welcomes the availability of funding for victim support services, the system of emergency barring orders allowing the immediate separation of perpetrators from victims, and the constructive co-operation developed between state authorities and civil society organisations.

406. Against this backdrop of promising developments, this report identifies areas where further progress is required. While important efforts have been made to address domestic violence, policy responses and institutional practice continue to focus primarily on violence within the family context, particularly violence against children, sometimes without sufficiently recognising the gendered nature and dynamics of violence against women. GREVIO notes the need to strengthen understanding of its root causes and to reinforce primary prevention efforts. It also emphasises that the effective implementation of the National Action Plan will require strong co-ordination, adequate resources and the involvement of all relevant stakeholders, while ensuring that protection and support services are accessible throughout the country, including in rural areas where significant disparities exist between municipalities, and that the needs of women exposed to multiple forms of discrimination are addressed.

407. Further efforts are also required to ensure the effective implementation of the existing legal and policy framework. In particular, GREVIO notes the need to strengthen systematic multi-agency risk-assessment procedures and to introduce mechanisms for domestic violence homicide review. Improvements are also needed in the collection of disaggregated data, the availability of specialist support services, including dedicated shelters for women victims of domestic violence and their children, and the availability and quality of perpetrator programmes. Progress is also required to ensure that decisions on child custody and visitation rights fully take into account incidents of violence covered by the scope of the Istanbul Convention and the safety of victims and their children, including child witnesses of violence. GREVIO also highlights the importance of ensuring sustainable funding and participation of specialist NGOs, exercising caution in the use of mediation in cases involving violence against women, and strengthening responses to emerging forms of such violence, including those occurring in the digital sphere.

408. These and other points have been outlined in this report, marking the beginning of GREVIO's fruitful co-operation with the authorities in Latvia. GREVIO invites them to keep it regularly informed of developments as regards the implementation of the Istanbul Convention.

409. With the present report, GREVIO wishes to support the Latvian authorities in this endeavour and invites them to keep it regularly informed of developments with regard to the implementation of the Istanbul Convention. GREVIO looks forward to continuing its fruitful co-operation with the Latvian authorities.

410. With a view to facilitating the implementation of its suggestions and proposals, GREVIO requests the national authorities to translate this report into their official national language 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.

Appendix I

List of proposals and suggestions by GREVIO

I. Purposes, definitions, equality and non-discrimination, general obligations

B. Scope of application of the convention and definitions (Articles 2 and 3)

1. GREVIO urges the Latvian authorities to operationalise the definitions contained in the National Action Plan for the Prevention and Combating of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence 2024-2029 and to ensure their effective implementation, including the understanding of violence against women and domestic violence as forms of gender-based violence directed against women because they are women or that affect them disproportionately, in accordance with Article 3, paragraph d, of the Istanbul Convention. (paragraph 10)

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

2. Intersectional discrimination

2. GREVIO urges the Latvian authorities to:

- a. take measures to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence that specifically address the situation of women and girls who are or might be facing multiple forms of discrimination, such as women with disabilities, Roma women, LGBTI women and girls;
- b. integrate the perspective of women facing multiple discrimination into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies for preventing and combating violence against women, by supporting, funding and closely co-operating with women's rights organisations representing them;
- c. mainstream preventing and combating violence against women in social inclusion programmes or other policy documents that aim to realise the rights and address the specific needs of women facing multiple forms of discrimination;
- d. develop and improve accessibility to protection and support services for victims belonging to these groups of women. (paragraph 19)

D. State obligations and due diligence (Article 5)

3. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to establish a domestic homicide review mechanism, to systematically analyse all cases of gender-related killings of women and girls, in particular in the context of domestic violence, with a view to identifying possible shortcomings in the institutional responses to such violence, protecting the safety of women and girls, holding to account both the perpetrator and the multiple agencies that come into contact with the parties, and ensuring that such gaps are effectively addressed. (paragraph 24)

