



Õiguskantsler  
Chancellor of Justice

**Report by the Chancellor of Justice of the Republic of Estonia  
on implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating  
violence against women and domestic violence**

First thematic evaluation round

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Established by the Constitution of Estonia, the Chancellor of Justice carries out the functions of constitutional review, ombudsman proceedings, National Human Rights Institution, National Preventive Mechanism under OPCAT, National Monitoring Mechanism under the CRPD, ombudsman for children etc. The Chancellor may use all these functions to prevent, raise awareness and tackle violence against women and domestic violence.

This submission concentrates on significant developments and emerging trends as identified by the Chancellor's work and by surveys of other institutions regarding gender-based violence in Estonia.

## Significant developments and emerging trends

### Gender-based violence against women

The enforcement of the new [Victim Support Act](#) on April 1, 2023, marks a notable advancement in providing aid to victims of violence, crime, or crisis. This legislation introduces several positive measures, including provisions for sexual violence crisis support, assistance in renouncing violence, psychosocial support during crises, basic victim support services and more.

The large-scale [relationship survey](#) reveals that 41% of women in Estonia have experienced intimate partner violence during their lifetime. The survey indicates that 39% of women have experienced psychological violence, 13% have encountered physical violence or threats, and 9% have faced sexual violence. Young women aged 18–29 and women with lower levels of education are the most susceptible to experiencing violence, whereas older women aged 65–74 are the least likely. Half of the women with physical disabilities or limitations have had to endure intimate partner violence. 56% of women who have experienced intimate partner violence in the past five years have reported it to someone. Still, only 2%–6% reported violence to authorities such as social workers, police, or women's shelters.

According to [information](#) from the Ministry of Justice, in 2023 and 2024 there has been a concerning increase in registered sexual crimes. In 2024 there were 746 cases in total, which is nearly a quarter higher than in 2022. Close to 90% of these registered sexual crimes involved minor victims, with approximately half occurring online. Apart from the over 700 cases leading to proceedings, the Police and Border Guard Board (PPA) [reported](#) investigating a similar number of reports that did not result in court proceedings. According to the PPA, the number of registered sexual crimes has grown mainly due to increased reporting.

The registered number of [domestic violence](#) cases was in decrease from 2019 to 2023 and showed a slight increase in 2024. The general [concern](#) is that there is a decrease in reporting but not in prevalence of domestic violence. Police and Border Guard Board assesses that many cases never reach official numbers because victims do not dare or know how to seek help, and some do not consider what happened serious enough to seek help. According to the Social Insurance Board there is a continuing need to raise awareness, encourage victims and provide support.

In 2023, the Ministry of Interior commissioned a [study](#) from the Center of Anthropology on knowledge and attitudes related to intimate partner violence among rescue workers and police

officers. According to the study, the specialists find that the residence ban is too short; there is no mandatory training for those who deal with victims and perpetrators of gender-based or intimate partner violence; the penalties for perpetrators of violence are too lenient or there is no punishment at all, and too little attention is paid to violence against the elderly.

In 2024, the research centre Praxis released findings from the study "[Pretrial Investigation of Sexual Violence](#)".<sup>1</sup> The study highlights improvements in Estonia's pre-trial procedures for sexual violence, emphasizing increased victim-friendliness and improved awareness and attitudes among those conducting investigations. However, the study identifies several remaining obstacles that may further victimize survivors of sexual violence, erode trust in the legal system, and impede the prosecution of perpetrators. The study also explores the potential introduction of a consent-based definition in determining sexual violence and rape.

