

# Implementing the Istanbul Convention into Social Work practice



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- ▶ Approximately 1 in 3 (30%) of women worldwide have been subjected to either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime
- ▶ Most of this violence is intimate partner violence. Worldwide, almost one third (27%) of women aged 15–49 years who have been in a relationship report that they have been subjected to some form of physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner

*<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>*

## 1. THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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**T**he Istanbul Convention (IC) is a major international human rights treaty established by the Council of Europe. It sets out comprehensive legal standards to ensure women's right to be free from violence. All governments that have ratified this treaty are bound by its obligations.

— On 31 January 2022, the Republic of Moldova ratified the convention and it entered into force on 1 May 2022. The Republic of Moldova as a state is therefore committed to take the necessary legislative steps and other measures to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence (VAW/DV) as laid out in the Istanbul Convention.

- ▶ Embodying the principle of equality between women and men in national constitutions and legislation, and ensuring the practical realisation of this principle
- ▶ Prohibiting discrimination against women, including the use of sanctions
- ▶ Abolishing laws and practices which discriminate against women

## 2. USING THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION TO IMPROVE SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

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**T**he IC not only calls on state institutions to implement its requirements through legislation and policy, but it also calls on individuals, particularly those working in public service such as social workers, to also take responsibility for preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

— By using the key principles of the IC, social workers can:

- ▶ Improve their understanding of VAW/DV
- ▶ Improve their social work responses to victims and survivors
- ▶ Improve their practice and increase positive outcomes for victims and survivors
- ▶ Contribute to positive change at individual and professional levels

## 3. KEY PRINCIPLES FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE USING THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION

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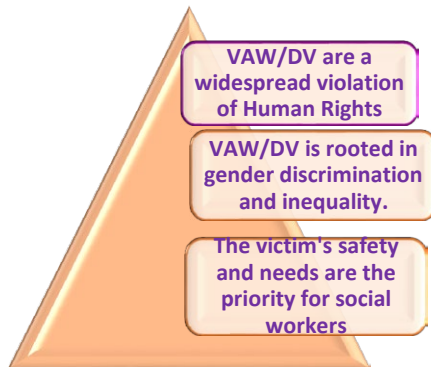
**A**rticle 3.a of the Istanbul Convention:

“Violence against women is understood as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and shall mean 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.”

— The IC recognises that violence against women is a violation of human rights that arises from gender discrimination and gender inequality. Discrimination and inequality are based on harmful gender stereotypes about men and women, which are often used to justify VAW. The IC also states that victims should

be seen as right-holders and that they should be able to access appropriate protection and support.

## THREE KEY PRINCIPLES OF THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION



## THESE THREE KEY PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE

- ▶ Social workers should recognise that VAW/DV is a systematic violation of human rights
- ▶ Social workers should understand that VAW arises out of gender discrimination and gender inequality
- ▶ To protect and support victims, social workers should base their work on an understanding of gender inequality as the cause and consequence of VAW/DV
- ▶ Social work practice should work to restore victims' rights and provide a means for their recovery
- ▶ Social workers should work to combat VAW and gender discrimination in their practice

## 4. INTERSECTIONALITY IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

**A**ccording to Article 4 of the Istanbul Convention, measures to protect the rights of victims:

“...shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, gender, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, state of health, disability, marital status, migrant or refugee status, or other status.”

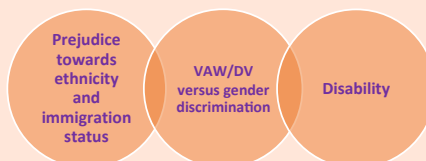
— All victims of VAW/DV should be able to access protection and support, whatever their background. The concept of ‘Intersectionality’ provides a useful approach to understanding the differing needs of each victim. Alongside gender discrimination, victims may face other forms of disadvantage or discrimination which intersect with VAW/DV.

### CASE STUDY:

Anna, a young immigrant woman is living with domestic violence. She is physically disabled and has problems understanding the language of the country she is living in. Her husband has threatened to make her immigration status insecure if she tells anyone about his violence. She is also dependent on her husband for mobility due to her physical disability.

Anna discloses the domestic violence to a social worker. It will be important to respond in a way which recognises that VAW/DV as a form of gender discrimination also intersects with other forms of discrimination and oppression. To meet her needs where the domestic violence is concerned, her other intersecting needs should also be considered.

Intersecting discrimination and disadvantage:

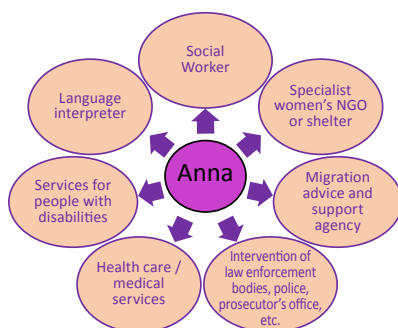


## 5. USING A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH IN SOCIAL WORK TO SUPPORT VICTIMS OF VAW/DV

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**T**he Istanbul Convention requires that agencies work collaboratively to meet the needs of victims, to protect them and help them to recover. A multi-disciplinary approach can help to meet the range of needs Anna has in order to be safe. It should take into consideration the prejudices and disadvantages she may experience alongside the trauma and fear of domestic violence. By working collaboratively, her needs can be met holistically.

— In the case study above, a multi-disciplinary approach can help to meet Anna's complex needs:



## 6. PRACTICE PRINCIPLES FOR SOCIAL WORKERS WORKING WITH VAW/DV

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**S**o far, we have outlined key principles of the Istanbul Convention to be used in social work practice (see section 3):

— According to the Istanbul Convention, victims of VAW/DV should be guaranteed a high-quality intervention which aims to protect and promote their human rights, their dignity, and their safety. The following practice principles provide guidance on how to respond appropriately to victims, recognising that they will have experienced trauma, fear, anxiety, and low self-esteem.

## NON-JUDGMENTAL

**S**ocial workers should avoid judging or pressurising women who come to them for support. Their situations are often complex. They may make decisions that a social worker does not agree with, but this must never lead to them receiving a lesser service.

— Self-blame is a common factor in preventing women from seeking help. Social workers should avoid ever blaming women for their situation and should convey the message that VAW/DV is always the responsibility of the perpetrator.

— A common reason why women are afraid to seek help in situations of VAW/DV is that they fear their children may be taken away from them. A woman may feel that she will be seen as a 'bad mother'. Social workers should take this into account and understand that the choices a woman makes will often be based on the needs of her children.

## CONFIDENTIALITY AND SECURITY

**T**he Istanbul Convention requires that social workers should be mindful of the risks to the victim and should be able to guarantee confidentiality as far as possible. Information should only be shared with the informed consent of the victim or survivor. At the same time, social workers should work to provide the necessary measures needed to protect the victim and to help her feel safe and cared for.

## A VICTIM CENTRED APPROACH

**T**he Istanbul Convention requires social workers to centre and prioritise the needs of victims and enable them to voice these needs. The victim is a holder of rights with the capability to make her own choices in exercising these rights. Women victims/survivors have the best knowledge of their situation and their experiences. They should be treated as active agents rather than passive recipients of support and intervention. Just as survivors should be consulted and listened to about policies which aim to protect them, social workers should listen to them, respect their choices, and place them at the centre of support.

**[www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int)**

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

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