

‘For many women and children, the home is not a safe place.’

Statement by the President of GREVIO, Marceline Naudi, on the need to uphold the standards of the Istanbul Convention in times of a pandemic

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As more and more countries around the world are moving towards mandatory lockdowns to curb the spread of COVID 19, our thoughts go out to the women and children for whom the home is a place of fear, not a place of safety. Keeping safe from the virus, slowing down its spread and making sure our health systems can cope are of crucial importance, but we need to be aware that the restrictions on movement offer abusers additional power and control. We hear that some women victims of violence are deciding against seeking medical attention for fear of contagion. Domestic violence shelters in some areas have already stopped all admissions because they are unsure how to manage the risk of infection. Others are privileging online or telephone support, but this still carries many risks for women who are in close quarters with their abusers. Nor must we forget that the economic consequences of the pandemic, such as loss of job or income, will hit women hard in that they create or exacerbate financial dependency, reducing their ability to leave abusers.

The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence, also known as the Istanbul Convention, continues to apply to all Parties, be it in times of conflict or in times of a pandemic. GREVIO calls on all Parties to do their utmost to ensure continuity in service provision and to keep offering support and protection to women and girls at risk of violence, with the involvement of all relevant actors: law enforcement agencies, social services, the justice sector, specialist support services and all relevant ministries. It gives us hope to see that many national administrations are rising to the challenges this pandemic presents to women victims of violence and are already working towards innovative solutions. For example, some are launching specific information campaigns on available services, while others are introducing online application forms for protection orders, and yet others have included domestic violence support services amongst the “essential services” to be. Many support services are offering online services, including psychological counselling and psycho-social support. Never before has the need been greater to ensure that such innovative solutions form part of a concerted effort by all relevant ministries and women’s organisations in a joint effort to keep women and children safe from violence.

I call on all Parties to the Convention to follow in these footsteps. I hope that the renewed spirit of solidarity this pandemic is creating in our societies will extend to women and girls who are victims of violence, and who may now feel even more trapped with their abusers.