Some of the concerns from the study:

- The investigation of sexual crimes can differ in different parts of Estonia. As a result, it may happen that the victim-centred approach is not adhered to in every region and the course of the proceedings is uneven. (p. 11)
- The interrogation of a victim of a sexual crime is intensive and takes about 3-4 hours, and sometimes the victim must give evidence several times, as less experienced police investigators lack the experience and/or training to pay attention to all the details immediately. (p. 12)
- The reasons for the termination of the proceedings are usually not explained to the victim. (p. 15) Both prosecutors and police officers admit that they do not always communicate with the victim enough when the proceedings are concluded. (p. 30)
- It is difficult for prosecutors to prove sexual crimes where the victim and the perpetrator have had a close relationship. (p. 21)
- The threshold for proving a crime is set very high - courts prefer emergency number recordings, camera recordings in public spaces or witness statements as evidence. (p. 22) Injuries are considered the most important evidence in court, but such injuries that would be watertight evidence do not occur very often. (pp. 79) Scientific evidence, e.g. sexual violence crisis centres' expertise is not always valued – the importance and role of science-based evidence should increase in proving rape (p. 89) It is difficult to reach court proceedings in rape cases, precisely because the conditions set out as a prerequisite for the act to be punishable have not been met or cannot be proven. (pp. 79)
- The proceedings are affected by the lack of trauma awareness among specialists, how trauma affects rape victims and manifests itself. There are also widespread misconceptions about the typical behaviour and reactions of rape victims. (p. 31)
- The course of the proceedings and the reliability of the victim's testimony may also be affected if the person handling the proceedings has misconceptions or lacks necessary training. (p. 36)
- Only the Northern Prefecture has a specialized unit for sexual violence, and a separate department for juveniles and intimate partnership violence. Specialization of the persons handling the proceedings is necessary for a high-quality procedure. (p. 39-40). Almost all interviewees considered specialization of the investigators to be one of the key conditions for professional proceedings. (p. 45)

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<sup>1</sup> See the summary in English on pp 93-95.

- There is also a lack of specialization of medical care, since only four cities (Tallinn, Pärnu, Tartu, Kohtla-Järve) have sexual violence crisis centres at emergency medical centres, where doctors with special training work. (p. 40)
- There is a great need for (further) training on sexual crimes, which would deal more broadly with the treatment of victims and psychological aspects of victim support - everyone who may come into contact with rape cases should receive training. (p. 50-55)
- Even though the attitudes and behaviour of specialists (police officers, prosecutors) participating in pre-trial proceedings have improved over the years, the negative attitudes have not disappeared (e.g. regarding the appearance and behaviour of the victim) and they can affect criminal proceedings (e.g. whether they are initiated at all). (pp. 59-60)
- It was pointed out that society does not trust the legal system, it is believed that the police and the judicial system do not believe the victim or help him, and therefore a crime report is not filed. (pp. 70)
- The current law places a greater role and responsibility on the victim, not the perpetrator. (pp. 81)

Simultaneously, the Ministry of Justice released a [legal analysis](#) examining the alignment of crimes related to sexual self-determination with the standards outlined in the Istanbul Convention. The study revealed that specific sections of the [Penal Code](#) (§§ 141, 141<sup>1</sup>, and 143) do not fully conform to Article 36 of the Convention. Currently, Estonian law stipulates that a sexual act or conduct is punishable if it involves one of three additional elements: use of force or taking advantage of a situation in which, the person is not capable of initiating resistance or comprehending the situation or taking advantage of a dependent relationship. This is not in line with the Convention, mandating punishment even in the absence of these elements and emphasizing that consent to any sexual act must be voluntary.

In addition to thorough analysis, the ministry has been pursuing an active engagement process of the civil society during the [development](#) phase of necessary legal amendments and currently for the [draft](#) of amendments to the Penal Code (the so-called consent law). The draft was submitted to the ministries for approval and sent for opinion to several public authorities and a wide range of civil society organizations.

The Chancellor of Justice recommends the State to continue enhancing work on violence prevention and victim support; strengthen efforts to increase awareness about sexual violence and consent-based sex within society; enhance the expertise and capabilities of investigators, prosecutors, and judges handling cases of sexual violence and align the Penal Code with the standards set forth in the Istanbul Convention.

## **International reporting**

In 2022, Estonia submitted its' seventh periodic [review](#) to the UN CEDAW Committee on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. In 2024, the Chancellor of Justice submitted her written input, raising among other issues relating to gender-based violence against women. Committee's [concluding observations](#) from 2024 include several recommendations on tackling gender-based violence against women.

