

The Council of Europe's Strategic Triangle: combating violence against women and advancing gender equality

The Council of Europe is Europe's leading human rights organisation, comprised of 46 member states that represent over 700 million people. Distinct from the European Union, the Council of Europe brings together its member states to jointly develop human rights standards, as well as standards on democracy and rule of law.

The Council of Europe has three main responsibilities: **standard-setting** (commitment by states or parties to conventions), **monitoring mechanisms** (mechanisms to identify shortcomings in reaching and maintaining standards), and **cooperation activities** (to address shortcomings). These are often referred to as the Council of Europe's **dynamic triangle** or **strategic triangle**, which is part of the unique added value of the organisation.



In the area of gender equality, violence against women and domestic violence, this strategic triangle advances commitments and action to bring about concrete progress across all member states.

Standard-setting

All [fifteen beneficiary countries](#) of the [EEA and Norway Grants](#), as well as the three donor countries, are member states of the Council of Europe, reflecting a shared commitment to human rights, democracy and rule of law. The Council of Europe has developed more than [200 international treaties](#) (conventions or protocols) that provide concrete human rights standards for Europe. In addition to these hard standards, the Council of Europe has also established soft standards such as recommendations and strategies.

The Council of Europe's most significant standard is the [European Convention on Human Rights](#), enforced by the [European Court of Human Rights](#) in Strasbourg, which provides individuals across member states the right to seek justice when their fundamental rights are violated. The European Court of Human Rights has developed significant case law holding states accountable for failures to protect women from violence, including through the judgments *Kurt v. Austria* (2021), *Volodina v. Russia* (2019), *Talpis v. Italy* (2017) and *Opuz v. Turkey* (2009). Information can be found in ECtHR fact sheets on [violence against women](#) and [domestic violence](#).

The cornerstone of the Council of Europe's standard-setting work on violence against women is the [Istanbul Convention](#) (Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence), which establishes comprehensive standards for preventing violence against women, protecting victims, prosecuting perpetrators, and coordinating integrated policies between relevant bodies to address this violence. As of March 2026, [39 parties have ratified the Istanbul Convention](#), making it one of the most widely ratified Council of Europe treaties. Significantly, the European Union ratified the Istanbul

Convention in 2023, extending the treaty's reach to EU institutions and policies. This dual ratification—by individual member states and by the EU as a supranational entity—strengthens implementation and creates additional accountability mechanisms at both national and EU levels.

In addition to the Istanbul Convention, **GREVIO** (the Group of Experts on action against violence against women and domestic violence) develops General **Recommendations** on the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, as foreseen in Article 69 paragraph 1 of the convention. General recommendations are not country-specific but serve as an important reference for Parties by offering clear guidance that can contribute to an effective implementation of the provisions contained in the convention through the prism of a specific theme or type of violence.

Additional standards further the commitments to end violence against women. At the ministerial level, the **Dublin Declaration on the prevention of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence** (September 2024) represents a high-level political commitment by Ministers from Council of Europe member states, and commits states to promoting institutional cultures that reject gender-based discrimination and violence.

Beyond such ministerial commitments, the **Committee of Ministers** (CM) has adopted an extensive body of recommendations addressing virtually every dimension of gender equality¹. Key CM Recommendations to member states address equality of Roma and Traveller women and girls, the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls, preventing and combating sexism, gender equality in the audiovisual sector, gender mainstreaming in sport, gender equality and media, the rights of women and girls with disabilities, balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making, and more.

The **Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)**, bringing together 306 parliamentarians from national parliaments, plays an important role in standard-setting through its resolutions and recommendations. Among many others, PACE has adopted texts including Resolution 2234 (2018) on sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments, and Resolution 2441 (2022) on combating violence against women in times of war and armed conflict. PACE resolutions often pave the way for Committee of Ministers action and help build political momentum for new standards.

The **Gender Equality Commission (GEC)**, an intergovernmental body of government-appointed experts, develops standards and strategies for achieving gender equality. The GEC prepares the Council of Europe **Gender Equality Strategy** (currently 2024-2029), providing a comprehensive policy framework covering violence against women, economic independence, women during crises, political participation, and combating gender stereotypes. The GEC also develops analytical reports and good practice compilations to strengthen policies in member states.

