

**Report submitted by Estonia  
pursuant to Article 68, paragraph 1  
of the Council of Europe Convention  
on preventing and combating violence  
against women and domestic violence  
(First thematic evaluation round)**

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## Introduction

In accordance with Article 66, paragraph 1, the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) shall monitor the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention). Following its baseline evaluation procedure which provided an overview of the implementation of the full spectrum of provisions of the convention by each state party, Article 68, paragraph 3, of the convention and Rule 30 of the Rules of Procedure of GREVIO (the Rules of Procedure) mandate GREVIO to carry out subsequent evaluation procedures divided into rounds. At the beginning of each round, GREVIO shall select the specific provisions on which the evaluation procedure shall be based and shall send out a questionnaire (Rule 31 of the Rules of Procedure).

For its 1<sup>st</sup> thematic evaluation round, GREVIO adopted this questionnaire to be sent to all states parties which have undergone the baseline evaluation procedure, according to an order approved by GREVIO. States parties are requested to transmit to GREVIO a reply to this questionnaire within five months from the date it was sent.

GREVIO decided to focus its 1<sup>st</sup> thematic evaluation round on the theme of building trust by delivering support, protection and justice. To address this overarching theme, the present questionnaire aims, in its first section, to identify developments in key areas such as comprehensive and co-ordinated policies, funding and data collection that have ensued following the completion of the baseline evaluation procedure. In its second section, it sets to obtain more in-depth information on the implementation of selected provisions in the area of prevention, protection and prosecution, in respect of which baseline evaluation procedures and the Conclusions on the Recommendations of the Committee of the Parties to the Istanbul Convention have revealed significant challenges and the need for further sustained implementation. In its third section, it brings its attention to emerging trends in the area of violence against women and domestic violence. Its fourth and last section requests annual statistics for two complete calendar years prior to receiving this questionnaire on specific administrative and judicial data.

The reply to the questionnaire should be submitted in one of the official languages of the Council of Europe (English and French) and should contain all the relevant information on the implementation of the Istanbul Convention since GREVIO's first baseline evaluation report, including copies or extracts of relevant legislation, regulations, case law and strategic documents or action plans referred to (Rule 33 of the Rules of Procedure).

## **Part I: Changes in comprehensive and co-ordinated policies, funding and data collection in the area of violence against women and domestic violence**

### **Article 7: Comprehensive and co-ordinated policies**

1. Please provide information on any new policy development since the adoption of GREVIO's baseline evaluation report on your country to ensure comprehensive policies covering the areas of prevention, protection, and prosecution in relation to stalking, sexual harassment and domestic violence, including their digital dimension, rape and sexual violence, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, forced abortion and forced sterilisation, thereby demonstrating further implementation of the convention. Please specify the measures taken particularly in relation to those forms of violence against women that have not been addressed in past policies, programmes and services encompassing the four pillars of the Istanbul Convention.

#### Answer:

The Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Research signed a new Action Plan to Prevent Intimate Partner Violence for 2024-2027. The new Action Plan has two main objectives:

1. Recognising and condemning domestic violence.
2. People affected by domestic violence are systematically assisted on a needs-based basis.

The Ministry of Education and Research has officially joined the new action plan from 2024, which is a major step forward in preventing violence, as the role of kindergartens and schools in detecting intimate partner violence and supporting children is critical.

The Ministry of Education and Research has included prevention and counselling as activities in its action plan. Through the implementation of national curricula (updated in 2023), students' knowledge is expanded and a disapproving attitude towards violence is formed. Sexual education is included concentrically as mandatory at each school level. There is a separate compulsory family education course in upper secondary schools. The preparation of teaching and methodological materials and the organization of in-service training for teachers took place in cooperation with the University of Tartu.

In early childhood education, the focus is rather indirect: i.e., children gain initial knowledge about their bodies, safe communication, etc. For example, the national curriculum for preschool institutions places emphasis on building friendships, understanding and respecting human relationships, developing caring, but also on understanding that all people can be different. In kindergarten, children develop the courage to refuse activities that could be harmful to themselves or others. The ability to say "Stop". The "Bullying-Free Kindergarten" program is used.

The youth information portal "Teeviit" has a separate section "Relationships and communication" and a sub-section "Intimate violence", the content of which is compiled in cooperation with partners. In a separate section "Advice and help", young people can find the necessary contacts and content information.

In Estonia the goals and actions aimed at preventing violence against women and other forms of violence are consolidated in the **Violence Prevention Agreement 2021-2025**. It is a cross-sectoral agreement signed by different ministries in cooperation with civil society partners and organizations.

The violence prevention agreement encompasses the prevention and suppression of various types of interpersonal violence. Particular emphasis is placed on violence against

children, while new focus areas include violence against the elderly and psychological violence. Additionally, hate crimes, which have received less attention so far, are also addressed to some extent.

The agreement sets out 14 measures for violence prevention. The agreement does not include a complete list of violence prevention activities. The focus is on problems that still need more attention or have so far been overshadowed or where the expected progress has not been made. The measures cover activities at different levels of prevention:

1. Changing attitudes and norms on violence;
2. Violence prevention in educational institutions, youth work, and hobby education and recreational activities;
3. Supporting children and young people who have problems with violence;
4. Prevention and reduction of domestic violence;
5. Prevention of violence against the elderly;
6. Prevention of violence in the digital world;
7. Prevention of trafficking in human beings;
8. Prevention of sexual violence;
9. Awareness of violence and the intervention skills of specialists;
10. Victim-friendly proceedings;
11. Better protection and support for victims of violence;
12. Supporting the work of perpetrators to stop violent behaviour;
13. Greater role of health care and social service providers in preventing violence;
14. Analysing the impact of violence prevention policies.

New Victim Support Law. Came into force on 1.04.2023, prepared since the drafting of the Victim Support Act (VTK) from 2019, as it required the involvement of many institutions and the development of new solutions.

- Several services that were not previously regulated by law were provided for in the new Victim Support Act- crisis support service for victims of sexual violence (highlighted positively in the GREVIO evaluation report on Estonia), support service for abandoning violence, psychosocial assistance in crisis situations, and the core victim support service;
- Descriptions of services provided to women's support centers, restorative justice, and victims of human trafficking were supplemented, as well as the content and requirements for mental health support for trauma recovery; the goal was greater clarity regarding what individuals are entitled to and how this support is provided;
- Stricter requirements for the professional training of individuals providing victim support were established through implementing regulations of the Victim Support Act to provide the best assistance to vulnerable groups;
- The system for applying for compensation for victims of crime became clearer, making the application process easier for victims;
- Victims of domestic and sexual violence can receive mental health support for trauma recovery (services of psychologists, psychotherapists) even without criminal proceedings, whereas previously, initiating proceedings was a requirement;
- Data exchange between institutions was established to provide victims with better access to services. For the first time, data exchange on cases of high-risk domestic violence and informing the Social Insurance Board (SKA) about victims requiring special treatment and protection was regulated to proactively offer assistance.

On November 1, 2022, the age limit for sexual self-determination in Estonia increased from 14 to 16 in order to protect youth. The regulation is set forth in subchapter 7 of the Estonian Penal Code.

As from 1 April 2023, the Victim Support Act ([Victim Support Act–Riigi Teataja](#)) stipulates that a minor who is a victim of sexual violence has the right to receive mental health support aimed at facilitating trauma recovery. Such support is available to the minor regardless of

whether the criminal proceedings were initiated and it is available until the need ceases. The purpose of this support is to promote the restoration of the victim's psychosocial balance and to reduce the likelihood or severity of mental and behavioural disorders. It includes psychological and psychotherapeutic assistance. The respective regulation is set forth in subchapter 10 of the Victim Support Act.

According to the Child Protection Act, all child protection officials must have professional qualification and higher education. Child protection officials shall acquire the profession of a social worker with specialisation in child protection no later than within two years after starting service as a child protection official.

As from the start of 2025 the Child Protection Act ([Child Protection Act–Riigi Teataja](#)) sets forth an enhanced obligation to report on a child in need for persons working with children. Estonian Child Protection Act sets, that everybody has an obligation to report on a child in need (a child whose well-being is threatened or in the case of whom doubt has arisen concerning his or her abuse, neglect or any other situation violating the rights of the child and a child whose behaviour threatens his or her well-being or the well-being of other persons) and at risk (a child who is in a situation which endangers his or her life or health and a child who endangers his or her life or health or that of the others through his or her behaviour). As from the start of 2025, Child Protection Act complements, that such persons include teachers or support specialists in pre-primary, basic, secondary, vocational, or hobby education, childcare providers working in a childcare institution, employees of a child welfare institution, youth workers, coaches or instructors working with children, healthcare workers, police officers and victim support workers. The Social Insurance Board has created special online forms for the submission of such reports available on [lasteabi.ee](http://lasteabi.ee) website together with supporting materials for recognising a child in need and FAQs.

2. Where relevant, please provide information on any measures taken to ensure the alignment of any definitions of domestic violence and of violence against women in national legislation or policy documents with those set out under Article 3 of the Istanbul Convention and provide the relevant applicable provisions in English or French.

Answer:

In the new Victim Support Act, the definitions of victims of violence against women and domestic violence were established.

A victim of violence against women, as defined in this Act, is a woman who has suffered physical, sexual, psychological, or economic harm or distress in either public or private life as a result of domestic violence or gender-based violence committed against her, including coercion, arbitrary deprivation of liberty, or threats thereof.

A victim of domestic violence, as defined in this Act, is a person who has experienced acts of physical, sexual, psychological, or economic violence within the family or cohabitation, or by a former or current spouse or partner, regardless of whether the perpetrator resides or has resided with the victim.

The Supreme Court of Estonia has made several rulings concerning domestic violence in recent years (2020-2023). The Supreme Court has pointed out that Section 121 of the Penal Code does not define the concept of close relationship. In its previous practice, the Supreme Court, when defining this constituent element, has found that when establishing a close relationship, it cannot be limited to merely establishing the formal characteristics of the relationship. More important than the latter is the substantive connection between people living together, which may include, for example, raising children, living together in a common household, etc. What is important is the actual social and, in most cases, also emotional connection between people, which is based, for example, on sharing responsibility, mutual

reliance and trust. A close relationship creates and ensures a sense of social security for the parties to the relationship. Only for this reason is it justified to provide such a relationship with additional criminal law protection by establishing a more severe sanction compared to the basic elements of the act of violence criminalized in Section 121(1) of the Penal Code. ([RKKK 09.03.2020, 1-19-3377/32](#), paragraphs 9 and 10) Although, depending on the circumstances, a close relationship may continue after separation, it must be assumed that the close relationship ends with the actual termination of the marriage or cohabitation (ibid., paragraph 11; see also [RKKK 21.10.2022, 1-21-3307/43](#), paragraphs 27-28).

On December 6 2023 Supreme Court of Estonia has found in [judgment no 1-21-4285](#): Section 121(1) of the Penal Code criminalizes intentional physical abuse of another person. The requirement of Article 46(a) of the Convention is met by Section 58(4) of the Penal Code, which, among other things, provides for the commission of any offence against a former or current family member of the offender, a person living with the offender or a person otherwise dependent on the offender as an aggravating circumstance. The Convention does not use the concept of close relationship.

In other words, close relationship is an autonomous concept in Estonian law. In this way, the Estonian legislator has created, in addition to the Convention, additional protection for persons who have been physically abused in a private relationship in which they are more vulnerable to the attacker, regardless of the formal definition of the relationship. If the legislator wanted to regulate this issue based on the convention, it would have criminalized domestic violence, not intimate partner violence, in Section 121(2) of the Penal Code, similar to Section 58(4) of the Penal Code, but this has not been done.

The Supreme Court acknowledges that close relationships and family relationships are often overlapping concepts, but they cannot be identified. Thus, a close relationship can be affirmed between persons whose communication is, for example, only online, i.e. without direct contact, but which can nevertheless be characterized by the above-mentioned characteristics; if such a relationship were to end in a physical conflict upon direct meeting, there are no obstacles to qualifying the act under Section 121(2)(2) of the Penal Code, although it is not a family relationship. Persons may also be related by family, for example, parents form a common household and their child who lives there with their own family, but it is hardly possible to characterize a physical conflict between a father-in-law and a son-in-law as having occurred in a close relationship, and it is also difficult to see a crime of close relationship in brothers living in the same family fighting with each other. This also shows that these are not synonyms, and the concepts used in Section 58(4) and Section 121(2)(2) of the Penal Code are not identical.

3. Please provide information on how your authorities ensure that policies on violence against women and domestic violence put women's rights and their empowerment at the centre and on any measure taken to enhance the intersectionality of such policies, in line with Articles 4 paragraph 3 of the convention. <sup>1</sup>

Answer:

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of intersectionality refers to the fact that "individuals (and groups) are affected by multiple inequalities based on various grounds of distinction rather than by discrimination based on one ground at a time. Therefore, discrimination, inequality and gender-based violence cannot be examined in relation to only one category of difference – for instance, gender – while precluding others – such as race, class, age, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity – because social categories intersect and interlock in multiple systems of discrimination that simultaneously affect an individual's life." See in this respect the study Ensuring the Non-discriminatory Implementation of Measures against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence: Article 4, paragraph 3, of the Istanbul Convention, A collection of papers on the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, p.12-13

At the national level, an intimate partner violence (IPV) expert group has been established, consisting of officials from the relevant ministries (Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs, Ministry of Social Affairs, and Ministry of Education and Research) and their respective agencies (Social Insurance Board, Police and Border Guard Board, and the Prosecutor's Office). This expert group meets regularly to ensure a shared information space and to exchange best practices in combating intimate partner violence.

The IPV steering group is a high-level body that brings together deputy secretaries-general, the Prosecutor General, representatives of the Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities, and the judiciary. The primary tasks of the steering group include supporting and monitoring the implementation of action plan-related tasks. Additionally, the group coordinates the activities of various ministries and state agencies in reducing intimate partner violence to enhance synergy and effectiveness.

The planning of activities for the current Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Prevention Action Plan for 2024–2027 took into account the recommendations from the evaluation report of the Istanbul Convention's monitoring committee (GREVIO).

To ensure that all parties involved in the intimate partner violence action plan share a sense of collective responsibility, it was decided that the expert group would be led on a rotating basis. In 2024, the process was led by the Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs, the Ministry of Social Affairs is currently in charge, and next year, the Ministry of the Interior will take on the leadership role.

#### **Article 8: Funding**

4. Please provide information on any new development since the adoption of GREVIO's baseline evaluation report on your country concerning the allocation of appropriate and sustainable financial and human resources for the implementation of integrated policies, measures and programmes to prevent and combat all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention.

##### Answer:

The Action Plan for the prevention of intimate partner violence does not have a separate budget and all the activities are done within various organisations' own budgets.

- The list of measures for the Cohesion Policy Funds for 2021–2027 includes a measure no. 21.4.7.9, "Services aimed at children and families are of high quality and meet the needs of families", implemented by the Ministry of Social Affairs. One of the activities under that measure is supporting children with diverse needs and their families, including child victims of sexual and domestic violence. For a period of two years (2023-2024), the disbursements of the activities of supporting children with diverse needs and their families (i.e. not only the child victims of sexual and domestic violence) have amounted over 500,000 euros. The activities shall continue until the end of 2027.
- The Ministry of Education and Research ordered the University of Tartu to provide educational materials and in-service training for teachers until the end of 2024, e.g. Digital learning materials have been prepared for the upper secondary school as described in the action plan by the agreed deadline: "Dating violence - noticing"; "Dating violence - what are the solutions"; "Sexual violence". The contract was 15,000 euros per year (a total of 60,000 euros in the period 2021-2024).
- In 2024, a two-year IMPACT project was launched (running from 2024 to 2026) to develop victim support systems in three countries: Estonia, Malta, and Portugal. In Estonia, this project serves as a continuation of the Protection of Crime Victims in



Estonia (AREV) project, which aimed to improve the identification of crime victims, the documentation of their injuries, and their referral to support services within the healthcare sector.

