

Committee of the Parties

Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention)

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation to Belgium on building trust by delivering support, protection and justice on the basis of the Istanbul Convention

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Secretariat of the monitoring mechanism of the Council of Europe Convention on
preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence

The Committee of the Parties to the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (hereinafter referred to as “the Convention”), acting under the terms of Article 68(12) of the Convention;

Having regard to the purposes of the Convention to protect women against all forms of violence, and prevent, prosecute and eliminate violence against women and domestic violence; to contribute to the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and promote substantive equality between women and men, including by empowering women; to design a comprehensive framework, policies and measures for the protection of and assistance to all victims of violence against women and domestic violence; to promote international co-operation with a view to eliminating violence against women and domestic violence; and to provide support and assistance to organisations and law enforcement agencies to effectively co-operate in order to adopt an integrated approach to eliminating violence against women and domestic violence;

Bearing in mind the provisions of Article 66 (1) of the Convention concerning the monitoring role of the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (hereinafter referred to as “GREVIO”);

Having regard to the Rules of Procedure of the Committee of the Parties;

Having regard to the instrument of ratification deposited by Belgium on 14 March 2016;

Having regard to the Baseline Evaluation Report adopted by GREVIO concerning the implementation of the Convention by Belgium, the Committee of the Parties’ recommendations adopted on 15 December 2020 and the Committee’s conclusions on the implementation of those recommendations, adopted on 31 May 2024;

Having examined the First Thematic Evaluation Report “Building trust by delivering support, protection and justice” concerning the implementation of the Convention by Belgium adopted by GREVIO at its 37th meeting (13-16 October 2025), as well as the comments of the Government received on 27 November 2025;

Welcoming the measures taken and progress achieved by the Belgian authorities in implementing the Convention and noting in particular:

- the further expansion of the legislative and policy framework to prevent and combat violence against women, in particular the adoption of the Law on Femicide which creates a framework for the development of tools in the fields of prevention, data collection, and prosecution of violence against women and establishes a commission for the systemic retrospective analysis of cases of gender-related killings;
- a number of changes in criminal legislation, including the introduction in 2022, of an affirmative consent standard in the definition of rape, the criminalisation of non-consensual sharing of images of a sexual character, and the recognition of the presence of a minor as an aggravating factor in cases of violence;
- the continued expansion of the network of institutions providing holistic services for victims of sexual and domestic violence, in particular the Sexual Violence Support Centres, which are now accessible within one hour from every point in the country, the Safe Homes in Flanders and the introduction of multidisciplinary structures to respond to the needs of victims of violence against women in other parts of the country; the work of the multidisciplinary specialist support centres for victims of female genital mutilations;

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- the introduction of mandatory training on sexual and domestic violence for students of the Judicial Academy and of a new e-learning programme for professionals working in the healthcare system;
 - the establishment of the Emergency Victim Assistance Units in the police force of Brussels Capital Region, which are specialised in violence against women and apply a trauma-informed and gender-sensitive approach to cases of violence against women; the adoption of guidelines for the police on digital forms of violence and the introduction of the Mobile Stalking Alarm.
- A. Recommends in light of the considerations indicated in the preamble above, that the Government of Belgium take the following measures identified in GREVIO's first thematic evaluation report¹ for immediate action to:
1. ensure greater consistency of policies and measures in relation to preventing and combating violence against women between the different levels of authorities in the country (Article 7);
 2. ensure that data collected by law-enforcement agencies, judicial authorities, the healthcare sector, social services and specialist support service providers are disaggregated at a minimum by sex, age, type of violence and the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim and geographical location; harmonise data collection between law-enforcement agencies and the judiciary, with the aim of allowing for a case to be tracked across the different stages of the criminal justice system (Article 11);
 3. ensure the practical implementation of the requirement to impart knowledge on the principles listed in Article 14 of the Istanbul Convention, including equality between women and men, non-stereotyped gender roles, mutual respect and non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships, at all levels of education, including the notion of freely given consent in sexual relations; regularly evaluate such measures by means of a unified set of indicators (Article 14);
 4. introduce mandatory initial and in-service training for all levels of law-enforcement officials concerning all types of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention as well as for all healthcare professionals that may come into contact with women victims of violence; adopt and disseminate quality standards for training courses on violence against women that incorporate a gendered understanding of violence (Article 15);
 5. step up the support for the recovery and economic independence of women victims of violence through measures including financial assistance, education/training and assistance in finding employment and housing; and implement, in the healthcare sector, standardised care paths based on a gender-sensitive approach in order to ensure the identification of victims of violence, their diagnosis, treatment and referral to appropriate specialist support services, accompanied by a medical certificate (Article 20);
 6. increase the number and capacity of women-only shelters providing accommodation to victims of all forms of violence against women and their children, with an adequate geographical distribution, and ensure that fees are not a barrier in accessing shelters; and set up a state-wide helpline that serves as a single first point of contact for

1. The Istanbul Convention's provisions concerned by GREVIO's proposals and suggestions are indicated in brackets.

providing advice to women victims of all forms of violence against women, operating round the clock, seven days a week (Article 22);

7. ensure that incidents of violence against women are a mandatory legal criterion to be taken into account in reaching decisions in the area of custody and visitation rights and carry out a thorough review of the judicial practice concerning custody and visitation rights in cases of parental separation with a history of violence; introduce systematic screening and risk-assessment procedures in order to establish whether there is a history of violence by one parent against the other; ensure that all professionals who come into contact with women victims of domestic violence or their children are made aware of the lack of a scientific basis of the so-called parental alienation syndrome; and ensure that supervised visitation facilities provide for the safety of children and their mothers and avoid secondary victimisation (Article 31);
 8. identify the factors that contribute to attrition of cases of all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention and ensure that cases of psychological violence are duly prosecuted; ensure that the prosecution applies a gender-based and victim-centred understanding of violence against women and afford it adequate priority; ensure that effective safeguards are in place to prevent the inappropriate use of mediation or monetary fines in cases of violence against women that are closed at the prosecution stage, particularly in cases involving sexual violence; ensure that sanctions are commensurate with the gravity of the crime in all cases of violence against women and undertake comprehensive research into the factors leading to disparities in the judicial response to such cases (Articles 49, 50);
 9. assess the level of implementation of and remove obstacles to the use of emergency barring, protection and restraining orders; ensure that such orders are available and accessible to victims of all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention and that they can be applied for independently of other procedures, including against perpetrators who do not currently share a residence with the victim, on an *ex parte* and *ex officio* basis (Articles 52, 53);
 10. evaluate the implementation of the existing protection measures for women victims of gender-based violence and ensure that all measures in place to protect women victims during investigations and judicial proceedings are implemented in practice and for victims of all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention (Article 56).
- B. Requests the Government of Belgium to submit a written report to the Committee of the Parties on the measures taken to improve the implementation of the Convention in the above-mentioned areas by 8 December 2028.
- C. Recommends that the Government of Belgium take measures to implement the further conclusions of GREVIO's first thematic evaluation report.
- D. Invites the Government of Belgium to continue the dialogue in progress with GREVIO.