



The role of NGOs in the first (baseline) evaluation procedure of the implementation of the Istanbul Convention

1. Introduction

NGOs active in preventing and combating violence against women are key actors in the implementation of the ***Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention)*** which is why, under the Convention, state parties have a legal obligation to recognise, encourage and support their work and to establish effective co-operation with them (Article 9).

NGOs are also major partners in monitoring. The Group of Experts on action against violence against women and domestic violence (GREVIO), the independent expert monitoring body established by the Convention, recognises the important role which NGOs play in this field and made it clear in its [Rules of Procedure](#) (Rule 35) that NGOs and other members of civil society are vital sources of information and that all information received from NGOs will be treated as confidential by GREVIO (see below **point 5. Confidentiality**). NGOs are therefore strongly encouraged to give their input and share their concerns at any time.

When starting its first (baseline) evaluation of a particular country on the basis of its [questionnaire](#), GREVIO will, whenever possible, invite NGOs working in that country to provide relevant information. GREVIO will also carry out visits to all countries party to the Convention in order to make a more thorough assessment of the situation on the ground. During these visits its delegations will hold meetings with NGO representatives. In addition, GREVIO may consider using further means of evaluation, such as organising hearings for NGOs.

2. Which NGOs can report to GREVIO?

GREVIO's aim is that all NGOs active in preventing and combating violence against women be able to contribute to the evaluation procedure. At the same time, it is aware that NGO resources are limited and although they may be willing to provide input at the early stages of the evaluation procedure they may simply not be in a position to do so.

GREVIO strongly encourages NGOs to work through coalitions, networks or platforms, drawing on the experiences gained from NGO participation in other monitoring mechanisms. This remains one of the most viable ways of sharing NGO resources and expertise, of organising the necessary information flow among NGOs and eventually contributing effectively to GREVIO's work. It may also help GREVIO establish an on-going dialogue with a multi-faceted NGO community and civil society, including during country visits. Where appropriate, national human rights institutions or leading NGOs in the countries under evaluation may co-ordinate NGO reporting to GREVIO.

GREVIO is particularly keen to receive information from women's and grassroots organisations on the practical implementation of the Convention.

NGOs consulted by the authorities or otherwise involved in the drawing-up of a state report can and should also be heard as independent voices.

3. When and how can NGOs provide their input?

NGOs can provide GREVIO with information at any time, even before GREVIO decides to examine the situation in a particular country and set a deadline for state reporting. The information should be provided in one of the official languages of the Council of Europe (English or French).

That said, NGO input is particularly useful at the following stages of the evaluation procedure (see GREVIO's provisional evaluation timetable for the dates of each stage).

a. Deadline for state reporting

It would be particularly helpful to GREVIO if NGOs drew up joint reports and shared them with GREVIO by the deadline set for state reporting (see GREVIO's provisional evaluation timetable for dates). The Secretariat may make contact with NGOs and invite them to do so.

b. Publication of state reports

NGOs are also encouraged to support GREVIO in its subsequent evaluation by sharing information, comments and data in reaction to state reports as soon as possible after their publication and before GREVIO carries out its examination of these state reports (see GREVIO's provisional evaluation timetable for dates)

c. Before and during evaluation visits

NGOs may meet members of GREVIO's delegations and support them during their country visits, for instance, by

- participating in NGO *in camera* meetings/roundtables organised by GREVIO's delegations;
- providing GREVIO's delegations with relevant written information, data and other evidence which may be of use during their country visits or for the drawing-up of GREVIO's Reports and conclusions;
- facilitating the organisation of in situ visits to places of relevance to GREVIO (such as NGO-run shelters for women victims of violence);
- assisting in the organisation of meetings with independent professionals; and
- facilitating meetings with victims or groups of victims.

d. Publication of GREVIO's Reports

NGOs can also play an important role in promoting GREVIO's Reports and the implementation of the suggestions and proposals made by GREVIO (see GREVIO's provisional evaluation timetable for dates).

e. Publication of recommendations made by the Committee of the Parties

Here again, NGOs can play an important role in promoting recommendations made by the Committee of the Parties.

f. Follow-up to evaluations

NGOs are encouraged to provide information on follow-up action or lack of action by the authorities to address GREVIO's concerns and to implement any recommendations made by the Committee of the Parties.

4. Should NGO reporting cover all aspects of the Convention?

Whilst the [questionnaire](#) adopted by GREVIO may help in structuring NGO reporting to GREVIO, NGOs are not necessarily expected to cover all aspects of the Convention or of GREVIO's questionnaire.

NGOs should *prioritise* and focus as much as possible on the *practical* implementation of the Convention. The information provided should be both *concise* and *precise*. Reports drawn up by NGOs should contain their views on positive developments and their concerns in their fields of expertise, supported by relevant data and other evidence (detailed data evidence may be appended to reports).

5. Confidentiality?

NGO information received by GREVIO is treated as confidential, unless otherwise decided by GREVIO on request of the NGO concerned. The same rule of confidentiality applies to views and information shared with GREVIO's delegations during country visits.

By so doing, GREVIO aims to protect its NGO sources and, as a matter of principle, will not indicate NGO sources in relation to its findings. Should a particular NGO request that confidentiality be lifted in relation to the information it provided, GREVIO would be free to refer to that NGO as its source if need be, for instance, during its dialogue with the State authorities.

NGOs are therefore invited to indicate, when transmitting information to GREVIO or speaking to delegations of GREVIO, whether GREVIO can disclose its sources when using such information.

NGOs are free to publish their own reports and other written information provided to GREVIO or its delegations, preferably in consultation with the Istanbul Convention Secretariat.

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Further advice may be sought from international women's organisations and networks such as

- [Women against Violence Europe \(WAVE\)](#) and
- the [European Women's Lobby Observatory on Violence against Women](#).

The [Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe](#) and the Strasbourg-based [NGO Access](#) may also be consulted.

For contacts and further information

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