

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 Serbia 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 Serbia on 21 November 2013;

Having regard to the Baseline Evaluation Report adopted by GREVIO concerning the implementation of the Convention by Serbia, the Committee of the Parties’ recommendations adopted on 30 January 2020 and the Committee’s conclusions on the implementation of those recommendations, adopted on 1 June 2023;

Having examined the First Thematic Evaluation Report “Building trust by delivering support, protection and justice” concerning the implementation of the Convention by Serbia adopted by GREVIO at its 36th meeting (30 June - 3 July 2025), as well as the comments of the Government received on 15 September 2025;

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

- the adoption of a comprehensive Strategy for Preventing and Combating Gender-Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence for the period 2021- 2025 which addresses all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention and provides measures under the four pillars of the convention, namely prevention, protection, prosecution and co-ordinated policies;
- continuous mandatory initial and in-service training provided to professionals involved in implementing the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence, including police officers, judges and prosecutors as well as plans to expand these training programmes to address the digital dimension of violence against women;
- initiatives to improve school attendance among Roma pupils, in particular Roma girls;
- the setting up of an online platform that enables parents, children and educators to report incidents of violence in the school system;
- an increase in the participation of victims in meetings of co-ordination and co-operation groups which aim to provide a multi-agency response to violence against women by conducting regular risk assessment and management;
- high conviction rates for cases of sexual violence and harassment despite low reporting rates;

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- systematic use of emergency protective measures which provide victims with immediate protection;
- A. Recommends in light of the considerations indicated in the preamble above, that the Government of Serbia take the following measures identified in GREVIO's first thematic evaluation report¹ for immediate action to:
1. harmonise the legal definitions of domestic violence across all laws in line with the Istanbul Convention; ensure the effective implementation, independent monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy for Preventing and Combating Gender-Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (2021–2025), while establishing safeguards to prevent future strategic documents on violence against women from facing implementation challenges; and allocate sufficient human and financial resources to the competent body or bodies responsible for the co-ordination, implementation, monitoring and independent evaluation of all policies and measures addressing all forms of violence against women, while providing it with a well-defined mandate, (Articles 3 and 7);
 2. ensure appropriate, sustainable, and long-term financial resources at both national and local levels for all legislation, policies and measures aimed at preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, including for the institutions and entities responsible for their implementation; use gender-responsive budgeting to enable effective monitoring of public expenditures; and guarantee sustainable funding for women's organisations providing specialist support services for women victims of all forms of violence through long-term grants awarded via transparent procurement procedures (Article 8);
 3. ensure that data collected by all relevant stakeholders, namely law-enforcement agencies, judicial authorities, Centres for Social Welfare and healthcare institutions, are disaggregated by the sex and age of the victim and perpetrator, type of violence, relationship of the perpetrator to the victim, geographical location and other relevant factors; harmonise data collection between law-enforcement agencies and the judiciary to enable the tracking of cases across all stages of the criminal justice system and the assessment of conviction, attrition and recidivism rates; and expand data-collection efforts in the social welfare and healthcare sectors to cover all forms of violence against women encompassed by the Istanbul Convention (Article 11);
 4. counter patriarchal attitudes in society through regular preventive measures aimed at eradicating gender stereotypes and addressing gender inequality as a root cause of violence against women, including in the media; promote awareness-raising campaigns addressing all forms of violence against women, including their digital dimension and targeting society as a whole as well as specific groups of women such as Roma women while evaluating the impact of such initiatives (Article 12);
 5. integrate the principles listed in Article 14 of the Istanbul Convention into the education system by developing adequate teaching material, monitoring its use by educators, and, where necessary, including programmes on these topics as mandatory subjects in the curriculum. ; Specific attention should be given, in an age-appropriate manner, to the notion of freely given consent in sexual relations, the harmful effects of violent pornography, and the implications of sharing intimate images of oneself and others (Article 14);