Key objectives of the IMPACT project:

- Developing national strategies and tools to improve victim support systems in Estonia, Malta, and Portugal;
- Enhancing the accessibility of support for crime victims and reducing re-victimization through innovative referral systems, training programs, and communication tools;
- Empowering victims and stakeholders by promoting collaboration and increasing awareness of rights and available resources.

Objectives of the IMPACT project in Estonia:

- Supporting the implementation of the Victim Support Act adopted in 2023;
- Developing and piloting tools for assessing crime victims' needs, facilitating referrals between services, and improving access to information;
- Strengthening cooperation with the healthcare sector, including expanding the use of the body map for documenting abuse;
- Training (healthcare) professionals to better understand the needs of crime victims and reduce re-victimization;
- Raising public and stakeholder knowledge and awareness.

The project is funded by the European Union's Technical Support Instrument, which focuses on implementing reforms in member states. The total budget for the IMPACT project is €1.6 million, of which approximately €400,000 is allocated to Estonia.

5. Please provide information on any development concerning the provision of appropriate and sustainable financial and human resources for women's rights organisations that provide specialist support services to victims, including those supporting migrant women and girls.

Answer:

In Estonia, support services for victims of violence against women are provided by women's NGOs. They receive funding from the government (via the Ministry of Social Affairs/Social Insurance Board). Funding is provided through procurement.

According to new Victims Support Act victims of domestic and sexual violence can receive mental health support for trauma recovery (services of psychologists, psychotherapists) even without criminal proceedings, whereas previously, initiating proceedings was a requirement.

#### **Article 11: Data collection and research**

6. Please provide information on any new development since the adoption of GREVIO's baseline evaluation report on your country on the introduction of data collection categories such as type of violence, sex and age of the victim and the perpetrator, the relationship between the two and where it took place, for administrative data of relevance to the field of violence against women and domestic violence emanating from law enforcement agencies, the justice sector, social services and the public health care sector.

Answer:

- In 2023, the Ministry of the Interior commissioned a research on "Knowledge and attitudes related to intimate partner violence among rescue workers and police officers" with the aim of understanding the experiences, knowledge and attitudes related to intimate partner violence among rescue workers and police officers who are involved in intimate partner violence cases. The survey was an input for planning further activities to improve the awareness and skills of professionals. Some of the actions that followed up on the results of the research were: upgrading the curricula of police

and emergency responders officers; covision and training (systematic) for police and emergency responders officers already in service.

- In 2024, the Ministry of the Interior commissioned a case analysis: "The authorities' handling of fatal domestic violence cases". The aim of the study is to:
  1. analyse the cases of intimate partner violence resulting in the death of the victim, focusing on the activities of the police, prosecution, victim support and local authorities in detecting, responding and processing the cases;
  2. identify the bottlenecks in the response of the authorities and proposals for changes in the work processes. The results of the study will serve as input for the planning of future actions and for filling the gaps identified.
- In 2024, Social Insurance Board published public opinion/awareness research ([Raport](#)) on knowledge and attitudes towards domestic violence, sexual violence, human trafficking. Last time such a study was conducted was in 2016.
- In 2023, Statistics Estonia published the largest and most comprehensive relationship survey to date. The survey provided an overview of how people in Estonia perceive relationships at home, in the workplace, and elsewhere. The results revealed that 41% of women have experienced violence in a romantic relationship at some point in their lives. Among them, 39% have experienced psychological violence, 13% physical violence (including threats), and 9% sexual violence. Young women aged 18–29 have experienced violence more frequently than average, while the lowest prevalence was reported among older women aged 65–74.
- The Estonian national child helpline 116 111 (*lasteabi* in Estonian and hereafter in the text) serves an important role in the Estonian child protection system: collecting information and providing counselling and guidance about all topics concerning or related to children and the youth, especially about children in need or in immediate danger; forwarding information about children in need of help to other relevant authorities, including the local child protection workers in local governments; outside normal working hours providing immediate and necessary assistance to children in danger together with other authorities. In 2024, the study ([Lasteabi-tulemuslikkuse-uuring-lopparuanne-16.10.2024.pdf](#)) sought to analyse the work conducted by lasteabi in the field of collecting information about children in need of help or in immediate danger and provide conclusions about its effectiveness, perceived impact and main challenges remaining.
- 2023 research report ([MSxpsPS](#)) evaluating the impact of MARAC model on victims of domestic violence, professionals and support networks.
- In 2024, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications funded the conduct of the study "Pre-trial Proceedings of Sexual Violence Cases" as part of the strategic partnership for supporting gender equality NGOs. The study focused on the pre-trial proceedings of sexual violence cases from the perspective of the police, prosecution, victim support, and health-care professionals. The study analyses the practices of pre-trial proceedings, including evidence collection, victim support mechanisms, and the institutional organization of the investigation of sexual violence. The study provides policy recommendations on how to enhance pre-trial proceedings by increasing professionals' awareness and skills and ensuring a stereotype-free, trauma-informed, and victim-centered approach to handling sexual violence cases. (<https://www.praxis.ee/uploads/2024/03/Seksuaalvagivalla-kohtueelne-uurimine.pdf>)

7. Where relevant, please provide information on any new development since the adoption of GREVIO's baseline evaluation report on your country to enable disaggregated data collection:

- a. on the number of emergency barring and protection orders and the number of breaches and the resulting sanctions;

Answer:

Between 2022 and 2023, an average of 450 emergency barring orders were issued, including most of them orally (95%), but a few in writing (5%). The prohibition to stay is applied on the basis of the Law Enforcement Act ([Law Enforcement Act–Riigi Teataja](#)) and mostly in cases where no criminal proceedings are opened (84%).

In 2023, a total of 33 restraining orders were issued, 14 of which were temporary restraining orders applied in urgent cases. In 2022, 48 temporary restraining orders were issued, 21 of which were urgent.

- b. on the number of times custody decisions have resulted in the restriction and withdrawal of parental rights because of violence perpetrated by one parent against the other.

Answer:

N/A

8. Please provide information on measures taken to allow cases of violence against women and domestic violence to be tracked from reporting to conviction, at all stages of the law-enforcement and judicial proceedings.

Answer:

In Estonia all proceedings of criminal acts can be tracked from reporting to conviction. Since 2023 the Police and Border Guard Board and the Prosecutor's Office use the same database for collecting and saving data. All evidence (except physical) and interrogation protocols are held there. It is also connected to the database the court system is using, so all court rulings connected to each case are visible there as well.

## **Part II: Information on the implementation of selected provisions in priority areas in the field of prevention, protection and prosecution**

### **Article 12: General obligations**

9. Please provide information on any primary prevention measures aiming to change mentalities and attitudes in relation to violence against women and to reduce women's exposure to gender-based violence by:

- a. addressing harmful gender stereotypes and prejudices, customs and traditions based on the idea of the inferiority of women;

Answer:

In 2024 University of Tartu and Praxis Think Tank conducted a study that focused on online content and communities that promote and reinforce misogynistic, sexist, and gender-stereotypical narratives—often referred to as the "manosphere". The study was funded and carried out in a framework of strategic partnership agreement with the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications.

The study indicates that the spread of misogynistic narratives among Estonian youth is significant, particularly on social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, where young people consume content that reinforces traditional gender roles and hypermasculine perceptions. Stereotypes originating from the manosphere portray men as strong and unemotional and women as caring and passive. Social media algorithms further contribute to the dissemination of these narrow and polarized views, reinforcing traditional gender roles and stereotypes. The study highlights the importance of critical media consumption and awareness to prevent the emergence of deep societal divides.

As a continuation of the research project, several communication activities were carried out. Estonian-language Wikipedia subpages were created to explain terms such as mansphere and manfluencer. In 2025, a teacher's toolbox "Misogyny and Gender Roles" was developed to help educators understand the role of social media in creating misogynistic narratives. This resource helps educators facilitate discussions on social media's influence and gender stereotypes from a critical perspective.

b. addressing the heightened exposure to gender-based violence by women and girls at risk of intersectional discrimination;

c. encouraging all members of society, including men and boys, to contribute actively to preventing all forms of violence against women covered by the scope of the Istanbul Convention, and promoting the empowerment of women and girls in all areas of life, notably their participation in politics at all levels and in the labour market.

Answer:

Estonia is taking several primary prevention measures to promote the empowerment of women and girls in all areas of life, notably their participation in politics at all levels and in the labor market.

Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications is implementing various activities during 2023-2029 to combat gender stereotypes and reduce gender segregation in education and the labour market, with a special focus on STEM and EHW sectors as well as women in leadership. These activities encompass conducting research, providing training, executing awareness raising campaigns, and endorsing non-traditional career paths. Additionally, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications plans to facilitate collaboration through open calls, to support employers, educational institutions, as well as other key stakeholders in helping to prevent and reduce gender segregation in education and labour market.

One of the ongoing activities is developing a gender equality training programme for career counselors to help combat gender stereotypes, encourage non-stereotypical career paths and reduce gender segregation in the labour market. The training programme will be a part of the in-job training program for career counselors. The Unemployment Insurance Fund's career counselors provide career counseling for adult clients as well as pupils in grades 7-12 all over Estonia.

Total budget for the activities targeted to reduce gender segregation in education and labor market is 3,5 mln euros, co funded by European Social Fund.

Awareness-raising initiatives aimed at increasing the share of women in leadership. In 2024, to mark the International Day of the Girl Child, Estonia introduced a work-shadowing event, "Girls Take Over." This initiative paired girls with top women managers and ministers to inspire young women to take on leadership roles, raise awareness of gender-related glass ceilings and challenge gender stereotypes. In 2025, a 18-month awareness campaign "Breaking Gender Stereotypes to Promote Gender Equality in Leadership and Decision-Making" will be launched that aims to:

- Raise awareness of gender stereotypes that hinder women's leadership
- Promote gender balance in decision-making and politics
- Highlight the societal benefits of gender equality
- Increase institutional support for women in leadership, encourage businesses and political organizations to value gender balance
- Foster stereotype-free media representation of women leaders
- Empower young women to pursue leadership roles
- Engage men, especially young men, as allies in advancing gender equality.

Social Insurance Board Victim Support 2024 and 2025 campaign: The *"Notice. Intervene. Help."* campaign takes a comprehensive approach to preventing sexual harassment in nightlife. To engage bystanders, visual materials have been created, along with a dedicated website, [www.palunabi.ee/ooelu](http://www.palunabi.ee/ooelu). The website provides information on distinguishing flirting from harassment and practical tips on how bystanders can intervene and support victims. In addition to these resources, the Social Insurance Board, in collaboration with partners, organizes thematic training sessions for nightlife venues in bigger cities of Estonia. Following England example, Social Insurance Board Victim Support, developed Estonia's own guidelines, *"Nightlife Free from Sexual Harassment,"* which provide recommendations for nightlife venue staff on creating an inclusive and harassment-free environment. Victim Support encourages nightlife establishments to implement the guidelines in their venues, thereby offering their guests a safer and harassment-free party environment for everyone. The guidelines also come with free training upon request and are offerer advice and support to bystanders, interveners, and victims: the Victim Support Crisis Helpline 116006 (available 24/7 in Estonian, English, and Russian) and Sexual Violence Crisis Centers for cases of rape or suspected sexual violence (available 24/7).

#### Article 14: Education

10. Please provide a few examples of promising teaching or prevention programmes, materials, or initiatives for use in formal education (from pre-school to higher education) that:

- a. educate children and youth about equality between women and men, the right to personal integrity, mutual respect and non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships, including the notion of freely given consent;
- b. address some or all the forms of gender-based violence against women and girls covered by the Istanbul Convention;
- c. promote the inclusion of digital literacy and online safety in formal curricula as foreseen under GREVIO General Recommendation No. 1 on the digital dimension of violence against women;
- d. ensure that teaching material used in school does not convey negative gender stereotypes of women and men of all ages;
- e. offer tailored interventions aimed at preventing gender-based violence and empowering all girls, including those at risk of intersectional discrimination.

#### Answer:

The Safer Internet Centre in Estonia established under the Estonian Union of Child Welfare (Lastekaitse Liit) is aimed at keeping children safe online. The centre works together with multiple stakeholders to promote safe and smart internet use among the wider public (teachers, children, parents etc). **The project's mission is a smarter Internet use by children and their parents and the prevention of the online distribution of child sexual abuse material.**

The project is co-financed 50% by the European Commission. The project includes:

- training sessions and seminars for children, parents, teachers and social workers, and awareness-raising events for the general public;
- the drafting of training and awareness-raising materials for children, teachers and parents;
- creative competitions for children and students;
- assistance and counselling from the Children's Helpline 116111 [www.lasteabi.ee](http://www.lasteabi.ee) children and parents on safe Internet and digital mobile devices use by telephone, MSN (user info@lasteabi.ee) and other IM solutions;
- the web-based hotline <https://vihjeliin.targaltinternetis.ee/en/>, which allows Internet users to provide information about web environments which contain material that violates children's right to sexual self-determination; notices about other materials that are inappropriate for children may also be sent to Vihjeliin;

- cooperation among different stakeholders in Estonia and Europe and participation in the INHOPE and INSAFE cooperation networks.

The activities of the project since January 2019 are being implemented by four organisations:

- [Estonian Union for Child Welfare](#) is a coordinator of the project and contributes to awareness raising activities, coordinates youth participation and operates Estonian Hotline [www.vihjeliin.ee](http://www.vihjeliin.ee);
- [Education and Youth Authority](#) and [Tallinn University of Technology](#) carry out awareness raising activities;
- [Estonian Social Insurance Board](#) (operates Child Helpline 116111) provides help and counselling for children and parents if problems emerge in the use of the Internet and digital media devices, and participates in awareness raising activities.

Furthermore, the project has a [youth panel](#) and [advisory board](#), through which representatives of stakeholders are using their knowledge and experience to support its implementation.

The general parts of the national curricula (2023. National curriculum for basic school: [Põhikooli riiklik õppekava–Riigi Teataja](#); [National curriculum for upper-secondary school: Gümnaasiumi riiklik õppekava–Riigi Teataja](#)) set out the basic values of education, which are universal and national, and on which learning must be based. The fundamental values prioritize universal human values (honesty, care, reverence for life, justice, human dignity, respect for oneself and others) and social values (freedom, democracy, respect for one's native language and culture, patriotism, cultural diversity, tolerance, environmental sustainability, the rule of law, solidarity, responsibility, and gender equality). The national curricula formulate the learning outcomes, knowledge, skills and attitudes to be achieved by the end of school levels, and schools have the autonomy to structure the curricula by grade so that the learning outcomes are achieved. To support teachers in compiling school curricula, a learning process environment ([Esileht - Õppekava materjalide veeb](#)) has been created, where all topics are open through subject content and learning outcomes, as well as examples of methods and teaching materials. Our partners, the Institute of Health Development, the University of Tartu, and the Children's Home (Lastemaja), have also contributed to the environment. The described values are most supported by social studies: Social studies competence aims to develop the student's ability to cope with themselves, the ability to function in their immediate environment, the willingness and ability to be an active and responsible citizen, the ability to interpret social relations in past societies based on the historical context and universal human values. Through social studies, primary knowledge and attitudes about social equality, equity, and the equality of women and men are formed. In social studies, students acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to function in society and make responsible decisions. All social studies subjects support the student's development of the ability to analyze their behavior and its consequences, to express their feelings in an appropriate way, to accept people's differences and to take them into account when communicating; to assert themselves, to resist injustice in a way that does not harm their own or others' interests or needs.