II. Integrated policies and data collection

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

4. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to:
 - a. develop a comprehensive, long-term and co-ordinated strategy addressing all the forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention, including digital forms of violence, integrating prevention, protection, support and prosecution, addressing the structural and root causes of such violence and ensuring that policies and measures respond effectively to the needs of all victims, including women exposed to multiple forms of discrimination;
 - b. continue to develop a systematic, nationwide and institutionalised co-ordination mechanism with clear mandates, adequate and sustainable human and financial resources, defined responsibilities and accountability arrangements. (paragraph 37)

B. Financial resources (Article 8)

5. GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to:
 - a. address the structural shortcomings of the current funding framework in terms of sustainability, coherence and sufficiency in order to ensure full compliance with Article 8 of the Istanbul Convention;
 - b. streamline the funding available at central and municipal levels through a consolidated budget line covering the full range of measures required under the Istanbul Convention and implement gender-responsive budgeting in order to identify and allocate appropriate funding, monitor public spending and measure progress achieved in combating violence against women;
 - c. ensure appropriate long-term and sustainable funding for women's rights organisations providing specialist support services for women victims of any form of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention and their children, throughout the country, based on transparent and accessible procedures. (paragraph 45)

C. Non-governmental organisations and civil society (Article 9)

6. GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to institutionalise meaningful civil society participation by ensuring sustainable and structured representation in efforts to design, co-ordinate and monitor policies on violence against women for women's rights organisations, including those serving women exposed to multiple forms of discrimination. GREVIO also encourages the Latvian authorities to develop and provide safeguards to protect and expand civic space for women's rights NGOs and to ensure continuity and accessibility of specialist services without jeopardising past gains. (paragraph 54)

D. Co-ordinating body (Article 10)

7. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to:
 - a. ensure that the relevant entities are vested with clear mandates, powers and competences that are widely communicated, and to allocate sufficient human and financial resources to these entities to safeguard the sustainability of their work;
 - b. maintain a clear separation between the co-ordination and implementation of policies and measures, on the one hand, and their independent monitoring and evaluation, on the other, in order to uphold the objectivity and credibility of policy assessment;

- c. ensure that the functions of the co-ordinating body encompass all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention and are supported by adequate and appropriate data systems, which are indispensable for evidence-based policy making. (paragraph 57)

E. Data collection and research (Article 11)

1. Administrative data collection

a. Law-enforcement agencies and the justice sector

8. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to:

- a. strengthen and harmonise administrative data collection on violence against women and domestic violence across the justice chain by collecting data on sex, age, type of violence, the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim and geographical location, to be added to all relevant systems (police, prosecution and courts);
- b. ensure that conviction and sentencing data be systematically disaggregated by sex, age, type of violence, the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim and geographical location, and be regularly published;
- c. establish formalised cross-sectoral co-operation mechanisms among the relevant ministries to support integrated data recording and analysis, in line with the requirements of Article 11 of the Istanbul Convention;
- d. ensure that all relevant data are made available to the public in line with Article 11, paragraph 4, of the Istanbul Convention. (paragraph 72)

b. Healthcare sector

9. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to ensure the systematic and comparable collection of data by the healthcare sector on the number of instances that contact has been made by women and girls who seek assistance from, or come into contact with, public or private healthcare services due to their experiences of any of the forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention. (paragraph 78)

c. Social services

10. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to collect data in the field of social services disaggregated by sex, age, type of violence, the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim and geographical location as well as other factors deemed relevant, including the types of services that are provided, in order to enhance its capacity to monitor, evaluate and respond effectively to violence against women and domestic violence, in line with the requirements of the Istanbul Convention. (paragraph 82)

d. Data on the asylum procedure

11. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to collect data on the number of asylum requests made and the number of decisions granted on the grounds of gender based violence against women. (paragraph 85)