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

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6. ensure mandatory, systematic initial and in-service training for all relevant professionals, focusing on trauma-informed, gender-sensitive responses to all forms of violence under the Istanbul Convention, including their digital dimension, also aimed at protecting the safety of women victims and their children (Article 15);
 7. provide adequate resources for existing domestic violence perpetrator programmes in voluntary and custodial settings to ensure their sustainability; expand voluntary programmes nationwide; adopt and implement uniform standards in line with the European Standards for Perpetrator Programmes in close co-operation with specialist support providers; improve their attendance and reduce the dropouts rates by integrating such programmes into probation services promoting referrals by courts and Centres for Social Welfare or introducing incentive schemes, while ensuring that participation is not used to avoid prosecution for domestic violence (Article 16);
 8. allocate sufficient resources to Centres for Social Welfare to fulfil their responsibilities, while ensuring that their staff have an understanding of all forms of violence against women, including forced and early marriage in order to challenge cultural and gender biases; improve victims' access to long-term financial support, social housing and employment to facilitate their independence; implement standardised care pathways in public and private healthcare to identify and diagnose victims of violence against women, treat their injuries and provide free forensic examinations; and ensure that victims' consent is sought before reporting violence to the police, except in cases of imminent danger and ensuring healthcare services are accessible to all women (Article 20);
 9. increase the number of shelter places, including in underserved municipalities, to ensure safe accommodation for all victims of violence against women, including those facing intersectional discrimination, while providing the option to self-refer; revise shelter licensing standards to prioritise gender-sensitive, victim-centred services rather than imposing administrative barriers on providers; provide free specialist psychosocial support and legal aid, drawing on the expertise of women's organisations (Article 22);
 10. establish rape crisis or sexual violence referral centres nationwide to offer holistic services free of charge, independent of the victim's willingness to report the violence to the police (Article 25);
 11. ensure that the legal obligation to consider incidents of violence against women and domestic violence when assessing the best interests of the child in custody and visitation proceedings is fully upheld, including by raising awareness among the judiciary in this respect; implement systematic screening and risk-assessment procedures to identify such cases; provide comprehensive training for professionals at Centres for Social Welfare on post-separation abuse, the impacts of witnessing violence on children and the risks of continued contact with an abusive parent; ensure that all relevant professionals recognise the lack of scientific basis for "parental alienation syndrome" and refrain from labelling women victims as alienating or unco-operative mothers; and improve the conditions of supervised visitations by equipping Centres for Social Welfare with sufficient resources (Article 31);
 12. encourage the reporting of all forms of violence against women, *inter alia*, by developing and implementing standard investigative procedures, raising law enforcement authorities' awareness in relation to gender stereotypes and sexist attitudes, providing gender-sensitive and trauma-informed responses to sexual violence and allocating resources to improve the accessibility, privacy and comfort of

police premises, including for victims with disabilities; strengthen evidence collection and case-building beyond victims' testimony; implement measures aimed at increasing conviction rates, while ensuring proportionate and dissuasive sentences; and address the root causes of attrition by ensuring data collection and case-tracking (Articles 49 and 50);

13. ensure training and guidance for police officers on risk assessment, including risk rating and the evolving nature of risks; ensure the use of internationally recognised evidence-based risk-assessment tools that incorporate all relevant risk factors; actively involve all relevant institutions, including NGOs providing specialist support, in risk-assessment and management mechanisms; develop and ensure the use of standardised risk-assessment tools for forms of violence beyond domestic violence, including early and forced marriages and violence related to "honour"; and systematically review and analyse all domestic and gender-based violence-related homicides and suicides (Article 51);
 14. improve the monitoring of compliance with emergency and extended protective measures, including through electronic monitoring and ensure that misdemeanour proceedings are initiated in cases of breach of such measures; re-examine and eliminate the practice of issuing mutual protective measures by implementing enhanced primary aggressor analysis and raising awareness of the dynamics of domestic violence; streamline provisions regulating emergency and long-term protection measures across different legal frameworks for consistency; remove financial barriers to accessing protection orders and systematically include children in both emergency protective measures and long-term protection orders while ensuring that exceptions allowing parental contact do not compromise the safety of victims and their children (Articles 52 and 53);
 15. ensure the effective implementation of all victim protection measures throughout investigations and judicial proceedings, including by systematically extending protections under Articles 103 and 104 of the Criminal Procedure Code to all victims of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention; allocate sufficient technical and human resources to enable victims to testify via video-conference; and safeguard victims from intimidation, reprisals and re-victimisation by upholding their right to be informed when perpetrators are issued with emergency, protection or restraining orders, or when they are released or escape (Article 56).
- B. Requests the Government of Serbia 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 Serbia take measures to implement the further conclusions of GREVIO's first thematic evaluation report.
 - D. Invites the Government of Serbia to continue the dialogue in progress with GREVIO.