In the fall of 2023, the Progressive Movement and the Feministeerium launched a cooperation project on consent-based sexual education (source: [“I want to rape you” or why consent-based sexual education should be in every Estonian school - Feministeerium](#)). It is still ongoing, as it later received funding from the Solidarity Corps: [We are bringing consent-based sexual education to every corner of Estonia - EEA map application](#).

## **Article 15: Training of professionals**

11. Please complete tables I and II included in the Appendix in order to provide a comprehensive overview of the professional groups that receive initial and in-service training on the different forms of violence against women and domestic violence. Please specify the frequency and scope of the training and whether it is compulsory.



Answer:

- The Estonian Academy of Security Sciences confirmed in 2025 the compulsory training curriculum which is targeted at first responders in the police and the emergency services. Each target group will receive 16 academic hours of training. They focus on, among other things, networking and working together to complement the capabilities of the different actors, rather than pushing one agency onto another. Above all, the curriculum will help to raise awareness of the roles and capabilities of the different actors, which in turn will broaden and motivate everyone to take action to tackle the problem. Consequently, we will try to influence attitudes towards an understanding of domestic violence, and to challenge established and sometimes fossilised perceptions and myths about the causes and nature of domestic violence, including recurrence.
- In October 2024, joint co-vision groups were piloted in all four Police prefectures, bringing together officials involved in handling domestic violence (LSV) cases: Police and Border Guard Board (community police officers, investigators, patrol officers), Emergency Response Centre (dispatchers), and victim support workers from the Social Insurance Board. These groups include officials working at different stages of domestic violence cases, enabling them to gain a better understanding of the actions taken by their cooperation partners before and after their own involvement. This helps them comprehend the overall case resolution process, recognize patterns of recurrence, and appreciate the significance of their contribution.
- The child welfare master's studies programme of Tallinn University includes [an elective course on "Violence and Victim Support"](#) (6 ECTS).
- University of Tartu offers an elective course on IPV in the faculty of law.
- Teachers are hired by the school principal, who is responsible for ensuring that a competent pedagogue works as a teacher. The qualification requirements for teachers have been established by a regulation of the Minister of Education and Research and described in the professional standard (level 7): § 3. Qualification requirements for teachers. The qualification requirements for a basic school and upper secondary school teacher are a master's degree or equivalent qualification and a teaching profession and proficiency in Estonian in accordance with the requirements set out in the Language Act and legislation issued on the basis of the Language Act. Social studies and civics teachers are trained at the Universities of Tallinn and Tartu. Social studies teachers are trained in a joint curriculum with history teachers. Students who have chosen the minor in pedagogy (BA level), multi-subject teacher (MA level) and class teacher at the Institute of Educational Sciences can study to become social science teachers at Tallinn University. The minor in social science can also be completed at the Institute of Natural and Health Sciences. As well also a major in psychology. At the Master's level, the didactics and practice are taught, which is mandatory for teachers. At the University of Tartu, sexual education topics are studied in the teacher training curricula of the Institute of Educational Sciences "Teaching Humanities and Social Sciences in Basic Schools" and "Multi-subject Teacher in Basic Schools" within the framework of the level of study.
- The University of Tartu offers a course called *Healthy and Safe Relationships* for primary and secondary school human studies teachers and other subject teachers. The aim of the training is to provide teachers with an overview of how to address the prevention of adolescent dating violence in schools, covering both theoretical foundations and methodology. The course explores topics such as building healthy and safe relationships, gender stereotypes, the nature and forms of dating violence, solution-oriented behaviors, and available support and assistance options. The training covers the following topics:

- Healthy and safe relationships, with mutual consent as the foundation for safe sexual relationships
  - Types and manifestations of dating violence, as well as attitudes that contribute to it
  - Responding to relationship violence, the network of helpers, and available support services (including the school's role as an observer and supporter)
  - Sexual violence in young people's relationships, its types, and available assistance options.
- The Social Insurance Board has conducted training sessions across Estonia for professionals working with children (teachers, educational support specialists, sports organization and hobby group instructors, coaches, youth workers, police officers, healthcare and victim support workers) on recognizing children in need and at risk. Starting in 2025, a free online course titled "Recognizing and Assisting a Child in Need" has been developed. This course helps participants understand the principles of ensuring children's rights and well-being, how to identify and support a child in need, use tools for assessing and reporting a child's need for assistance, prevent maltreatment, and recognize different types of abuse (emotional, physical, sexual abuse, and neglect).
  - The Social Insurance Board also provides trainings on the Sensoa flag system designed for professionals working with children and young people (aged 0-18) across various fields (child protection, substitute care, education, youth work, health, police, sports, etc.) to assess whether children's or young people's sexual behaviour is natural, inappropriate, or unacceptable. The flag system encourages open discussions on the topic with children and young people, colleagues, management, and cooperation partners. It also supports parents and is suitable for use in children's and young people's sexual education.
  - In cooperation with the Estonian LGBT+ Association, we have conducted 2 trainings for specialists working with children on the topic "Possibilities of supporting LGBT+ children and youth". A participant who has completed the training will understand the main principles related to ensuring the safety, equal rights and accessibility of services for LGBT+ children and youth, and will discuss options for supporting LGBT+ children and youth and their families. In addition, the LGBT+ topic module has been included as part of the training for child protection workers "Legal bases in child protection work".
  - The Social Insurance Board has developed the training "Multiculturalism in child protection work". The training is intended for both child protection workers and specialists working with children. The training provides knowledge in the following topics: cultural and religious specificities, cultural diversity, abuse, closed communities and radicalization. In the last two years, 4 trainings on this topic have been organized.
  - In addition, various prevention activities by the Estonian Barnahus include training sessions for specialists, communication activities (articles, media, etc), awareness-raising campaigns, and educational workshops and presentations in schools and kindergartens. The Barnahus also collaborates with a wide range of professionals and institutions to promote child safety and well-being.

In the Victim Support Act, education and training requirements for specialists providing victim support services are established through regulations. This means that professionals working in women's support centers, sexual violence crisis centers, victim support services, and other victim support service providers must complete both basic and continuing training to be eligible to perform their duties.

A person directly providing victim support services must complete basic victim support training within one year of starting to provide the service. Basic victim support training must equip individuals providing direct victim support with the necessary preparation and support to fulfill their legal duties and provide victims with need-based assistance and support.



A person directly providing services at a women's support center must complete basic victim support training and additional training on violence against women within one year of starting work. Alternatively, they may have completed a university course on violence against women.

The Social Insurance Board assesses whether university coursework meets the requirements for additional training. Additional training on violence against women must prepare service providers for working with victims of violence. It should provide an overview of concepts related to violence against women and gender equality, explain violence against women as a human rights violation and its connection to gender inequality, and cover the motives behind victim and perpetrator behavior as well as the impact of violence on women and children.

A person directly providing sexual violence crisis support must complete basic victim support training and additional training on sexual violence within one year of starting work. Additional training on sexual violence must prepare service providers for working with victims of sexual violence. It should provide an overview of the nature and forms of sexual violence, its impact on victims, available support options, and relevant offenses defined in the Penal Code.

The Victim Support Department of the Social Insurance Board has developed several e-courses for specialists working with victims. These courses make additional training more accessible to a wider range of professionals, allowing them to complete the training more easily, revisit topics as needed, and refresh their knowledge. The e-courses are available on <https://www.palunabi.ee/et/e-kursused>

E-courses: "Trauma-Informed Practice" and "Psychological First Aid in Supporting a Person in Crisis" are intended for everyone. The remaining e-courses are designed for specialists, for example, if you work with people, including vulnerable groups (possibly also victims), and wish to develop professionally. The e-course **"Handling Cases of Violence"** is designed to raise awareness among professionals working with victims about domestic violence—exploring its nature, introducing key principles of assistance, and providing guidelines on how to act in situations requiring prompt and decisive intervention. The **trauma-informed e-course** serves as a guide on how to better understand and address trauma-related needs both in daily work and at the organizational level. The **Basic Victim Support E-Training** is intended for those who encounter victims of crime, violence, or crisis situations in their work or who wish to learn more about the functioning of the victim support system and needs-based support for victims. The **Restorative Justice E-Learning Course** focuses on the principles and core beliefs of restorative justice, which guide building connections with people and understanding emerging situations. When professionals grasp these principles, it enables them to apply restorative justice methods in each case and feel confident in their role as facilitators.

For initial training of judges, please note the following: There is no dedicated training program for judges before they assume office. However, newly appointed judges must complete a mandatory specialized training program.

The term "newly appointed judge" refers to judges at the first instance or appellate level who have served in a judicial role for less than three years. Additionally, many judges in Estonia have prior experience within the Estonian court system, often working as law clerks or judicial clerks. As a result, they may have already participated in judicial training events organized by the Legal Information and Judicial Training Department at the Supreme Court of Estonia (hereafter: the Department).

The mandatory training program also includes free access to e-courses, such as the HELP Online course on Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence. Given that only a small number of new judges are appointed each year (ranging from 2 to 5), online courses offer an effective way to familiarize them with key topics, such as different forms of violence against

women and domestic violence. The HELP course is available to all judges, and information about these courses is shared annually.

For in-service training, please note the following: The Department assesses judges' training needs, develops training strategies, and drafts the annual training program. The content of the program varies each year based on the judges' evolving needs. Many training events are recorded and made available to members of the Estonian Judiciary via our internal webpage (e.g., a 2022 lecture on parental alienation and its lack of academic validation). This approach eliminates the need to repeat certain topics annually.

12. Please specify if the expertise of women's rights organisations or specialist support services is integrated in the design and/or implementation of the training.

Answer:

The Victim Support Department of the Social Insurance Board involves experts from women's support centers as trainers and contributors in its training programs to provide practical insights and expertise in assisting victims of violence against women. The additional training on violence against women, which is a mandatory prerequisite for working in a support center, is largely conducted by the support center staff themselves.

**Article 16: Preventive intervention and treatment programmes**

13. Please provide information on measures taken to increase the number of available preventive intervention and treatment programmes for perpetrators of domestic and sexual violence both for voluntary and mandatory attendance.

14. Please provide information on measures taken to:

- a. increase the number of men and boys attending perpetrator programmes for domestic and sexual violence;
- b. ensure that the perpetrator programmes apply standards of best practice;
- c. ensure the safety of victims and co-operation with specialist support services for victims;
- d. ensure that the outcomes of the programmes are monitored and evaluated.

Answer to 13 and 14:

The police officer handling the case or the investigator conducting the criminal proceedings introduces the perpetrator of violence to the violence cessation service and offers a referral to it.

Since 2020 The Prosecutor's Office has agreed on common practice agreements in criminal proceedings for domestic violence where it is stipulated that the prosecutors introduce suspects to the activities of the service of support for abandonment of violence and share information on how to contact it, if this has not been done before by the police (in consultation with a support line counsellor in advance).

One of the key services provided by the Victim Support Unit of the Social Insurance Board is the Violence Cessation Support Service, which is also established by the Victim Support Act. The goal of this service is to contribute to the prevention and reduction of violence through interventions directed at perpetrators. The service collaborates with European Network for the Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence network. The Violence Cessation Support Service includes:

- Assessing the perpetrator's motivation and psychosocial needs to determine the necessity and scope of the service;
- Evaluating the risk of continued violent behavior;

- Providing counseling to support the cessation of violent behavior. When supporting violence cessation, the primary focus must be on the safety, well-being, and human rights of the victim.
- **Violence cessation counselors** are involved in all **MARAC teams** to ensure the appropriate measures are applied to perpetrators receiving the violence cessation service and to safeguard the safety of victims.

A low-threshold service has been created for counseling individuals with harmful sexual behavior, either towards themselves or others. A website, [piirid.ee](http://piirid.ee), has been set up where people can express their concerns, and specialists respond to them. A follow-up project is underway, which involves training specialists to provide initial counseling both online and in person, in various regions, for people who are concerned about their problematic sexual behavior. Specialists are offered training based on the NACS (Nordic Association of Clinical Sexology) curriculum, and intervention training follows scientifically proven methods and theories (cognitive-behavioral theory, Good Life model, RNR principles, etc.). The service can be accessed voluntarily or through court referral. Solutions are being developed to offer anonymous counseling for individuals with problematic sexual behavior.

In prisons we work on increasing the motivation of individuals in order to create motivation in individuals to participate in the program. During participation in the program, we monitor motivation and if there is a risk of dropping out of the program, we also deal with this issue individually. Programs must be carried out in accordance with the training and the procedure prescribed in the program manual. The quality of program implementation is maintained through program-specific case discussions and covisions. Program implementers are also given feedback on the implementation of the program based on audio or video recordings. Ensuring the safety of victims and cooperation with cooperation partners is addressed through networking. Perpetrators who have committed domestic violence crimes and sexual crimes are addressed through networking. In each case, network members who are important for that case are called together. Networking is a form of cooperation where different organizations and individuals join together to achieve common goals or solve problems. This creates a common information field and shares resources, focusing on interventions based on the needs of specific cases to support disengagement from crime. Through the provision of coordinated support, mitigating the risks and needs arising from a specific person or situation, the safety of victims, loved ones and the community is increased.

### **Article 18: General obligations**

15. Please provide information on any multi-agency co-operation mechanisms, structures or measures in place designed to protect and support victims of any of the forms of gender-based violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention (e.g., interdisciplinary working groups, case-management systems, cross-sectoral protocols/ guidelines...). Please describe:

- a. the state agencies involved in their functioning (law-enforcement agencies, judiciary, public prosecutor, local authorities, healthcare services, social services, educational institutions etc.);
- b. whether they involve specialist support services provided by civil society organisations, especially women's rights organisations;
- c. how they adopt a gender-sensitive approach to violence against women, including the prioritisation of the safety of women and girl victims, their empowerment and a victim-centred approach;
- d. the financial and human resources dedicated to their implementation; and
- e. any available information on the evaluation of their outcome or impact.

Answer:

In 2024, a two-year IMPACT project was launched (running from 2024 to 2026) to develop victim support systems. This project serves as a continuation of the Protection of Crime Victims in Estonia (AREV) project, which aims to improve the identification of crime victims, the documentation of their injuries, and their referral to support services within the healthcare sector.

The cooperation agreement between the Social Insurance Board and the Police and Border Guard Board is being updated to highlight key areas of cooperation, opportunities, and mutual expectations. In addition, cooperation seminars between the Police and Border Guard Board and Social Insurance Board is held in each four regions.

There are a total of 21 MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences) teams in Estonia. They are regular meetings of professionals who discuss how to help individuals who are most at risk of serious harm due to domestic violence and abuse. Take actions to safeguard your clients and others immediately. 97% of MARAC victims are women in Estonia.