2. Population-based surveys

12. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to regularly conduct population-based surveys covering all forms of violence against women as defined by the Istanbul Convention. Such surveys should, as much as possible, cover the experiences of all women, with particular attention to those from groups at heightened risk of violence, including those living in institutional settings, in order to ensure a pertinent, inclusive and comparable assessment of prevalence and trends over time. (paragraph 92)

3. Research

13. GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to:
- a. develop structured, systematic and regular research on all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention, including female genital mutilation, forced marriage, online and technology-facilitated violence, and violence committed in the name of “honour”;
 - b. support academic research on violence against women, including targeted studies on groups of women facing discrimination on multiple grounds in order to inform comprehensive and evidence-based policies and measures. (paragraph 99)

III. Prevention

A. General obligations (Article 12)

14. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to:
- a. strengthen primary prevention measures by explicitly challenging harmful stereotypes and bias that justify or perpetuate violence against women, understood as a form of violence that targets women because they are women or that affects them disproportionately;
 - b. reinforce prevention efforts through systematic and targeted engagement of men and boys, in line with the Istanbul Convention’s preventive and transformative objectives. (paragraph 105)

B. Awareness raising (Article 13)

15. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to address gaps in coverage, visibility and co-ordination and develop a more coherent framework that expands and aligns awareness-raising initiatives on all forms of violence against women with the standards and transformative objectives of the Istanbul Convention. (paragraph 111)

C. Education (Article 14)

16. GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to:
- a. consider introducing dedicated curricular modules covering all of the principles spelled out in Article 14 of the Istanbul Convention to complement mainstreamed content, ensuring that the forms of violence against women and their linkages to questions of mutual respect, non-violent conflict resolution and women’s equality with men are specifically covered, and that violence against women is addressed as a distinct phenomenon with specific causes, dynamics and consequences;
 - b. strengthen the systematic monitoring of the implementation of the teaching requirements arising from Article 14 of the Istanbul Convention and ensure mandatory review of teaching materials and curricula to identify and eliminate stereotypes and narratives that undermine the equality between men and women;
 - c. expand and structure non-formal education initiatives in schools, sports, cultural, and leisure settings to promote non-violent conflict resolution, mutual respect and equality. (paragraph 118)

D. Training of professionals (Article 15)

17. GREVIO urges the Latvian authorities to ensure the systematic and mandatory provision of both initial and in-service training on the prevention, detection and response to all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention, taking due account of their specific characteristics, interconnections and the risks of re-victimisation. This training must be ensured across all relevant sectors, adequately address the needs of all victims, including women exposed to multiple forms of discrimination, be supported by clear and binding protocols and guidelines, and be subjected to regular evaluation mechanisms to assess its quality, consistency and practical impact. (paragraph 135)

E. Preventive intervention and treatment programmes (Article 16)

1. Programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence

18. GREVIO urges the Latvian authorities to:

- a. develop new and consolidate existing programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence based on common minimum standards, with a specific focus on the gendered dynamics of domestic violence, behavioural change and the taking of responsibility for acts of violence against women. These programmes should operate in systematic co-ordination with specialist support services for victims to ensure their safety, building on and further strengthening existing inter-institutional cooperation mechanisms;
- b. take measures to increase the level of attendance and the rate of completion of such perpetrator programmes;
- c. ensure that that specialised training requirements for professionals delivering perpetrator programmes are standardised and consistently applied across all programme providers, building on and expanding existing training measures developed within the State Probation Service;
- d. ensure consistent application of referral criteria across all perpetrator programme providers, so that persons assessed as requiring intervention are systematically directed to appropriate programmes regardless of the pathway through which they come into contact with the authorities;
- e. ensure robust victim-centred safeguards, preventing programme participation or completion from being used to weaken protection measures or custody arrangements;
- f. further develop systematic monitoring and independent evaluation of programmes across all providers and pathways, and ensure that evaluation frameworks encompass data on referrals, completion rates, recidivism and, in particular, victim safety outcomes. (paragraph 146)