Monitoring

Independent expert bodies evaluate how the standards are implemented in the member states and make constructive recommendations on how to improve.

GREVIO serves as the independent monitoring mechanism for the Istanbul Convention, working alongside the **Committee of the Parties to the Istanbul Convention** (CoP). This two-pillar monitoring system provides an assessment of implementation of the Convention. Composed of independent experts, GREVIO conducts country evaluations examining legislation, policies, and implementation measures to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence. It has issued baseline evaluation and thematic evaluation reports on **Parties to the convention**, providing detailed findings per country. The CoP, composed of representatives of the parties to the Istanbul Convention, complements GREVIO's work by adopting recommendations based on GREVIO's reports, including on the digital dimension of violence against women, and gender-related killings/femicides.

The **Commissioner for Human Rights**, an independent institution, regularly addresses gender equality and violence against women through country visits, letters to governments, reports, and thematic work, maintaining dialogue with authorities and civil society.

¹ See 2022 publication, “Make gender equality in law a reality in fact - Compilation of recommendations of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in the field of gender equality” <https://rm.coe.int/prems-125322-gbr-2573-make-gender-equality-in-law-a-reality-in-fact-we/1680a81f99>

The Committee of Ministers monitors the **execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights**, ensuring that states take measures to remedy violations and prevent future ones, bringing about significant legislative and policy reforms on violence against women across member states. It also monitors implementation of Committee of Ministers recommendations, including through periodic reporting on key instruments.

The **Congress of Local and Regional Authorities**, representing over 150 000 local and regional authorities across Europe, monitors the situation of women in local politics and addresses violence against women at the local level. Through its reports and recommendations, the Congress highlights the crucial role of municipalities and regions in implementing national strategies, providing victim services, and ensuring women's safety in public spaces.

Cooperation

Where measures are needed for Council of Europe standards to be met, targeted technical cooperation may be agreed upon with member states. Cooperation is established largely on the basis of the monitoring conclusions in order to assist member states in their efforts to apply Council of Europe standards and address shortcomings. Results from cooperation activities are subsequently shared with monitoring bodies and form a body of knowledge which can then be applied for the development of new standards.

The Council of Europe provides technical cooperation to support implementation of women's rights standards by member states, through its **Gender Equality Division's Capacity Building and Cooperation Projects Unit**. This includes strategic advising on **EEA and Norway Grants' Programmes** as an International Partner Organisation, acting as an international partner in pre-defined projects, and leading Mission-Driven Initiatives such as **Pathways to end violence against women** which includes reinforcement of the **SYNERGY Network against gender based and domestic violence**.

The Council of Europe has additional ongoing **cooperation projects** on violence against women and domestic violence in nine countries and four regions, with funding through the Council of Europe ordinary budget, voluntary contributions and joint programmes with the EU. The Gender Equality Division coordinates these cooperation activities, working with governments, national human rights institutions, civil society organisations and other important stakeholders to strengthen institutional responses to violence against women. Project implementation can involve needs assessments, legislative expertise, capacity-building, awareness-raising and peer-to-peer actions. Cooperation aims to reinforce ownership by national stakeholders and to ensure the sustainability of the outcomes. Publications developed through cooperation programmes and projects can be accessed through the **online library**.

Council of Europe cooperation is coordinated by the Directorate of Programme Co-ordination, including **cooperation between the Council of Europe and EEA and Norway Grants**. The Directorate submits interim and final reports on the progress and outcomes of the cooperation to the Committee of Ministers.

The Strategic Triangle in Action

The strategic triangle creates a comprehensive approach to preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence while advancing gender equality, involving multiple Council of Europe bodies working across all three aspects. While the sides of the triangle remain fully separate and act independently, the work of each reinforces and adds value to the work of the others. The result is a comprehensive Council of Europe system that doesn't merely condemn violence against women and domestic violence in principle, but actively works to eliminate it in practice through the combination of minimum standards, independent monitoring to ensure implementation, and targeted cooperation to address identified gaps and support member states in meeting their obligations, feeding back into future standard setting.