Each MARAC team always includes representatives from:

- National Victim Support,
- Police,
- Prosecutor's Office,
- Local government,
- Violence Cessation Counselor,
- Third-sector representative, such as a Women Support Centre

In **2023**, an **impact study on the MARAC model** was conducted in Estonia. The report is available in English here: [Evaluation of the impact of the MARAC networking model](#).

Additionally, starting from **April 31, 2025**, a **feedback form** will be introduced for victims within the MARAC model.

In order to make sure the new Action Plan to Prevent Intimate Partner Violence for 2024-2027 is being implemented accordingly, we have an expert group on intimate partner violence, which brings together all the ministries and the implementing units under their responsibility. They meet once a month. In addition, a steering group on intimate partner violence, comprising deputy ministry chancellors and heads of departments that work under the ministries, meets twice a year. The aim is to oversee how the action plan is completed and give additional advice. Domestic violence touches on different areas and everyone has a role to play in preventing and reducing it, so it was jointly decided that the new action plan on the prevention of intimate partner violence will be managed on a rotating basis during this period.

16. Please detail whether any such co-operation mechanisms or structures set up for the delivery of support services for a specific form of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention is based on a legal or policy document advocating for or requiring such approaches.

Please see answer 15.

17. Please explain whether all or some of the services of protection and support offered for victims of the different forms of violence against women are provided on the basis of a one-stop-shop approach.

Answer:

Victim support specialists usually work in police stations so that the police can include them during the interrogation etc and "hand over" the victim to victim support.

There are four sexual violence crisis centers in Estonia where victims are examined and treated for free, but also supported if they want to contact the police. They also collect and lodge evidence during examination in case the victim should want to contact the police later

on. If necessary, the victim will be offered a referral to a psychologist, psychiatrist or other specialist (e.g. victim support).

Women's support centers offer primary psychosocial crisis support 24/7 both by phone and on site at the support center, psychological counseling or psychotherapy, legal advice, safe temporary accommodation (with children if necessary).

## **Article 20: General support services**

18. Please provide information on programmes and measures aimed at ensuring, through general services, the recovery of victims of violence, including in the health and social areas, financial assistance, education, training and assistance in finding employment and affordable and permanent housing.

### Answer:

The Victim Support Act defines the victim support services, which are provided and coordinated by the Social Insurance Board.

The victim support services are:

1. **Basic victim support service.** Is provided by the staff of the Victim Support Department of the Social Insurance Board in all Estonian counties and are usually located in the same building as the police. Victim support offices are open on weekdays. To arrange an appointment, one must contact a victim support worker by phone or e-mail or via Victim Support Crisis Line 116006 which offers support for the people who have experienced violence, loss, etc. Crisis helpline counselors listen, share information about help options and, if necessary, connect the victim with the right specialists.
2. Psychosocial support in crisis situations;
3. **Women's support center services** offer help for the victims of violence against women. The service is funded by the state, coordinated by the Social Insurance Board but provided by the NGOs. The service is available 24/7 and is free of charge in every county of Estonia. The service includes counseling and safe temporary accommodation for a victim and their children.
4. **Sexual violence crisis support;** The goal of sexual violence crisis support is to ensure that victims of sexual violence receive the necessary medical assistance and initial psychosocial support, contributing to the victim's physical and psychosocial recovery. Sexual violence crisis support centers are located in four regions of Estonia, and the service is provided by healthcare institutions that are partners of the Social Insurance Board under contract.
5. Services for victims of human trafficking;
6. Restorative justice services;
7. **Violence cessation support;** The goal of violence cessation support is to contribute to the prevention and reduction of violence through interventions directed at the perpetrator. The Social Insurance Board has a team of 5 counselors who provide counseling to perpetrators of violence in four regions of Estonia.
8. **Mental health support for trauma recovery.** The goal of mental health support for trauma recovery is to promote the victim's psychosocial balance and reduce the likelihood or intensity of psychological and behavioral disorders. This support includes psychological and psychotherapeutic assistance. Mental health support for trauma recovery is available to:
  - Crime victims, for whom a criminal procedure has been initiated;
  - Victims of domestic violence or sexual violence;
  - The victim's child, grandchild, parent, or any other person raising the child, as well as grandparents, siblings, or someone who is or has been in a marriage or cohabitation with the victim;
  - Persons participating as witnesses in criminal proceedings.

The Estonian Barnahus, a public service of the Social Insurance Board, is a child-friendly, multidisciplinary service that supports children who have experienced sexual abuse or display harmful sexual behaviour. In Estonia Barnahus is regulated by § 29<sup>1</sup> of the Child Protection Act. This legal framework defines the responsibilities and tasks of Barnahus in providing assistance and support to children of the target group.

**Questions specific to the public health sector:**

19. Have specific measures been taken to ensure that public health services (hospitals, health centres, other) respond to the safety and medical needs of women and girls victims of all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention on the basis of national/regional standardised protocols?

Answer:

In 2024, a two-year IMPACT project was launched (running from 2024 to 2026) to develop victim support systems. This project serves as a continuation of the Protection of Crime Victims in Estonia (AREV) project, which aims to improve the identification of crime victims, the documentation of their injuries, and their referral to support services within the healthcare sector.

If a person suspected of experiencing sexual violence is admitted to the hospital, they are referred to a sexual violence crisis centre.

Hospitals have victim support brochures that individuals can read and take with them if needed.

20. Do such protocols detail the procedure to:

- a. identify victims through screening;
- b. provide treatment for all the medical needs of victims in a supportive manner;
- c. collect forensic evidence and documentation;
- d. ensure that a clear message of support is conveyed to the victim;
- e. refer to the appropriate specialist support services that form part of a multi-agency co-operation structure; and
- f. identify children who may have been exposed to domestic violence or other forms of gender-based violence against women and girls and require further support.

Answer:

For example, Estonian Barnahus cooperates with Sexual Assault Centres (situated at the regional hospitals) in providing necessary support (therapy and counselling) to child victims of sexual abuse and their families. Over the years, more than half of the referrals to the Barnahus have involved girls. In 2023, there were a total of 728 referrals to the Barnahus, of which 519 were for girls. In 2024, there were a total of 814 referrals to the Barnahus, of which 577 were for girls.

For example, the guide to identifying and referring victims of human trafficking to services:

[Microsoft Word - Juhis 2019 avalik.](#)

Please see also answer 21.

21. Please provide information on the procedures in place for the documentation and collection by actors of the public health sector of forensic evidence in relation to victims of domestic violence, victims of sexual violence, including rape, and victims of female genital mutilation.

Answer:

At the **sexual violence crisis support centers**, the following services are provided:

- Support and counseling;

- Medical examination, **including the collection of evidence**, in case you wish to report to the police later;
- Referral to a psychologist, psychiatrist, or other specialists, if necessary;
- Provision of contraception;
- Preventive treatment for HIV and Hepatitis B;
- Support if you wish to report to the police;
- Examinations and treatment are free of charge;
- Assistance even if you do not remember what happened, but suspect that you have been a victim of sexual violence.

The Victim Support Department of the Social Insurance Board has developed a guide to assist victims in collecting evidence of domestic violence. The guide is also available in English: [https://sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/sites/default/files/documents/2023-02/lsv\\_toendite\\_kogumise\\_juhend\\_eng.pdf](https://sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/sites/default/files/documents/2023-02/lsv_toendite_kogumise_juhend_eng.pdf)

22. Are all women victims of violence, irrespective of any of the grounds listed in Article 4 paragraph 3 of the Istanbul Convention, in particular asylum-seeking women, refugee women, migrant women, women from national or ethnic minorities, women with irregular residence status, women with disabilities and LGBTI women, able to benefit on an equal footing from existing healthcare services? Please describe any measure taken to reduce legal or practical barriers to their accessing regular healthcare services.

Answer:

Estonian victim support is intended for all individuals regardless of their nationality, race, skin color, religion, beliefs, views, age, disability, sexual orientation, etc. The provision of services and assistance must be ensured for all those in need, including victims of violence and crime.

The Estonian government has supported the Estonian LGBT Association, which provides legal, psychological and experiential counselling to LGBTIQ people and their loved ones, as part of a strategic partnership 2022-2024. The civil society organisation also organises various support groups for trans people, parents of trans people and families with same-sex parents.

In 2021-2024 public think tank Praxis Carried out project HEALTH - Health Equality, Attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ People and Trans Health Care. The project addressed the inequalities LGBTIQ+ people face in health system. They carried out survey among health care professionals and used the results to design training module for health care professionals. The study also informed the work on developing the trans health care protocol. The project provided 300 health care professionals with tools and 60 professionals training to better respond to their LGBTIQ patients and clients needs.

During 2023-2025 Praxis carries out project LESELEH – Learning to Support and Empower LGBTIQ+ People for Equality in Health. The project brings together LGBTIQ+ people, health policy area decision-makers and medical professionals to learn from each other and engage in a dialogue.

23. Please provide information on the measures in place to facilitate the identification and care of victims of violence against women in institutions for persons with disabilities and for the elderly as well as for those in closed reception facilities for asylum-seekers and to respond to their safety and protection needs.

Answer:

For example, for elderly there is the training handbook for professionals, volunteers and older people “How to Identify and Support Older Victims of Abuse” [https://naistetugi.ee/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Tisova\\_Training-handbook\\_ENG.pdf](https://naistetugi.ee/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Tisova_Training-handbook_ENG.pdf)



Also there is a collaboration model for helping the elderly “Preventing violence against older women through a multi-level cooperation model in Austria, Estonia and Greece” [https://naistetugi.ee/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/MARVOW\\_EST.pdf](https://naistetugi.ee/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/MARVOW_EST.pdf)

24. Please provide information on how the authorities ensure that different groups of women and girls, *inter alia* women with disabilities, Roma women and other women belonging to national or ethnic minorities, migrant women and intersex persons are fully informed, understand and freely give their consent to procedures such as sterilisation and abortion.

Answer:

According to the [Termination of Pregnancy and Sterilisation Act–Riigi Teataja](#):

#### **§ 5. Voluntariness of termination of pregnancy**

(1) A woman's pregnancy may only be terminated at her own request. Nobody is allowed to force or influence a woman to terminate her pregnancy. Consent for termination of pregnancy shall be in written form.

(2) Pregnancy of a woman with restricted active legal capacity may be terminated with her own consent or with the consent of her legal representative according to subsection 766 (4) of the Law of Obligations Act.

(3) If a woman with restricted active legal capacity does not agree to involve her legal representative with good reason in the case provided for in subsection 766 (4) of the Law of Obligations Act or if the decision of the legal representative is in conflict with the interests of the woman, the health care provided shall proceed from the person's own consent upon termination of pregnancy.

(4) A health care professional shall be required to inform a woman with restricted active legal capacity of the importance to involve a legal representative or another adult with active legal capacity whom she trusts.

#### **§ 19. Voluntariness of sterilisation**

(1) A person may only be sterilised at his or her own request. A request for sterilisation shall be in written form.

(2) The sterilisation of a person with restricted active legal capacity shall be decided by a county court in proceedings on petition of the guardian of a person. Minors may not be sterilised.

#### **§ 20. Admissibility of sterilisation**

(1) An adult may be sterilised if at least one of the following circumstances exists:

- 1) the person has at least three children;
- 2) the person is older than 35;
- 3) pregnancy endangers the woman's health;
- 4) other contraceptive devices are contraindicated;
- 5) the person is in danger of having a child with severe mental or physical damage to health;
- 6) the person's illness or health problem hinders the raising of a child.

(2) An adult with restricted active legal capacity may be sterilised if at least one of the conditions specified in clauses (1) 3), 4), 5) or 6) of this section exists.

### **Article 22: Specialist support services**

25. Please describe the type of specialist support services dedicated to women victims of the forms of gender-based violence covered by the Istanbul Convention (e.g., stalking, sexual harassment and domestic violence, including their digital dimension, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, forced sterilisation, forced abortion), including those specialist support services providing:

- a. shelters and/or other forms of safe accommodation
- b. medical support
- c. short- and long-term psychological counselling



- d. trauma care
- e. legal counselling
- f. outreach services
- g. telephone helpline
- h. other forms of support (e.g. socio-economic empowerment programmes, online assistance platforms etc.)

Answer:

In 2024, a **guide of cyber violence for professionals working with victims** ([Juhendmaterjal kübervägivallast ohvritega töötavatele spetsialistidele.pdf](#)) was translated and published. It provides valuable support and practical recommendations for effectively and sensitively assisting victims, managing risks, and helping restore their sense of security. Designed to facilitate the work of specialists, this guide offers concrete instructions and best practices. As a vital resource, it enhances professionals' understanding of the impact of cyber violence and ensures comprehensive support for every affected individual.

The President Kaljulaid Foundation is exploring new ways, how to build a less violent society in Estonia. To this end, the foundation has established a domestic abuse prevention competence center for employers, is supporting impactful initiatives with seed funding, organising the annual domestic abuse conference “Stronger Together,” and leading public discussions.

The **Employers Against Domestic Abuse** ([Vägivallavabaks](#)) initiative, established in 2024, aims to engage employers in the prevention, detection, and support related to domestic abuse. With nearly 700,000 employed individuals potentially affected, domestic abuse impacts not only victims' well-being but also team dynamics, productivity, and overall organizational performance.

The initiative seeks to raise awareness among employers and employees about recognizing and responding to domestic abuse, creating abuse-aware workplaces, and fostering public discussions on the topic. To achieve these goals, the initiative offers guidance, training, and educational toolkits for employers, along with establishing a network for sharing best practices. It also collaborates with universities and the public sector on research efforts.

Forced marriages are criminalized in Estonia as a human trafficking offense, and victims can receive extensive support through victim assistance services for human trafficking victims. The Victim Support Act (Section 24) provides a wide range of services to help those affected.

Victims have access to immediate psychosocial assistance available 24/7, as well as an assessment of their needs to determine the necessary level of support. If long-term and comprehensive help is required for independent living, case management services are provided. Additionally, victims receive counseling and psychosocial support, along with safe temporary accommodation at any time of the day or night. Basic needs such as food and material assistance are covered, and access to necessary healthcare services is arranged. Psychological counseling or psychotherapy is also available. Furthermore, victims are entitled to legal assistance, and translation services are provided to ensure they can fully access all available support.

With the new Victim Support Act, a regulation was adopted that established stricter educational requirements for individuals providing direct psychological assistance to victims. This ensures that those working with victims have a strong educational background, which helps demonstrate their readiness to support such a vulnerable target group as crime victims. Before the regulation was enacted, input was gathered from various professional associations related to psychology, most of which supported the stricter educational requirements.

The basic educational requirements are as follows:

1. A victim support worker or a case management service provider must have a higher education in social work, a valid professional qualification as a social worker, or other relevant professional training and higher education suitable for providing victim support.
2. A person providing psychological counseling services must have a valid professional qualification as a clinical psychologist, counseling psychologist, or school psychologist, or hold a master's degree in psychology.
3. A person providing legal counseling services must have a master's degree in law.
4. A person providing services to support the cessation of violence must have a higher education in psychology or social work, a valid professional qualification as a social worker, or other relevant professional training and higher education suitable for providing victim support.