IV. Protection and support

A. General obligations (Article 18)

19. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to operationalise and institutionalise interinstitutional co-operation at all relevant levels in order to embed the provision of services for victims of all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention in multi-agency co-operation structures that involve all relevant bodies, including women's specialist support services, and that operate in accordance with protocols and guidelines for co-operation, based on a gendered understanding of violence against women and domestic violence and focusing on the human rights and safety of women victims and their children, as well as on their empowerment and economic independence. (paragraph 157)

20. To this end, GREVIO urges the Latvian authorities to establish mandatory guidelines and/or protocols for relevant professionals on how to respond to cases of violence against women as covered by the Istanbul Convention on the basis of multi-agency co-operation with a view to ensuring the coherent, victim-centred and consistent implementation of the Action Plan for the Prevention and Combating of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence 2024-2029 across the country. These efforts should be accompanied by systematic monitoring of progress, structured exchanges of good practices between municipalities and the formalised involvement of specialist women's rights organisations with recognised expertise in the field. (paragraph 158)

21. GREVIO further strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to ensure that protection and support services are made available as much as possible on the same premises ("one-stop shop"). (paragraph 159)

B. Information (Article 19)

22. GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to strengthen efforts to ensure that all women victims receive timely, accessible and comprehensible information, including in relevant languages, and to ensure that the information provided covers all forms of violence against women under the Istanbul Convention, together with clear guidance on available legal remedies and support services. (paragraph 163)

C. General support services (Article 20)

1. Social services

23. GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to develop dedicated programmes addressing the specific needs of women victims of all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention, particularly in the areas of employment and vocational training, with a view to promoting their recovery, economic independence and empowerment. To achieve this, the authorities should:

- a. establish clear national provisions linking victim support to prioritised and sustainable housing solutions, targeted employment schemes and vocational training opportunities;
- b. ensure that services are tailored to the specific needs of victims and their children, including those exposed to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination;
- c. guarantee uniform standards and adequate, sustainable funding across municipalities so as to ensure consistent, high-quality support throughout the country. (paragraph 170)

2. Healthcare services

24. GREVIO urges the Latvian authorities to ensure that all healthcare services are equipped to respond effectively to all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention, notably by developing and implementing comprehensive, gender-sensitive protocols in the public and private healthcare sectors establishing standardised care pathways for women victims of violence. Such protocols should include screening and systematic identification, diagnosis, treatment, documentation of injuries, risk assessment and referral to appropriate specialist support services while promoting multi-agency co-operation between the healthcare sector and specialist and social services. (paragraph 174)

D. Specialist support services (Article 22)

25. Recalling the important role that specialist support services play in addressing the different forms of violence covered by the scope of the Istanbul Convention by providing tailored support to all groups of victims, GREVIO urges the Latvian authorities to ensure the availability of adequate specialist support services for women victims of all forms of violence covered by the

Istanbul Convention throughout the country, grounded in a clear understanding of the specific dynamics of violence against women and the particular needs of its victims, including women facing multiple forms of discrimination. (paragraph 180)

E. Shelters (Article 23)

26. GREVIO urges the Latvian authorities to establish and sustainably fund a nationwide network of dedicated, specialist shelters for women victims of violence and their children, ensuring immediate, round-the-clock access to safe accommodation and comprehensive, multidisciplinary support in line with the Istanbul Convention's standards. (paragraph 185)

F. Telephone helplines (Article 24)

27. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to ensure that in addition to the many different and specialist helplines there is a state-wide helpline that serves as a single first point of contact providing advice to women victims of all forms of violence against women and domestic violence, operated by trained professionals throughout the country, round the clock, free of charge and with due regard for the language barriers that women belonging to minority groups, refugee and migrant women, and other callers may face, as well as with due respect for the confidentiality and anonymity of all callers. In addition, sustainable funding levels for the available helplines must be ensured. (paragraph 188)

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

28. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to:
- a. pursue the existing process of establishing dedicated rape crisis and/or sexual violence referral centres throughout the country, in line with the benchmark of one centre per 200 000 inhabitants, operating on a victim-centred, integrated basis and staffed by trained specialists;
 - b. ensure that these centres provide immediate medical care, trauma support, forensic examinations based on recognised standards and short- and long-term psychological counselling, as well as legal counselling, irrespective of the victim's willingness to report;
 - c. strengthen co-ordination and referral pathways between health, forensic and support services and guarantee free-of-charge access to medical and forensic care. (paragraph 192)

H. Protection and support for child witnesses (Article 26)

29. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to ensure the availability of dedicated support services for children who are victims or witnesses of all forms of violence against women, including age-appropriate psychosocial counselling from professionals trained in interviewing children, with due regard for the best interests of the child. (paragraph 199)

I. Reporting by professionals (Article 28)

30. Recalling the principle of women's empowerment mainstreamed throughout the Istanbul Convention, GREVIO urges the Latvian authorities to:
- a. review and align their system of reporting by professionals in relation to the forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention, including through making available harmonised criteria and guidance for reporting;

- b. ensure that the duty to report imposed on professionals is tempered by full and sensitive information being provided to the victim to allow her to make an informed decision herself, and that informed consent is sought from a victim of violence for the reporting of a suspicion of a criminal act, outside of those cases where there is a reasonable suspicion that there is an imminent danger to the victim or another person, or where the victim is a child or unable to protect themselves. (paragraph 205)

V. Substantive law

A. Civil law

1. Civil remedies against the state – ensuring due diligence (Article 29)

31. GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to systematically examine and address any practical and institutional barriers that impede the effective use that women victims of the different forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention make of existing civil and administrative law remedies for holding state officials accountable for failures to fulfil their obligations to diligently prevent, investigate and punish acts of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention. Progress in this area should be monitored and evaluated through the systematic collection of data on the number of cases filed by victims and their outcomes. (paragraph 212)

2. Compensation (Article 30)

32. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to:

- a. assess the adequacy and effectiveness of the compensation mechanisms available under Latvian law for victims of any of the forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention with a view to expanding its scope to cover all forms of violence against women where the criterion of serious bodily injury or impairment of health is met;
- b. systematically collect, analyse and take into account, for the purposes of such assessment, data on the number of criminal and civil proceedings in which perpetrators have been ordered to pay compensation to such victims, as well as the number of cases in which state compensation has been awarded, including to the dependants of women who have died as a result of such violence. (paragraph 218)

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

33. GREVIO urges the Latvian authorities to take the necessary measures to ensure that all judicial and administrative bodies involved in determining custody and visitation rights systematically and effectively take into account incidents of violence against women, including situations where children are exposed to such violence, notably by:

- a. ensuring the systematic screening of all custody and visitation cases by courts and Orphans and Custody Courts to identify whether domestic violence, including coercive control and post-separation abuse, has occurred or has been reported;
- b. ensuring that allegations or indications of violence are duly investigated and assessed through strengthened co-operation between family courts, Orphans and Custody Courts, criminal courts, law-enforcement agencies, health and education authorities and specialist support services;
- c. incorporating structured risk-assessment procedures into custody and visitation proceedings, explicitly addressing the risks arising from children's exposure to violence against a parent;
- d. ensuring that only professionals with specialist training and demonstrated expertise in domestic violence and the requirements of the Istanbul Convention are appointed to

- provide opinions or assessments in custody and visitation cases with a history of violence;
- e. preventing the use, by courts, experts and social services, of concepts that obscure power imbalances, minimise violence or place responsibility on victims for the consequences of abuse;
- f. ensuring the appropriate and effective use of legal provisions allowing the restriction, suspension or subjecting to safeguards of custody and visitation rights where violence is identified, including by ensuring that children exposed to domestic violence are systematically covered by protection measures and that supervision arrangements prioritise safety and independence;
- g. measuring progress in this area through the systematic collection and analysis of data and case law, demonstrating how incidents of violence are assessed and how decisions on custody and visitation rights are reasoned in light of such violence. (paragraph 229)