Women's Support Center service in every Estonian county aims to help victims of gender-based violence escape violence, increase their safety, and achieve independent coping. Service provided by the NGOs and coordinated by the Social Insurance Board. The Women's Support Center service includes the following:

1. 24/7 availability of initial psychosocial support for the victim and their children;
2. Assessment of the victim's needs to determine the necessity and scope of the service;
3. Counseling and psychosocial support for the victim;
4. Case management when the victim requires long-term and diverse support to achieve independent coping;
5. Psychological counseling or psychotherapy;
6. Legal assistance;
7. Safe temporary accommodation for the victim and their children, available 24/7-up to 6 months.

26. Which type of specialist support service includes child psychologists or other professionals specialised in supporting children who have been exposed to domestic violence, including violence perpetrated by one parent against the other?

Answer:

Children who have witnessed violence between their parents are entitled to trauma recovery support under the new Victim Support Act. The purpose of this support is to facilitate the victim's psychosocial recovery and reduce the likelihood or severity of psychological and behavioral disorders.

27. Do specialist support services exist that cater to the specific needs of migrant women and girls or those belonging to national or ethnic minorities who are victims of violence against women, including women and girls seeking asylum and those granted refugee or international protection status?

Answer:

Estonian victim support is intended for all individuals regardless of their nationality, race, skin color, religion, beliefs, views, age, disability, sexual orientation, etc. The provision of services and assistance must be ensured for all those in need, including victims of violence and crime.

### **Article 25: Support to victims of sexual violence**

28. Please indicate if any of the below services are available in your territory:

- a. sexual violence referral centres (e.g. specialist support services offering immediate medical care, forensic examination and crisis intervention to victims of sexual violence);

- b. rape crisis centres (e.g. specialist support services offering long-term counselling, therapy and support to victims of sexual violence regardless of whether the sexual violence occurred recently or in the past);
- c. any other specialised services offering short-term and/or long-term medical, forensic and psycho-social support to victims of sexual violence.

Answer:

In Estonia there are sexual violence referral centres in four regions, located in hospitals. Sexual violence crisis centers provide comprehensive support, including counseling and psychological assistance. Medical examinations are conducted, along with the collection of forensic evidence, should the victim choose to report the incident to the police at a later stage. Support is also offered for pregnancy prevention, as well as testing for sexually transmitted infections and post-exposure prophylaxis for HIV. Victims are assisted in reporting the crime to the police if they wish to do so. If necessary, referrals to psychologists, psychiatrists, or other specialized professionals are provided. All examinations and treatments are offered free of charge.

Long-term support is available through the national victim assistance system, which provides access to both psychological and legal assistance, also accommodation if needed. Ongoing medical services can be obtained through the primary healthcare system.

In Estonia, child victims of sexual abuse and their families are offered support at Barnahus. The Barnahuses are located in Tallinn, Tartu, Jõhvi, and Pärnu, but the service is accessible to all children in need across Estonia.

Often, victims' family members also need counseling to understand how to better support the victim. In the cases of children, sexual violence crisis support centres work in close cooperation with the Barnahus. If during the provision of the service of sexual violence crisis support to a child it becomes evident that the child had been sexually abused or such suspicion arose, the centre transmits, as soon as possible, to the Social Insurance Board the data of the child in the case in order to enable the provision of the support provided by the Barnahus. For further information please see the Articles 22 and 23 of the Victim Support Act and information available on the Social Insurance Board website: <https://sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/en/child-and-adult-need-help/support-victims/victim-sexual-violence>

In addition, as mentioned above, from 1 April 2023, the Victim Support Act stipulates that a minor who is a victim of sexual violence has the right to receive mental health support aimed at facilitating trauma recovery. Such support is available to the minor regardless of whether the criminal proceedings were initiated and it is available until the need ceases. The purpose of this support is to promote the restoration of the victim's psychosocial balance and to reduce the likelihood or severity of mental and behavioural disorders. It includes psychological and psychotherapeutic assistance. The respective regulation is set forth in subchapter 10 of the Victim Support Act.

29. Please provide information on the number of such services and the number of women and girls supported annually.

Answer:

Four sexual violence referral centres covering all four regions in Estonia. In 2024 241 victims. In 2023 209 victims, in 2022 201 victims received the service.

There are four Barnahuses in Estonia, in the northern, southern, eastern and western part of Estonia. Over the years, more than half of the referrals to the Barnahus have involved girls. In 2023, there were a total of 728 referrals to the Barnahus, of which 519 were for girls. In 2024, 577 out of 814 referrals were girls.

30. Please indicate the procedures and time frames for collecting and storing forensic evidence in cases of sexual violence (e.g. existence of protocols, use of rape kits) in the relevant services.

Answer:

Sexual violence crisis support centres provide medical examination and treatment and collect and preserve (up to 6 months) evidence that can later be used in the investigation.

See also answer 21.

31. Please describe any applicable access criteria for use of these services (e.g. affiliation with a national health insurance, residence status, prior reporting of the case to the police, other).

Answer:

There is no access criteria for the use of services for victims of sexual violence. This service is free of charge for everybody.

**Article 31: Custody, visitation rights and safety**

32. Please indicate whether under national law incidents of violence covered under the scope of the convention must be taken into account in the determination of custody and visitation rights of children. If this is the case, please clarify to what extent these provisions:

- a. explicitly list domestic violence as a criterion to be taken into account when deciding on custody and/or visitation rights in the applicable legislation. If so, please clarify whether this criterion is/has been applied in practice in the determination of both custody and visitation rights;
- b. acknowledge the harm that witnessing violence by one parent against the other has on a child;
- c. ensure that custody with the non-violent parent is preferred over foster-care;
- d. foresee the screening of civil proceedings related to the determination of custody or visitation rights for a history of domestic violence among the parties;
- e. foresee that judges conduct risk assessments or request the disclosure of risk assessments drawn up by law-enforcement agencies or other competent stakeholders for victims of domestic violence, with a view to taking them into account and determining the best interest of the child in the context of custody and visitation decisions

Answer:

Estonian Family Law Act ([Family Law Act–Riigi Teataja](#)) mandates that the best interests of the child are paramount in matters concerning the child taking into account all the circumstances and the legitimate interest of the relevant persons. While the Act doesn't explicitly list domestic violence as a criterion, the consideration of the child's well-being inherently involves assessing any history of violence. In practice, courts evaluate all factors affecting the child's safety and development, including any incidents of domestic violence.

Code of Civil Procedure ([Code of Civil Procedure–Riigi Teataja](#)) also states that when the court applies an measure of interim relief under the rules for interim protection measures, it takes into consideration whether one parent has used violence in respect of the child or of the other parent. When making arrangements for hearing the child, the court takes into consideration whether one parent has used violence in respect of the child or the other parent – the same principle applies when hearing the parents. Mediation or conciliation proceedings are not required to be undertaken as a prerequisite for approaching the court for assistance where one parent has used violence in respect of the child or the other parent.

Child Protection Act ([Child Protection Act–Riigi Teataja](#)) emphasizes the child's right to life, health, development, and well-being. The risks threatening the well-being and development of the child must be prevented. Prevention includes the perception of situations and events which threaten the child as early as possible and the reaction thereto, including the identification of the child's development and behaviour problems, problems occurring in the family environment, identification of abuse and the increase of protective measures promoting the child's well-being and development. Although it doesn't specifically mention the psychological impact of witnessing domestic violence, the Act's broad protections encompass safeguarding children from environments where such violence occurs. State and local government agencies shall, according to their possibilities, develop measures in order to prevent the child's need for assistance and to decrease the existing problems.

Estonian law prioritizes the child's right to be raised by their parents (i.e. Child Protection Act states that the natural environment for the development and growth of the child is the family; Family Law Act states that parents have the obligation and right to care for their underage child; A court may separate a child from the parents only if damage to the interests of the child cannot be prevented by other supporting measures applied in the relationship between the parents and the child). In cases where one parent is violent, authorities aim to place the child with the non-violent parent, provided it's in the child's best interest. Foster care is considered a last resort when neither parent can ensure the child's safety and well-being.

§ 27 of the Constitution guarantees the protection of children at the constitutional level. According to the Child Protection Act, the Family Law Act, as well as Estonia's international obligations, the best interests of the child must always be taken into account when resolving matters related to children and making decisions related to children.

Child Protection Act § 2 provides the aim of the Act:

**„§ 2. Purpose of Act**

*This Act shall be established in order to form behaviour and way of life which value and promote the development of children in the society, to create a supporting environment for children, to set the best interests of children as primary consideration, to improve the quality of life of children, to support the comprehensive development of children and to ensure the necessary assistance and care in a timely manner for children whose health and well-being is in danger in conformity with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the optional protocols thereto (hereinafter the convention) and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and other relevant legislation.”*

The consideration of the child's best interests is regulated also in § 21 of the Child Protection Act:

**„§ 21. Setting best interests of child as primary consideration**

*(1) Upon the adoption of or deciding not to adopt decisions affecting a child and choosing between different options upon planning a decision (hereinafter deciding together), the best interests of the child shall be ascertained and they shall be based on as the primary consideration upon the making of decisions.*

*(2) In order to ascertain the best interests of the child, it is necessary:*

*1) to ascertain all the relevant circumstances concerning the situation and person of the child and other information which is necessary to evaluate the effect of the decision on the child's rights and well-being;*

*2) to explain the content and reasons of the planned decision to the child, to hear the child in a manner taking account of his or her age and development and to account for his or her opinion based on the child's age and development as one of the circumstances upon ascertaining the best interests of the child;*

*3) assessing all the relevant circumstances in aggregate, to form a reasoned opinion concerning the best interests of the child with regard to the planned decision.*

*(3) If the best interests of a child differ from the child's opinion or if a decision which does not coincide with the child's opinion is made on other grounds, the reasons for not taking the child's opinion into account must be explained to the child."*

The consideration of the child's best interests is emphasized also in the Family Act:

**"§ 123. Following child's interests**

*(1) Upon hearing any matter concerning a child and regulated in this Chapter, a court shall make a decision primarily in the interests of the child, taking into account all the circumstances and the legitimate interest of the relevant persons.*

*(2) A court shall amend a decision made earlier if this is required due to significant circumstances which affect permanently the well-being of a child.*

**118. Exercise of parental legal custody**

*[...]*

*(2) If it is not possible for the parents to exercise legal custody, a court shall apply the relevant measures in the interests of the child. If necessary, a court shall commence proceedings for appointment of a guardian with respect to the child.*

**§ 123<sup>1</sup>. Restoration of parent's legal custody**

*(1) In the case of variation of legal custody, a parent's legal custody shall be restored on the basis of a parent's application if restoration of the parent's legal custody corresponds to the interests of the child.*

*(2) In the case of restriction of legal custody, application of measures restricting the legal custody shall be terminated and a parent's legal custody shall be restored on the basis of a parent's application if the interests of the child are no longer in danger.*

*[...]*

**§ 135. Separation of child from family and deprivation of legal custody in full**

*(1) A court may separate a child from the parents only if damage to the interests of the child cannot be prevented by other supporting measures applied in the relationship between the parents and the child.*

*(2) A court may deprive a parent of legal custody in full only if other measures have not yielded any results or if there is reason to presume that the application of the measures is not sufficient to prevent danger.*

*(3) Upon hearing a matter concerning substantial restriction of legal custody or deprivation of legal custody in full, a court shall involve a rural municipality or city government in the proceedings for the purpose of hearing its opinion.*

*(4) If leaving a child in his or her family endangers the health or life of the child, a rural municipality government or city government or the Social Insurance Board may separate the child from the family before a court ruling is made. In such case the rural municipality government or city government shall promptly submit a petition to a court for restriction of the parent's legal custody with respect to the child.*

**§ 137. Termination of joint legal custody**

*(1) If parents who have joint legal custody live permanently apart or do not wish to exercise the right of joint legal custody any further for any other reason, each parent has the right to request from a court in proceedings on petition that the legal custody of the child be partially or fully transferred to him or her. A court may resolve a dispute concerning the legal custody also in the proceedings concerning the divorce.*

*(2) A petition shall be dismissed if:*

*1) a child who has attained at least 14 years of age objects to the transfer of legal custody, or*

*2) if there is reason to believe that termination of the joint legal custody and granting sole legal custody to the petitioner does not correspond to the interests of the child.*

*(3) In the case of termination of the joint legal custody, a court shall decide on the grant of legal custody to one parent on the basis of the interests of the child and shall take into account, inter alia, the mental and financial readiness of each parent to raise the child, emotional*



*relationship with the child and current commitment to caring for the child and the future living conditions of the child.*

### **§ 138. Transfer of legal custody**

*(1) If legal custody belongs to only one parent, the other parent may request from a court that legal custody of the child be partially or fully transferred to him or her. A petition is satisfied if transfer of legal custody corresponds to the interests of the child, a child who has attained at least 14 years of age does not object to it and the parent requesting transfer of the right is suitable and able to exercise legal custody. If legal custody belongs to only one parent on the basis of a court decision, the other parent may request transfer of legal custody if the circumstances on the basis of which the court decision was made have changed significantly, or he or she may request restoration of joint legal custody.*

*(2) If a parent with sole legal custody has died or has been deprived of legal custody in full, a court shall grant legal custody to the other parent unless it is in conflict with the interests of the child.*

### **§ 140. Suspension of parent's legal custody**

[...]

*(4) If parents have joint legal custody and the legal custody of one parent is suspended, the other parent shall exercise legal custody alone. If sole legal custody of a child granted to a parent on the basis of law or a court decision is suspended and there is no reason to expect that the grounds for suspension cease to exist, a court shall grant legal custody to the other parent if it corresponds to the interests of the child.”*

When performing and organizing procedural actions, the court takes into account whether the parent has been violent towards the child or the other parent (Code of Civil Procedure § 551 (3), § 552<sup>1</sup> (1), § 558 (1), § 560<sup>1</sup> (2), (5), § 561 (1)).

It is important to note that matters concerning the procedure for determining a parent's rights in respect of the child and regulating access to the child are resolved in a in action-by-petition proceedings (CCP § 550), which means that the court applies the principle of investigation and collects evidence on its own initiative (CCP § 477 (5), (6), (7)), the court essentially has the obligation to establish the truth.

33. Please describe the measures in place to ensure that judges, court-appointed experts and other legal professionals:

- a. have sufficient knowledge of the law and understanding of the dynamics of intimate partner violence, including the psychological impact of witnessing violence on the child;
- b. duly take into account victims' grievances in cases of domestic violence and hear children victims/witnesses, where applicable, in the determination of custody and visitation rights;
- c. are informed of the unfoundedness of notions of “parental alienation”<sup>2</sup> or analogous concepts that are used to overshadow the violence and control exerted by perpetrators of domestic violence over women and their children.

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<sup>2</sup> In its baseline evaluation reports GREVIO has consistently referred to the statement of December 2017 by the European Association for Psychotherapy (EAP), which draws attention to the fact that the concepts of “parental alienation syndrome” (PAS) and “parental alienation” (PA) are unsuitable for use in any psychotherapeutic practice. This statement by the EAP, which is made up of 128 psychotherapy organisations from 41 European countries, acts as a guiding principle for European psychotherapists. Moreover, in February 2020 the World Health Organisation (WHO) published its new draft International Classification of Diseases, 11th Revision (ICD-11) and confirmed that it had removed parental alienation from index term in the final ICD-11. See also the Platform of Independent Expert Mechanisms on Discrimination and Violence against Women ([EDVAW Platform](#)) statement of May 2019 “[Intimate partner violence against women is an essential factor in the determination of child custody, say women's rights experts](#)”.