B. Criminal law

1. Psychological violence (Article 33)

34. GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to ensure the effective investigation, prosecution and sanctioning of acts of psychological violence by making full and consistent use of Article 174.1 of the Criminal Law, including in cases involving patterns of coercive and controlling behaviour. (paragraph 239)

3. Physical violence (Article 35)

35. GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to ensure the practical application of Section 174.1 of the Criminal Code with a view to imposing effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions. (paragraph 248)

4. Sexual violence, including rape (Article 36)

36. GREVIO urges the Latvian authorities to:

- a. fully incorporate the notion of freely given consent into sections 159 and 160 of the Criminal Law, in line with Article 36 of the Istanbul Convention;
- b. ensure adequate sanctions for all sexual acts committed without such consent, including in situations where the circumstances of the case preclude valid consent. (paragraph 257)

5. Forced marriage (Article 37)

37. GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to ensure that all forms of conduct covered by Article 37 of the Istanbul Convention, including forcing an adult or child into a marriage and luring an adult or child abroad for that purpose, are effectively and operationally addressed by law-enforcement authorities and courts. (paragraph 263)

6. Female genital mutilation (Article 38)

38. GREVIO invites the Latvian authorities to align its Criminal Law with the requirements of Article 38, paragraphs b and c, of the Istanbul Convention. This would ensure that coercing or procuring a woman or girl, or additionally inciting a girl to undergo any of the acts listed in Article 38, paragraphs b and c, of the convention, is also punishable. (paragraph 268)

8. Sexual harassment (Article 40)

39. GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to ensure the effective implementation of section 11.2 of the Law on Administrative Penalties for Offences in the Field of Administration, Public Order and Use of the Official Language on sexual harassment, both in the workplace and beyond, including in institutional and digital contexts, and to establish systematic data collection enabling the monitoring of its practical application and effectiveness. (paragraph 279)

9. Unacceptable justifications for crimes, including crimes committed in the name of so-called honour (Article 42)

40. GREVIO urges the Latvian authorities to align the relevant provisions of Latvia's Criminal Law with Article 42 of the Istanbul Convention and to take steps to ensure that the circumstances set out in Section 47.1.5 of the Latvian Criminal Law relating to the alleged immoral behaviour of the victim are not considered as mitigating circumstances in cases of violence against women. (paragraph 282)

10. Sanctions and measures (Article 45)

41. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to ensure, through legislative and other appropriate measures, that sentences and measures imposed for domestic violence offences are effective, proportionate and dissuasive, including by collecting relevant data on sentences imposed and reviewing sentencing practices with a view to developing clear criteria consistent with the requirements of Article 45 of the Istanbul Convention. (paragraph 287)

11. Aggravating circumstances (Article 46)

42. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to take appropriate measures to ensure that all circumstances listed in Article 46 of the Istanbul Convention are, in practice, considered as aggravating circumstances by the courts. (paragraph 292)

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

43. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to uphold and effectively enforce the prohibition of mandatory reconciliation in family law proceedings, particularly those concerning child custody where there is a history of violence against women and domestic violence; to ensure that the voluntary nature of mediation is properly understood by institutions and victims; and to continue developing and implementing robust guidelines and training on screening family law cases for domestic violence. (paragraph 302)

VI. Investigation, prosecution, procedural law and protective measures

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

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

44. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to:

- a. ensure timely and consistent police response to all reports of violence against women within the remit of the Istanbul Convention, including in rural areas;
- b. take measures to reduce the secondary victimisation of women who report any of the forms of violence against women, including intimate partner violence, sexual violence

and rape, stalking and online violence against women, including by increasing the degree of specialisation of law-enforcement officers across the country and guaranteeing access to adequately trained female officers;

- c. address geographical and capacity disparities to ensure uniform access to trained law-enforcement personnel and specialist interventions across the country. (paragraph 314)

2. Effective investigation and prosecution

45. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to strengthen the investigation and prosecution of all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention, in particular intimate partner violence against women, sexual violence, stalking and technology-facilitated violence, including online harassment and image-based sexual abuse, through adequate degrees of specialisation achieved on the basis of dedicated training and resources and made available across the country. (paragraph 319)

3. Conviction rates

46. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to:

- a. address any/all factors that contribute to attrition in all cases of violence against women and domestic violence covered by the Istanbul Convention;
- b. expand the practical use of electronic monitoring in high-risk cases, ensuring geographically even application in line with risk assessments and victim protection needs. (paragraph 326)

B. Risk assessment and risk management (Article 51)

47. GREVIO urges the Latvian authorities to:

- a. develop and implement a standardised, nationwide risk-assessment instrument for all cases of violence against women, to enable structured, multi-agency, victim-centred risk response and follow-up, ensuring consistent application across regions and authorities;
- b. ensure risk assessment systematically captures psychological, sexual and economic violence, coercive control, patterns of abuse, prior incidents and children's exposure to violence;
- c. integrate victim-centred approaches and gender-sensitive language into risk-assessment procedures, including mechanisms to record victims' needs, preferences and safety concerns;
- d. strengthen multi-agency co-ordination and follow-up, linking police, social services, health services and specialist support providers to ensure timely and effective protection measures based on up-to-date knowledge regarding escalating risk factors and child-protection considerations. (paragraph 333)

C. Emergency barring orders (Article 52)

48. GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to:

- a. ensure that any exceptions to emergency barring orders prohibiting contact, including for work-related reasons and to ensure contact with children, are strictly regulated, clearly guided and applied only where they do not compromise victim safety;
- b. strengthen the ability of law-enforcement officers to serve an emergency barring order on a perpetrator, including by ensuring systematic follow-up and active searches where perpetrators leave the scene prior to police arrival. (paragraph 341)

D. Restraining or protection orders (Article 53)

49. GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to:

- a. ensure that police officers consistently fulfil their statutory duty to assist victims in applying for judicial protection orders, including through clear guidance and supervision;
- b. ensure that the full range of protection orders are made use of in practice and in relation to all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention;
- c. take the necessary measures to systematically take into consideration the safety concerns of women victims of domestic violence and their children, on a case-by-case basis, when deciding on rights of contact for the duration of protection orders issued;
- d. address enforcement gaps by developing procedures to prevent evasion of service of protection orders and ensure timely implementation of protection measures;
- e. monitor the outcomes of breaches of protection orders to ensure that sanctions imposed are effective, proportionate and dissuasive, in line with the Istanbul Convention. (paragraph 349)

E. Ex parte and ex officio proceedings (Article 55)**1. Ex parte and ex officio proceedings**

50. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to ensure the consistent application of the law so that all cases of physical violence against women, sexual violence (including rape), forced marriage, female genital mutilation and forced sterilisation or forced abortion are subject to ex officio initiation of criminal proceedings and may continue even if the victim withdraws her complaint. (paragraph 354)

F. Measures of protection (Article 56)

51. GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to:

- a. ensure that heightened procedural protection is consistently granted to victims of all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention, including psychological violence, stalking, forced marriage, female genital mutilation and forced sterilisation or abortion;
- b. strengthen the automatic provision of information and safeguards, including notification of the release or escape of perpetrators, by reducing reliance on victim-initiated requests and ensuring that protection is granted wherever a risk assessment indicates a potential threat;
- c. guarantee that women victims of violence are not excluded from special protection due to restrictive interpretations of permanence or duration of the relationship;
- d. expand the systematic application of special procedural protection to all child victims and child witnesses of violence during police investigations and criminal proceedings, including in situations where children are exposed to violence against women within the family context, regardless of whether they are direct victims of physical harm. (paragraph 365)