Answer:

a. This topic has been addressed in previous training events, including two seminars held in 2023 under the title "Trauma Awareness in Cases Involving Children." The primary objective of these sessions was to equip participants with foundational knowledge and practical guidelines for engaging with individuals who have experienced trauma, with a particular focus on the psychological impact of witnessing violence on children.

b. This topic has been addressed in previous training events, e.g. two two-day seminars held in 2023, "Interviewing Minors in Practice," provided specialized knowledge on effective communication with minors. On the first day, participants were introduced to different types of memory and cognitive processes, the principles of child interviewing, and approaches tailored to a child's age, mental maturity, and special needs. The second day focused on the practical application of this theoretical knowledge, allowing participants to practice assessing the interview environment and conducting preparatory and procedural stages of interviewing minors under the guidance of professionals. Additionally, emphasis was placed on common mistakes to avoid when communicating with minors. To ensure personalized feedback and facilitate skill acquisition, training sessions were conducted in small groups of up to fifteen participants.

The 2024 follow-up seminar, "Advanced Interviewing of Minors," provided judges, prosecutors, and defense attorneys—who had previously completed basic training in interviewing minors—with a more in-depth understanding of the impact of trauma on memory processes. This was followed by practical exercises on interview preparation, execution, and management, with particular attention to avoiding common errors in communication with minors. The training also addressed the assessment of a child's best interests.

In the fall of 2025, a roundtable discussion on custody and child access arrangements will take place, with a primary focus on the issue of domestic violence.

c. This topic has been addressed in various training events, including a 2022 lecture on parental alienation and its lack of academic validation. This issue was also highlighted during a 2024 roundtable discussion between judges from the Supreme Court of Estonia, as well as the Tartu and Tallinn Circuit Courts. The discussion emphasized that there is still significant misinformation surrounding the topic, which has no place in the courtroom.

The training of attorneys focuses on protecting the rights and interests of children. The Estonian Bar Association has established mandatory trainings for attorneys providing state legal aid to minors and has developed guidelines for lawyers providing state legal aid regarding the representation of children in civil court proceedings. The training that attorneys are required to undergo covers various stages of child development, interviewing children and the psychology of children in conflict relationships with parents.

In spring 2024, the Ministry of Social Affairs organised a roundtable on parental alienation for representatives of child protection specialists, legal professionals, psychologists and other related specialists. One of the two key presentations at the round table gave a short introduction to the social science research on the subject, incl. the controversial views among the researchers. As a follow-up, at the end of 2024 the Ministry of Social Affairs commissioned research on "Identifying intra-family child abuse and assessing its impact in child protection work and civil proceedings concerning children", which among other things includes research questions on whether and how the concept of parental alienation is used in civil proceedings concerning children.

In 2023, it was made mandatory for lawyers representing children to complete six training courses, with the requirement to have completed all six courses taking effect from 01.01.2025. These training courses are as follows:



1. Child developmental psychology (including brain development, developmental stages, attachment theory, etc.)
2. Interviewing children
3. Children's rights
4. Child psychology in conflicted parental relationships in court proceedings (as per the board decision of 28.05.2024, this replaces the previously mandatory training on "A Specific Form of Violence – Parental Alienation.")
5. Practical workshop on the guidelines for representing minors
6. Child-friendly communication skills

34. Please provide details on the procedures in place to ensure that the competent court for family-related issues co-operate/communicate with other relevant bodies/professionals, including, but not limited to, criminal courts, law-enforcement agencies, health and education authorities and specialist women's support services when taking decisions on custody and visitation or when offering family law mediation. Please specify whether the law provides a legal framework for any of the procedures in place.

Answer:

Estonian law has been designed in such a way that in general, before filing a case in court on determining a parent's rights in respect of the child or regulating access to the child, parents should participate in out-of-court mediation procedure. Family mediation in Social Insurance Board is a state-funded service, participation in a state-funded mediation service is free. The purpose of the service is to conclude a parenting plan on issues related to the child at the earliest possible stage in order to avoid conflicts and escalation of conflicts. The service and the procedure are regulated by Act on State-Funded Family Mediation Services. Family mediators are specially trained for this purpose. If the application submitted to the court is not accompanied by a certificate of the unsuccessful mediation but the party to the proceedings indicates or it is apparent from the circumstances that there has been domestic violence in the family against the child or the other parent, the court does not direct the parents to participate in family mediation proceedings. The court has the discretion not to direct the parents to participate in family mediation proceedings, for example, in cases where the court is aware of domestic violence. To prevent the risk of revictimization, the victim does not have to prove domestic violence. When resolving a civil dispute related to a child the court proceeds from the victim's statement, case's circumstances and the court's knowledge. Where, based on the petition, one parent has used violence in respect of the child or of the other parent, the court explains to the parents the possibility of recourse to the Social Insurance Board in order to undertake the mediation procedure provided for by the Act on State-funded Family Mediation Services ([Act on State-Funded Family Mediation Services–Riigi Teataja](#)). In this case, mediation will only take place if the victim so wishes. Specially trained mediators work with the family.

The court proceedings in matters of determining a parent's rights in respect of the child and regulating access to the child are regulated by Chapter 56, Section 3 (§ 558-563<sup>2</sup>) of the CCP. Matters concerning the procedure for determining a parent's rights in respect of the child and regulating access to the child are resolved in a in action-by-petition proceedings (CCP § 550), which means that the court applies the principle of investigation and collects evidence on its own initiative (CCP § 477 (5)-(7), the court essentially has the obligation to establish the truth. The court shall involve the local government (child protection officers, social workers) in resolving a matter related to a child (CCP § 551 (2), § 552).

**§ 551. Granting interim protection**

[...]

*(2) Before applying interim protection measures in relation to a minor, the court must – unless it is manifest that the resulting delay would harm the interests of the minor – invite the executive of the municipality in which the minor has their residence to provide its opinion in the matter. If*

*the measure is applied without such an opinion having been provided, the opinion must be obtained at the earliest opportunity.*

*[...]*

**§ 552. Cooperation with the municipal executive**

*(1) Where, by law, proceedings require participation of the municipal executive, the court notifies the executive of the proceedings. Unless otherwise provided by law, the court also informs the executive of the proceedings and of the circumstances connected to the same in other situations where it is manifest that the executive needs to be aware of those circumstances in order to perform its duties.*

*(2) In proceedings that concern a minor or the legal guardianship, the court invites the municipal executive to state its view and sends the executive copies of the orders by which it concludes such proceedings.*

In accordance with Family Law Act § 135, upon hearing a matter concerning substantial restriction of legal custody or deprivation of legal custody in full, a court shall involve a rural municipality or city government in the proceedings for the purpose of hearing its opinion (3). If leaving a child in his or her family endangers the health or life of the child, a rural municipality government or city government or the Social Insurance Board may separate the child from the family before a court ruling is made. In such case the rural municipality government or city government shall promptly submit a petition to a court for restriction of the parent's legal custody with respect to the child (4).

A website that provides relevant information on conducting child-friendly court proceedings is available to help both the court and all participants in proceedings involving children: <https://lapsesobralikmenetlus.just.ee/et>. The website is managed by the Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs.

35. Please provide detailed information on the procedures in place (including, if applicable, the relevant personnel used, the specific infrastructure available), in the exercise of custody and visitation rights, to:

- a. eliminate the risk for the abused parent to be subjected to further violence;
- b. eliminate the risk for the child to witness or experience violence;
- c. ensure that the responsible personnel are trained and that the facilities are suited to enable safe supervised visitation.

Answer:

a. Courts may impose supervised visitation or restrict the abusive parent's access to the child. To prevent the risk to abused parent, visitation exchanges can be organized so that the parents are not in any direct contact.

b. Courts may impose supervised visitation or restrict the abusive parent's access to the child.

c. This is organized by the local governments themselves. There are local governments that take this into account by organizing meetings in separate rooms. For example, in Tallinn, the Family Center has a separate service for meeting with a separated parent, where families are sent based on a court order if there has been domestic violence between the parents and it has been determined that one parent may also have a negative impact on the child. There are two social workers at this meeting who monitor that everything is safe for the child. The victim does not have to meet the perpetrator, they can enter through different doors.

36. Please indicate whether national provisions foresee the withdrawal of parental rights in criminal sentences if the best interest of the child, which may include the safety of the victim, cannot be guaranteed in any other way.

Answer:

Criminal sentence per se does not automatically lead to the restriction of parental rights. Estonian legislation allows for the restriction of parent's legal custody rights if it's determined that the child's best interests and safety cannot be ensured otherwise. The Family Law Act states that if the physical, mental or emotional well-being or the property of a child is endangered by abuse of the parent's legal custody, neglecting the child, inability of the parents to perform their obligations or conduct of a third person and the parents do not wish or are unable to prevent danger, a court shall apply necessary measures for the prevention of danger.

Measures applied may be that a court may make decisions arising from legal custody in lieu of a parent, issue warnings and precepts and impose prohibitions and require the parents to observe the instructions of the agency specified by the court. A court may restrict physical custody or property guardianship by prohibiting the performance of certain acts or certain type of acts. A court may separate a child from the parents only if damage to the interests of the child cannot be prevented by other supporting measures applied in the relationship between the parents and the child. A court may deprive a parent of legal custody in full only if other measures have not yielded any results or if there is reason to presume that the application of the measures is not sufficient to prevent danger. If leaving a child in his or her family endangers the health or life of the child, a rural municipality government or city government or the Social Insurance Board may separate the child from the family before a court ruling is made. In such case the rural municipality government or city government shall promptly submit a petition to a court for restriction of the parent's legal custody with respect to the child.

#### **Article 48: Prohibition of mandatory alternative dispute resolution processes or sentencing**

##### **Criminal law:**

37. Please provide information on the measures taken to ensure that mandatory alternative dispute resolution processes are prohibited in criminal proceedings related to cases involving the different forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention.

##### Answer:

According to the Code of Criminal Procedure ([Code of Criminal Procedure–Riigi Teataja](#)) § 203<sup>1</sup>(1) and § 203<sup>2</sup>(1):

##### **§ 203<sup>1</sup>. Termination of criminal proceedings due to remediation of the harm caused by the criminal offence**

(1) Where the subject matter of criminal proceedings is a criminal offence of the second degree, the facts of the offence are clear and it is not in the public interest to continue the proceedings, and the suspect or accused and the victim have reached an agreement – in accordance with the rules provided by § 203<sup>2</sup> of this Code – concerning remediation of the harm caused by the offence, the Prosecutor's Office, with the consent of the suspect or accused and of the victim, may make a motion for the court to terminate criminal proceedings in the case. Termination of criminal proceedings is not permitted:

- 1) regarding the criminal offences mentioned in §§ 133<sup>1</sup>, 133<sup>2</sup>, 134, 138–139, 141<sup>1</sup> and 143 and regarding the criminal offence mentioned in § 144 of the Penal Code if the victim is under eighteen years of age;
- 2) regarding a criminal offence committed by a full-age person against a victim who is less than fourteen years of age;
- 3) if the criminal offence resulted in the death of a person;
- 4) regarding crimes against humanity and international security, criminal offences against the State, criminal offences of misconduct by a public official, criminal offences creating a danger to the public and criminal offences against the administration of justice.

##### **§ 203<sup>2</sup>. Mediation proceedings**

(1) The Prosecutor's Office or the court may, on the grounds provided by subsection 1 of § 203<sup>1</sup> of this Code, direct the suspect or accused and the victim to undertake mediation proceedings with the objective of reaching an agreement between the suspect or accused and the victim concerning remediation of the harm caused by the criminal offence. For such proceedings to be implemented, the consent of the suspect or accused and of the victim is required. Where any of the persons concerned is a minor or suffers from a mental disorder, the consent of their parent or other statutory representative or legal guardian is also required.

38. Where voluntary alternative dispute resolution processes exist for any criminal offences within the remit of the Istanbul Convention, such as conciliation or mediation, please provide information on the safeguards incorporated to ensure the free and informed consent of the victim to such processes and the measures taken to avoid that direct or indirect pressure is placed on the victim. Please also state whether the offer of alternative dispute resolution processes may result in the discontinuation of criminal investigation and prosecution or other consequences for the victim.

Answer:

The Prosecutor's Office or the court may, on the grounds provided by subsection 1 of § 203<sup>1</sup> of the [Code of Criminal Procedure](#), direct the suspect or accused and the victim to undertake mediation proceedings with the objective of reaching an agreement between the suspect or accused and the victim concerning remediation of the harm caused by the criminal offence. For such proceedings to be implemented, the consent of the suspect or accused and of the victim is required. Where any of the persons concerned is a minor or suffers from a mental disorder, the consent of their parent or other statutory representative or legal guardian is also required. In practice the prosecutor meets with both the victim and the suspect/accused, explains the procedure and possible outcome of mediation and gets written consent from both parties. The order by which the Prosecutor's Office or the court imposes mediation proceedings is sent to the mediator for making the arrangements for mediation. The mediator then meets separately first with the victim, then with the accused and then with both of them together if possible and recapitulates the mediation as a written mediation agreement that is signed by the suspect or accused and the victim. The agreement must include rules and requirements for remedying the harm caused by the criminal offence. The agreement may contain other requirements. The mediator provides the Prosecutor's Office with a report describing the course of the mediation. If the suspect or accused and the victim have reached an agreement concerning remediation of the harm caused by the criminal offence, a copy of the mediation agreement is appended to the report. The prosecutor can then terminate the criminal proceedings and set the requirements agreed on by the victim and the accused together with a six months probation period. After termination of criminal proceedings, the mediator verifies whether or not the requirements of the mediation agreement that were approved as an obligation are being complied with. The mediator is entitled to require production of documents or information confirming performance of the obligation. The mediator notifies performance of, or failure to perform, the obligation to the Prosecutor's Office. If a person in whose respect criminal proceedings have been terminated does not perform the obligations imposed on them or commits another intentional criminal offence against the same victim within six months following termination of the proceedings, the criminal proceeding will be renewed.

**Civil law:**

39. Please provide information on the measures taken to ensure that alternative dispute resolution processes such as mediation or procedures which can be considered tantamount to the latter are not used in family law proceedings such as divorce proceedings or proceedings related to custody and visitation of children, where there is a history of violence.

Answer:

Normally in cases on parental rights family mediation must be preceded before court proceedings. The petition that is filed with the court must be accompanied by a certificate of unsuccessful mediation. By law mediation or conciliation proceedings are not required to be undertaken as a prerequisite for approaching the court for assistance where one parent has used violence in respect of the child or the other parent. When making the decision, the Social Insurance Board – in order to ascertain whether the case falls under the special situations of family mediation – has a right to check whether there have been instances of domestic violence between the parties to mediation, whether the child that is concerned by the dispute has been the subject of abuse or neglect.

In Estonia, mediation and conciliation procedures are regulated by the Conciliation Act, which transposes the Mediation Directive (Directive 2008/52/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on certain aspects of mediation in civil and commercial matters). The family mediation service is regulated by the Act on State-Funded Family Mediation Services. In accordance with § 2 (1) of the Act on State-Funded Family Mediation Services, mediation proceedings provided for by this Act, proceedings before a mediation body, the duties of family conciliators and the approval, validity and enforceability of parenting plans are subject to the provisions of the Conciliation Act without prejudice to any special rules established by the Act on State-Funded Family Mediation Services.