G. Legal aid (Article 57)

52. GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to take the relevant measures to increase the accessibility and the quality of legal aid for women victims of the different forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention. (paragraph 372)

VII. Migration and asylum

A. Residence status (Article 59)

53. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to take the necessary legislative and policy measures to ensure that migrant women victims of domestic violence who depend on their abusive spouse for their residence in Latvia are sufficiently informed of the legal avenues available to them and are guaranteed access to apply for an independent temporary residence permit upon dissolution of their marriage. (paragraph 382)

54. GREVIO encourages the Latvian authorities to take the necessary legislative and policy measures to ensure that expulsion proceedings initiated in relation to sponsoring spouses of dependent migrant women victims of domestic violence may be suspended in relation to the dependent spouse. (paragraph 383)

B. Gender-based asylum claims (Article 60)

1. Gender-sensitive asylum determination procedure

55. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to take the necessary legislative or other measures to:

- a. ensure that gender-based violence against women may be recognised as a form of persecution and serious harm and that a gender-sensitive interpretation is applied to all grounds of persecution as contained in the United Nations 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees;
- b. establish nationwide, uniform guidelines setting out procedures and trauma-informed criteria for the identification, within the asylum determination procedure, of women victims of gender-based violence, in order to ensure the systematic assessment of whether female asylum seekers have been exposed to, or are at risk of, gender-based persecution, and to reduce barriers to disclosure;
- c. ensure that all those involved in the asylum procedure (decision makers, interpreters and legal representatives) receive adequate training on gender-based persecution of women and girls. (paragraph 394)

2. Accommodation

56. GREVIO strongly encourages the Latvian authorities to take the necessary legislative or other measures to:

- a. incorporate specific questions regarding women's and girls' vulnerabilities, dependencies and their heightened exposure to violence against women in order to ensure the adequate screening for vulnerabilities of all female asylum seekers and to identify their special needs;
- b. ensure that all women and girls, including unaccompanied girls, are offered adequate and safe single-sex accommodation;
- c. introduce and implement standard operating procedures or safety protocols for the prevention of and protection of women and girls from violence perpetrated in reception facilities. (paragraph 402)

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

Ministry of Welfare
Ministry of the Interior
Ministry of Justice
Ministry of Culture
Ministry of Education and Science
Ministry of Health
Legal Affairs Committee of the Saeima (Parliament of Latvia)
Supreme Court of Latvia
Prosecution Office of Latvia
Court Administration
Academy of Justice
State Police
State Police College
Citizenship and Migration Affairs Office
Centre for Disease Prevention and Control
State Centre for Forensic Medical Examination
Child Protection Centre
Riga Orphan's and Custody Court
Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia
Information Centre of the Ministry of the Interior
Liepāja City Municipality Central Administration
Liepāja Municipal Police
Ombudsman's Office

Non-governmental organisations and civil society organisations

Centre Dardedze
Association MARTA Centre
Women's NGOs Co-operation Network of Latvia
Latvian Centre for Human Rights
Crisis and Counselling Centre Skalbes
Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia (LBAS)
Latvian Safer Internet Centre
Association MOZAIKA of LGBT and their friends
"I Want to Help Refugees" (GPB)
Liepāja Night Shelter
Foundation Agape

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.

The Istanbul Convention is the most far-reaching international treaty to tackle violence against women and domestic violence. Its comprehensive set of provisions spans far-ranging preventive and protective measures as well as a number of obligations to ensure an adequate criminal justice response to such serious violations of human rights.

This report contains an overall analysis of the implementation of the provisions of the Istanbul Convention. It highlights positive initiatives in preventing and combating all forms of violence against women at national level and provides suggestions and proposals to improve the situation of women facing such violence.

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