§ 4 of the Conciliation Act provides the following:

**“§ 4. Confidentiality of conciliation proceedings**

*(1) Conciliation negotiations are not public.*

*(2) The conciliator has a duty of confidentiality in respect of the facts of the conciliation proceedings which have become known to them in the course of proceedings or outside the proceedings. The duty of confidentiality also extends to legal persons mentioned in subsection 1 of § 2 of this Act.*

*(3) The conciliator provides information regarding the facts of the conciliation proceedings only to the parties to those proceedings and their representatives.*

*(4) A conciliator who is examined as a witness may not be asked questions about or required to explain any circumstances of conciliation proceedings which have become known to them in the course of those proceedings.*

*(5) A court which is hearing a criminal, civil or administrative case may order the conciliator to provide information regarding the circumstances of conciliation proceedings if this is justified by a substantial public interest, especially where the protection of a child's interests or a threat to a person's health or life is concerned.*

*(6) When ordered to do so by the court, the conciliator must provide information regarding the circumstances of conciliation proceedings to investigative bodies.*

*(7) A party to conciliation proceedings or their successor or representative may release the conciliator from the duty of confidentiality in respect of a procedural operation by providing a corresponding written consent. Where a party is deceased and has no successors, or where it is not possible to establish communication with the party, the conciliator may be released from the duty of confidentiality by the court. On a petition of the conciliator, the court may also release the conciliator from the duty of confidentiality in respect of the circumstances of conciliation proceedings for other compelling reasons. The petition is filed according to general rules of jurisdiction as applicable to the conciliator. The court disposes of the petition under the action-by-petition procedure.*

*(8) Unless otherwise provided by law, the duty of confidentiality in respect of the facts of conciliation proceedings also extends to third parties who have in their possession documents containing information mentioned in subsection 2 of this section or who have access to such documents. Such parties disclose the information mentioned in subsection 2 analogously to what has been provided by subsections 3–7, unless another Act provides otherwise.*

*(9) The conciliator's duty of confidentiality does not bar the conciliator from making the notification provided for by subsection 1 of § 27 of the Child Protection Act concerning a child in need of assistance, and by subsection 1 of § 31 of that Act concerning a child in danger,*

*even where the circumstances that indicate that the child is in need of assistance or in danger become known to the conciliator in the course of conciliation proceedings.”*

Special regulation in § 14 of the Act on State-Funded Family Mediation Services provides the following:

**“§ 14. Notifying the court of the outcome of mediation proceedings**

*(1) Where the court has made an order directing the parties to undertake family mediation, and mediation proceedings have ended, the Social Insurance Board, within ten business days following termination of the proceedings, transmits to the court the particulars concerning approval of a parenting plan or – where mediation has been unsuccessful – a certificate of unsuccessful mediation, or information regarding the fact that the child concerned by the dispute has attained full age.*

*(2) Where a parenting plan replaces a previous judicial disposition rendered in respect of the child, the Social Insurance Board transmits such a plan within ten business days following the plan’s approval to the court that rendered the disposition.”*

**Articles 49 and 50: General obligations and immediate response, prevention and protection**

40. Please describe the human, financial and technical resources provided to law enforcement agencies to diligently respond to and investigate all cases of violence against women, including their digital dimension.

Answer:

There are specialised units for investigating and prosecuting domestic and sexual violence cases both in the Police and Border Guard Board and the Prosecutor’s Office.

41. Which measures have been taken to ensure that the premises of police stations are accessible and suitable for receiving and interviewing victims of violence while ensuring their privacy? Is it possible to report cases of violence against women elsewhere than in police stations, including through digital means?

Answer:

In Estonia all crimes may be reported also via internet on the [website of the Police and Border Guard Board](#), also by post, by calling 112, via email etc. All crimes may be reported by anyone, not just the victim. The victims have the right to make an application to be interviewed or examined by a person of their sex if the case concerns sexual violence, gender violence or a criminal offence committed in a close relationship – except if the interview is conducted by the prosecutor, or if the examination is conducted by the judge, or if this would interfere with the course of the proceedings.

Security and privacy are ensured for all individuals in Police and Border Guard buildings. They are received by trained professionals, and the presence of a victim support worker is guaranteed at police stations, with immediate involvement if necessary.

42. Please explain whether specialist police/prosecution units exist to investigate and prosecute violence against women and specify:

- a. which forms of violence against women they are competent for; There are specialised investigators and prosecutors to investigate cases of domestic and sexual violence.
- b. whether such units exist in all police/prosecution districts throughout the country. There are specialised investigators and prosecutors to investigate cases of domestic and sexual violence in all regions of Estonia, however not in small police stations and Prosecutor’s offices.

Answer:



The Police and Border Guard Board has domestic violence investigation units, sexual crime units, and child protection units across Estonia in every prefecture. These units investigate crimes of the respective types and are trained to operate in these specific fields.

The units are competent in all types of violence defined as criminal offenses under Estonian law.

43. Please describe any measures taken to ensure swift investigation into and effective prosecution of cases of violence against women and domestic violence such as prioritisation through fast-tracking, benchmarking or other initiatives, without compromising the thoroughness of the investigation.

Answer:

Domestic and sexual violence cases belong to the highest prioritisation group among criminal cases (there are three different levels according to the guide of prioritisation agreed on by both the Prosecutor's Office and the Police and Border Guard Board).

The quality, speed, and oversight of proceedings are ensured.

The Police and Border Guard Board monitors the proportion of domestic violence criminal proceedings resolved within 30 days.

44. Are any measures taken to encourage women and girls who experience any of the forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention to report incidents of violence to the authorities? Please provide examples of any measures taken to instill confidence in law-enforcement officials, including those aimed at addressing any language or procedural difficulties they encounter when lodging complaints, in particular those of migrant women, asylum-seeking women, women with disabilities, women with addiction issues and other women and girls at risk of intersectional discrimination.

Answer:

The public is encouraged to report incidents to the police. Relevant notifications and awareness-raising campaigns are carried out in cooperation with partners through media, social media, and other channels. There are no linguistic or ethnic barriers — translation services are provided to everyone when needed. Cross-sectoral cooperation takes place, ensuring equal treatment for all.

45. Please indicate whether protocols/standard operating procedures or guidelines for police officers are in place providing guidance on how to receive reports, interview victims, investigate and collect evidence in cases of rape and sexual violence, domestic violence, psychological violence, stalking, sexual harassment (including their online manifestation), forced marriage, female genital mutilation and forced sterilisation/abortion. Please provide information on how the authorities ensure the comprehensive collection of evidence beyond the victim's testimony.

Answer:

Proceedings are carried out in accordance with the law and internal guidelines. The elements of criminal offenses are defined by law. The Police and Border Guard Board has a guideline for responding to and resolving domestic violence cases. Police officers are trained in trauma-informed practices, as well as in interviewing victims of specific types of crimes and understanding their particular needs.

46. Please describe the efforts taken to identify and address all factors that contribute to attrition (the process whereby cases drop out of the criminal justice system) in cases of violence against women and domestic violence.

Answer:

Cases of violence against women and domestic violence have been declared a priority and are monitored for compliance with the procedural deadlines. There are no known cases where proceedings take too long and are terminated as a result.

47. Please indicate if legislative or other measures have been taken to issue a renewable residence permit to migrant women who have become a victim of any of the forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention if the competent authority considers that their stay is necessary for the purpose of their co-operation in investigation or criminal proceedings.<sup>3</sup>

Answer:

Aliens Act ([Aliens Act–Riigi Teataja](#)) (hereinafter AA) allows possibility to issue a residence permit for settle permanently in Estonia to a foreigner, who has a residence permit with spouse and his or her marriage ends before three years have passed as of the issue of a residence permit but the obligation to leave Estonia would be clearly too burdensome for him or her. Same rights and possibility to apply an independent residence permit applies to his or her close relatives (direct descending and ascending relatives, etc.).

The AA § 203 foresees possibility to grant a residence permit for participation in a criminal proceedings for assistance in the ascertaining of the facts of the subject of proof of a criminal offence if he or she has been issued a residence permit to settle with his or her spouse and their marriage ends before three years have passed as of the issue of the residence permit and he or she is a victim in a criminal procedure (physical abuse committed in a close relationship or relationship of subordination or rape).

In addition, the AA § 210-3 allows in exceptional circumstances to an foreigner to grant a residence permit issued for settling permanently in Estonia if the foreigner is staying in Estonia and his or her temporary stay, residence and employment in Estonia and the obligation to leave Estonia of an foreigner it has become evident that it would be clearly unduly burdensome to him or her.

### **Article 51: Risk assessment and risk management**

48. Please describe any standardised and mandatory risk assessment tools in use by all relevant authorities in all regions for forms of violence against women such as stalking, violence committed in the name of so-called honour and domestic violence and to what extent these tools are being used in practice to assess the lethality risk, the seriousness of the situation and the risk of repeated violence with a view to preventing further violence. Please specify whether the following elements are considered as red flags when carrying out the risk assessment:

- a. the possession of or access to firearms by the perpetrator;
- b. the filing for separation/divorce by the victim or the break-up of the relationship;
- c. pregnancy;
- d. previous acts of violence;
- e. the prior issue of a restrictive measure;
- f. threats made by the perpetrator to take away common children;
- g. acts of sexual violence;
- h. threats to kill the victim and her children;
- i. threat of suicide;
- j. coercive and controlling behaviour.

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<sup>3</sup> This question refers to the obligation contained in Article 59, paragraph 3. State parties that have entered a reservation in respect of Article 59 may reply to this question but are not required to do so.



Answer:

All these elements are part of the risk-assessment made in the framework of MARAC (Victim Support Act § 10).

The Police and Border Guard Board has a guideline for responding to and resolving domestic violence cases, which outlines all the necessary steps and actions for officials, as well as information exchange with cooperation partners and data entry procedures. For every domestic violence case, a domestic violence information sheet is completed, containing data for an initial risk assessment. This information is forwarded to a community police officer or investigator, who conducts a more thorough risk assessment and carries out follow-up actions according to the level of risk. Police risk assessment includes all the factors of the list above.

49. Please specify how effective co-operation is ensured between the different statutory authorities and specialist women's support services in making risk assessments and whether the risks identified are managed by law enforcement agencies on the basis of individual safety plans that include also the safety of the victim's children.

Answer:

The Victim Support Act establishes a cooperation model with data exchange for high-risk domestic violence cases. All relevant institutions have the right to share information about cases and victims, with the specific data categories listed in the law. The cooperation model is the so-called Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC). If the victim is in MARAC, an individual safety plan is composed in cooperation with different authorities (also women's support centers etc). If the risk is estimated as a low one, the safety plan is composed only if needed. It is mandatory to do the risk assessment in domestic violence cases (Victim Support Act § 9).

50. Please describe the efforts made to analyse retrospectively all cases of gender-based killings of women, in the context of domestic violence and other forms of violence against women to identify the existence of possible systemic gaps in the institutional response of the authorities with the aim of preventing such acts in the future.

Answer:

Systemic analysing has not been possible since there are no grounds for sharing information between agencies in Estonian laws when it comes to adult victims. Our Child Protection Act regulates sharing information between agencies when it comes to child victims and a new working group has been formed in 2025 in order to start regularly retrospectively analysing child protection cases where severe consequences (e.g. death) have occurred.

**Article 52: Emergency barring orders**

51. Have any legislative or other measures been taken to introduce and/or amend the legal framework governing emergency barring orders in order to align it with the requirements of Article 52? If yes, please specify whether:

- a. emergency barring orders may remain in place until a victim can obtain a court-ordered protection order in order to ensure that gaps in the protection do not arise;
- b. support and advice are made available to women victims of domestic violence in a pro-active manner by the authority competent to issue an emergency barring order;
- c. children are specifically included in contact bans issued under the emergency barring order;
- d. any exceptions to contact bans are made and in which circumstances.

Answer:

In the report of the GREVIO report published on 17 November 2023, it was brought out that Estonia's current legislation on emergency barring orders is not in line with the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, as it does not provide adequate protection to the victim. Since then an intention to draft an amendment to the relevant law (legislative intent) has been made and we are now at the process of drafting the new article on emergency barring orders. In order to identify best practices and solutions, we have organised various international meetings on this topic and sent a questionnaire to all EU Member States on the subject. The plan is to change the length of the barring order, extend the powers to extend the barring order and create mechanisms to ensure that a breach of the barring order has consequences for the offender. This is due to be done by the end of 2025.

52. Please provide information on the measures taken to enforce emergency barring orders and on responses to any violations of such orders.

Answer:

Use of force may be applied against a person violating an emergency barring order for as long as it is unavoidable to achieve the objective.

**Article 53: Restraining or protection orders**

53. Have any legislative or other measures been taken to introduce and/or amend the legal framework governing restraining and protection orders in order to align it with the requirements of Article 53? If yes, please specify whether:

- a. restraining or protection orders are available – in the context of criminal proceedings and/or upon application from civil courts - to women victims of all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention, including domestic violence, stalking, sexual harassment, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, violence related to so-called honour as well as digital manifestations of violence against women and girls;
- b. children are specifically included in protection orders;
- c. any exceptions to contact bans are made and, if so, in which circumstances these may be made.

Answer:

According to the Code of Criminal Procedure:

**§ 141<sup>1</sup>. Temporary restraining order**

(1) The suspect or accused in proceedings concerning a criminal offence against the person or a criminal offence against a minor may, in order to protect the privacy or other personal rights of a victim and on an application or motion of the Prosecutor's Office by order of the pre-trial investigation judge or of the court, be prohibited from attending any places determined by the court, from approaching any persons determined by the court or from communicating with such persons.

(1<sup>1</sup>) The court may, together with a temporary restraining order and with the consent of the suspect or accused, impose electronic monitoring as provided for by § 75<sup>1</sup> of the Penal Code.

(1<sup>2</sup>) In a situation of urgency, the restraining order provided for by subsection 1 of this section may be imposed by order of the Prosecutor's Office and regardless of the victim's consent. In such a situation, the Prosecutor's Office notifies the imposition of the restraining order to the court within two working days and the court, having regard to the victim's consent, decides on the permissibility of the order following the rules provided by subsections 1<sup>3</sup>–6 of this section.

(1<sup>3</sup>) The order which is mentioned in subsection 1 of this section and by which a temporary restraining order is imposed and the order which is mentioned in subsection 1<sup>2</sup> and by which a restraining order is declared permissible may be made as a note on the corresponding application, motion or order of the Prosecutor's Office.

(2) A temporary restraining order is imposed on the suspect or accused with the consent of the victim.

### **§ 310<sup>1</sup>. Decision concerning a restraining order**

(1) On an application of the victim and for the protection of their private life or other personal rights, the court may, under § 1055 of the Law of Obligation Act, impose a restraining order for a period of up to three years on an offender convicted of a criminal offence against the person or against a minor.

(1<sup>1</sup>) The court may impose a restraining order together with the electronic monitoring provided for by § 75<sup>1</sup> of the Penal Code if the suspect or accused agrees to this. Electronic monitoring may be imposed for up to twelve months.

According to the Law of Obligation Act ([Law of Obligations Act–Riigi Teataja](#)) (within civil proceeding)

### **§ 1055. Prohibition on performance of damaging acts**

(1) If unlawful damage is caused continually or a threat is made that unlawful damage will be caused, the victim or the person who is threatened has the right to demand that behaviour which causes damage be terminated or the making of threats with such behaviour be refrained from. In the case of bodily injury, damage to health, violation of inviolability of personal life or any other personality rights, it may be demanded, inter alia, that the tortfeasor be prohibited to approach other persons (restraining order), the use of housing or communication be regulated or other similar measures be applied.

54. Please provide information on the measures taken to enforce protection orders and on responses to any violations of such orders.

Answer:

According to the Penal Code ([Penal Code–Riigi Teataja](#)):

### **§ 331<sup>2</sup>. Violation of restriction order**

Violation of a restriction order or other measure of protection of personality right imposed by a court decision, if this poses a danger to the life, health or property of persons, or repeated violation of a restriction order or other measure of protection of personality right is punishable by a pecuniary punishment or up to one year's imprisonment.

## **Article 56: Measures of protection**

55. Please provide information on the measures taken to ensure the following:

- a. that the relevant agency informs the victim when the perpetrator escapes or is released temporarily, at least when they or their family might be in danger (paragraph 1 b);
- b. the protection of the privacy and the image of the victim (paragraph 1 f);
- c. the possibility for victims to testify in the courtroom without being present or at least without the presence of the alleged perpetrator, notably through the use of appropriate communication technologies, where available (paragraph 1 i);
- d. the provision of appropriate support services for victims so that their rights and interests are duly presented and taken into account (paragraph 1 e).

Answer:

According to the Code of Criminal Procedure:

### **§ 37<sup>2</sup>. Assessment of specific protection needs of an individual victim**

(1) The proceedings authority is obligated to assess whether any circumstances are present that amount to a reasonable cause to believe that the individual victim requires special treatment and protection – including victim support services – in the proceedings.

(2) The assessment takes into consideration the victim's personality, the gravity and nature of the criminal offence, who the suspect is, the circumstances in which the criminal offence was committed and the harm caused to the victim. Any minor victims are presumed to require special treatment and protection in criminal proceedings.

(3) As a result of the assessment, a decision is made concerning which of the means provided for by this Code for ensuring the safety of the victim it is possible to employ, as well as whether the interview with the victim should be conducted in premises adapted for their special needs or by, or with the participation of, a specialist trained to interview victims with special protection needs or, if possible, by the same person throughout the proceedings or whether a victim who has special needs may require victim support services.

### **§ 38. Rights and obligations of the victim**

(1) The victim has a right to:

1) contest the refusal to commence, or the termination of, criminal proceedings according to the rules provided by §§ 207 and 208 of this Code;

2) file, through the investigative authority or the Prosecutor's Office, a civil court claim or statement of a public-law claim during the time limit provided by subsection 1 of § 225 or clause 4 of § 240 of this Code;

3) give statements or testimony, or refuse to give them, on the grounds provided by §§ 71–73 of this Code;

4) offer evidence;

5) file applications, motions and complaints;

6) acquaint themselves with the report of any procedural operation performed in the case and to make representations, which are to be included in the report, concerning the conditions, course, results and reports of the operation;

7) acquaint themselves with the materials of the criminal file following the rules provided by § 224 of this Code;

8) participate in the trial or hearing of the case;

9) consent to the use of the plea agreement procedure or refuse such consent, state their opinion concerning the charges and the sentence, as well as the quantum of harm mentioned in the charges and the civil court claim or statement of the public-law claim;

10) consent to the imposition of a temporary restraining order and apply for the imposition of a restraining order following the rules provided by § 310<sup>1</sup> of this Code;

11) make an application to be interviewed or examined by a person of their sex if the case concerns sexual violence, gender violence or a criminal offence committed in a close relationship – except if the interview is conducted by the prosecutor, or if the examination is conducted by the judge, or if this would interfere with the course of the proceedings.

(2) The victim is required to:

1) appear when summoned by the investigative authority, the Prosecutor's Office or the court;

2) participate in procedural operations and comply with the directions of the investigative authority, the Prosecutor's Office and the court.

(3) [Repealed – RT I, 06.01.2016, 5 – entry into force 01.01.2017]

(4) The investigative authority or the Prosecutor's Office explains to the victim their rights, the procedure for filing a civil court claim, the principal requirements that apply to such a claim, the time limit for filing the claim and the consequences of allowing such a time limit to expire, and the conditions and rules that govern the provision of State-funded legal aid.

(5) An individual victim has a right to:

1) receive information concerning the committal in custody of a person suspected of the criminal offence, to apply to be notified of the release of the person committed in custody, in the event this poses a threat – except if communication of such information would cause harm to the suspect;

2) apply to be notified of any premature release of the convicted offender or of their escape from the custodial institution, if the information may prevent a threat to the victim;

3) have one person chosen by themselves accompany them at any procedural operation,

unless the proceedings authority has refused this, stating its reasons;

4) apply for an opportunity to state their opinion concerning a premature release on parole of the offender, provided the offence that was committed is a criminal offence of the first degree provided by Chapter 9 or 11 of the Penal Code;

5) state their opinion concerning the impact that the criminal offence had on them and concerning the perpetrator's taking of responsibility for the offence.

(6) The person to accompany the victim at a procedural operation under clause 3 of subsection 5 of this section is cautioned that they are not allowed to disclose any information concerning the proceedings or to intervene in the course of the operation.

**According to the Code of Criminal Procedure § 37 (3) the provisions applicable to witnesses apply to the victim as well.**

### **§ 67. Ensuring the safety of a witness**

(1) Having regard to the gravity of the criminal offence or to any exceptional circumstances, the pre-trial investigation judge may, on an application of the Prosecutor's Office, by order, anonymise a witness in order to ensure their safety.

(2) To enter an order by which a witness is anonymised, the pre-trial investigation judge questions the witness in order to ascertain their reliability and their need for protection, and hears the relevant submissions of the prosecutor. Where this is needed, the pre-trial investigation judge acquaints themselves with the criminal file.

(3) The order by which a witness is anonymised assigns the witness a name to be used in procedural operations according to subsection 8 of § 146 of this Code.

(4) Information concerning the name, personal identification number (or, if the person does not possess such a number, their date of birth), citizenship, education, place of residence and position of employment or educational institution of a witness who has been anonymised is enclosed in an envelope bearing the number of the criminal case and the signature of the person conducting the proceedings. The envelope is sealed and kept separately from the criminal file. Only the proceedings authority may acquaint themselves with the information contained in the envelope; the authority is to re-seal and re-sign the envelope after having acquainted itself with the information.

(5) In judicial proceedings, a witness bearing an assigned name is examined by telephone according to the rules provided by clause 2 of subsection 2 of § 69 of this Code using voice changing equipment, if necessary. Questions may also be put to the witness in writing.

(6) To ensure the safety of the witness, regardless of whether or not they have been anonymised, the relevant provisions of the Witness Protection Act may be applied in their respect.

### **§ 69. Distance interview or distance examination**

(1) The proceedings authority may arrange a distance interview or examination of a person if interviewing or examining the person first-hand is complicated or unreasonably burdensome or if the distance interview or examination is necessary for protecting the person's interests.

(2) For the purposes of this Code, distance interview or examination means an interview or examination:

1) by means of a technical solution as a result of which the statement or testimony of the person interviewed or examined is seen and heard directly via live streaming, and questions can be put to the person;

2) by telephone, as a result of which the statement or testimony of the person interviewed or examined is heard directly by live streaming, and questions can be put to the person.

(3) [Repealed – RT I, 06.05.2020, 1 – entry into force 07.05.2020]

(4) A note is recorded in the report of the distance interview or examination regarding the cautioning of the witness against refusing to give a statement or testimony without a statutory basis and against making a knowingly false statement or giving knowingly false testimony.

(5) Where the interviewing or examining of a person who is found in a foreign State requires the assistance of a judicial authority of the foreign State, the provisions of § 489<sup>41</sup> of this

Code are followed if the interview or examination takes place under a cooperative arrangement between the Member States of the European Union, whereas the provisions of § 468 of this Code are followed in other situations.

(6) The Minister in charge of the policy sector may enact more specific requirements for arranging distance interviews or distance examination.

In addition, the new victim interview protocol form (effective since 2023) obliges the investigator to also provide or email the victim with a victim information sheet, which the victim confirms receipt of by signing the victim interview protocol form. This helps ensure that the victim is left with a document explaining their rights in simple language with relevant references.

### **Part III: Emerging trends on violence against women and domestic violence**

6. Please provide information on new developments since the adoption of GREVIO's baseline evaluation report on your country concerning:

- a. emerging trends in violence against women and domestic violence, including its digital manifestations (types of perpetration, groups of victims, forms of violence);
- b. emerging trends in domestic case law related to violence against women;
- c. emerging trends in the allocation of funding and budgeting by your state authorities;
- d. innovative approaches to primary prevention, for example new target audiences and means of communication, public/private partnerships etc.
- e. emerging trends related to access to asylum and international protection for women victims of violence against women.

#### Answer:

In 2024, a guide of cyber violence for professionals working with victims (Juhendmaterjal kübervägivallast ohvritega töötavatele spetsialistidele.pdf) was translated and published. It provides valuable support and practical recommendations for effectively and sensitively assisting victims, managing risks, and helping restore their sense of security. Designed to facilitate the work of specialists, this guide offers concrete instructions and best practices. As a vital resource, it enhances professionals' understanding of the impact of cyber violence and ensures comprehensive support for every affected individual.

In 2023, IKEA launched the social initiative "Notice Violence" in Estonia to raise awareness about domestic violence and encourage people to intervene and take notice. As part of the initiative, safe accommodations in women's support centers were also renovated with the help of IKEA employees volunteering their time. The campaign's opening event involved the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Social Insurance Board, and the Tallinn Women's Crisis Shelter.

Before Christmas 2024, the Ministry of Social Affairs and IKEA, in cooperation with the Police and Border Guard Board and the Social Insurance Board, organized an awareness-raising event called "Home Should Be a Safe Haven." The aim of the event was to draw attention to the increase in domestic violence during the holiday season and to encourage people to notice and report it.

In December 2024, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Social Insurance Board organized a webinar for journalists, where various experts discussed how to report on domestic violence stories more ethically and avoid re-victimization. A checklist was also created to guide journalists in covering domestic violence cases responsibly.

The President Kaljulaid Foundation is exploring new ways how to build a less violent society in Estonia. To this end, the foundation has established a domestic abuse prevention competence center for employers, is supporting impactful initiatives with seed funding, organising the annual domestic abuse conference "Stronger Together," and leading public discussions.

The Employers Against Domestic Abuse (Vägivallavabaks) initiative, established in 2024, aims to engage employers in the prevention, detection, and support related to domestic abuse. With nearly 700,000 employed individuals potentially affected, domestic abuse impacts not only victims' well-being but also team dynamics, productivity, and overall organizational performance.

The initiative seeks to raise awareness among employers and employees about recognizing and responding to domestic abuse, creating abuse-aware workplaces, and fostering public discussions on the topic. To achieve these goals, the initiative offers guidance, training, and educational toolkits for employers, along with establishing a network for sharing best practices. It also collaborates with universities and the public sector on research efforts.

Please see also answers 2 and 9.

#### **Part IV: Administrative data and statistics**

57. Please provide annual statistics for two complete calendar years prior to receiving this questionnaire on administrative and judicial data on:

- a. the number of reports, investigations opened, prosecutions, final convictions secured and sanctions imposed in respect of all forms of violence against women and domestic violence covered by the Istanbul Convention;
- b. the number of emergency barring orders issued by the competent authorities, the number of breaches of such orders, and the number of sanctions imposed as a result of these breaches;
- c. the number of protection orders issued, the number of breaches of such orders and the number of sanctions imposed as a result of such breaches;
- d. data on the number of decisions issued by family courts on custody/visitation/residence of children that have expressly taken into account incidents of domestic violence.

#### Answer:

The number of registered domestic violence crimes is 3186 in year 2023 and 3244 in year 2022.

Between 2022 and 2023, an average of 450 emergency barring orders were issued, including most of them orally (95%), but a few in writing (5%). The prohibition to stay is applied on the basis of the Law Enforcement Act and mostly in cases where no criminal proceedings are opened (84%).

Use of force may be applied against a person violating an emergency barring order for as long as it is unavoidable to achieve the objective.

In 2023, a total of 33 restraining orders were issued, 14 of which were temporary restraining orders applied in urgent cases. In 2022, 48 temporary restraining orders were issued, 21 of which were urgent.

In 2022 there were 44 violations of a restriction order (Penal Code § 331<sup>2</sup>), in 2023 there were 74 violations of a restriction order.



## APPENDIX

**Table 1: Initial training (education or professional training)**

*Please fill in the table and list the professionals (in the area of healthcare, law enforcement, criminal justice, social welfare, education, asylum and migration, media/journalism and support services) which have received initial training on violence against women. Please place each category of professional in a separate line.*

[illegible]


**Table 2: In-service training**

*Please fill in the table and list the professionals (in the area of healthcare, law enforcement, criminal justice, social welfare, education, asylum and migration, media/journalism and support services) which receive in-service training on violence against women. Please place each category of professional in a separate line.*

Professionals	Number of professionals trained	Is this training mandatory ?	Frequency	Training efforts supported by guidelines and protocols	Please describe the content and duration of the training
Teachers of civics working in schools in the school year 2024/2025	803	Initial education at universities	continuous + needs based in-service training what teachers can select and take individually	Curricula approved by universities	The minor in basic school multi-subject teacher education is at the BA level, 48 ECTS credits. The combined field of History and Social Studies at the MA level (2 years) includes specialized subjects, didactics, and internship in the second academic year.
Teachers of social science (health education, family study, communication etc) working in schools in the school year 2024/2025	1813	Initial education at universities	ontinuous + needs based in-service training what teachers can select and take individually	Curricula approved by universities	Minor in pedagogy (BA level), multi-subject teacher (MA level) class teacher (BA and MA level), minor in social science major in psychology (MA), sexual education topics in the teacher

					training curricula (MA level). Studies at the MA level (2 years) includes specialized subjects, didactics, and internship in the second academic year.
Judges	11	No	Every other year	Yes	Trauma Awareness in Cases Involving Children." The primary objective of these sessions was to equip participants with foundational knowledge and practical guidelines for engaging with individuals who have experienced trauma, with a particular focus on the psychological impact of witnessing violence on children
Judges, Attorneys, Prosecutors	30	No	When training need arises	Yes	"Interviewing Minors in Practice", provided specialized knowledge on effective communication with minors.
Judges, Attorneys, Prosecutors	15	No	When need arises	Yes	"Advanced Interviewing of Minors," provided judges, prosecutors, and defense attorneys—who had previously completed basic

					training in interviewing minors—with a more in-depth understanding of the impact of trauma on memory processes. This was followed by practical exercises on interview preparation, execution, and management, with particular attention to avoiding common errors in communication with minors. The training also addressed the assessment of a child's best interests.
Judges	30	No	When need arises	Yes	Thematic roundtable discussions
Attorneys	97	Yes, all attorneys providing legal aid to minors must complete the training.	on request/take place when the group is full	Participants in the training will be provided with instructional materials and references to additional materials; Guidelines issued by the Bar for attorneys providing state legal aid regarding the representation of minors in civil court proceedings.	“The art of child friendly conversation” (8 academic hours). The training provides practical skills for conducting conversations with children, interview situations are played out and the results are analyzed.
Attorneys	175	Yes, all attorneys	on request/take	Participants in the training	„Specific form of violence –

[illegible]