In 2023, Estonia submitted its [report](#) on implementation of the Convention to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. The Chancellor of Justice also prepared an overview of the situation of children's rights in Estonia and submitted her [report](#) to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. So did the [children and young people](#) of Estonia. The reports touched also issues that are relevant in the context of the Istanbul Convention. In 2024, the Committee issued a long list of [concluding observations](#) on protection of children from violence and abuse. Many of the Committee's recommendations were based on the observations and recommendations in the reports by the Chancellor of Justice, NGOs and children.

### **Children's safety at home and at school**

Although corporal punishment of children is prohibited in Estonia, it is still necessary to raise public awareness about how violence affects a child's development and who can be asked for advice about preventing it. The Chancellor of Justice recommends the State to make training for parents on violence-free parenting practices better accessible and to organise nationwide campaigns to inform adults and children of the prohibition of corporal punishment and its harmful effects.

Estonian children noted in their report that bullying is rife and not all children's homes are safe. The children said they did not dare to report the violence they had experienced. There are also cases that parents do not believe the child. Children admitted that they do not dare to talk about bullying and abuse because they are afraid of possible consequences. Children should be told where to look for help, but help is not always accessible to children. Children proposed that even in kindergarten and primary school, attention should be given to the prevention of bullying and violence, and children should be taught to be caring and friendly in their behaviour and communication. This will make it easier to spot bullies and those who really need help, and to report them.

Some children indicated that they do not always want to communicate with their parents. One reason may be that they "are afraid of one of their divorced parents (the one they don't live with) because the usual reason for divorce in the first place is violence or something like that".

### **Safety in alternative care**

The Chancellor of Justice has indicated to substitute and family homes the need to address issues related to sexuality, reproductive health and safety of children and young people living in alternative care. Among other, because the [young advisers](#) to the Chancellor of Justice have noted how important is the physical integrity, and relatedly protection from violence, for a young person in alternative care. Based on their experience, the young people explained that some young girls and boys only tell their peers about being sexually abused. Young people feel it is necessary that adults in alternative care be able to talk to them about sexuality-related topics; teach young people how to say 'no' and help them seek help if they have been abused. Together with the Chancellor, the young advisers passed their [recommendations](#) on to the Minister of Social Affairs.

In 2022, the Chancellor was informed that there could be problems with ensuring the safety of children in one of the [substitute homes](#). The Chancellor's advisers went to check the situation, and it was found that some children living in the family house could indeed endanger others and themselves through their behaviour. Children who had been victims of ill-treatment also lived in the family house. The Chancellor's adviser asked the Children's House (*Barnahus*)

specialists of the Social Insurance Board to assess the children's need for assistance and to offer counselling to the staff of the family house. The Social Insurance Board complied with the proposal. The Chancellor's advisers recommended that the family house should provide sex education training to family parents, so that they can better protect and support children.

In 2025, there were also [substitute](#) and [family homes](#) where the Chancellor of Justice raised concerns over sufficient support and counselling to possible victims of violence and abuse. The Chancellor indicated that [studies](#) from other countries show that children who run away from alternative care may become victims of exploitation. Young persons having money of unknown origin may have been obtained by breaking the law or by self-harming behavior. This is a risk that the substitute and family homes need to assess and respond to as needed (including, for example, in cooperation with the Children's House (*Barnahus*)).

The Chancellor noted also that if a young person has become a victim of intimate partner violence, they need special support and attention, including psychological help to process the traumatic experience. Due to limited coping skills and youth, the victim may not be able to cope with the situation on their own and break the relationship pattern that is damaging them. In such a situation, the sense of security provided by the substitute or family home is particularly important for the young person – the young person must feel that they are in a physically and emotionally safe environment.

The Chancellor was also concerned over the [emplo yees](#) not having attended sex education training. For the adults working in the field of alternative care to be able to talk to young people about sexuality, they need sufficient knowledge to guide young people to take care of their sexual health, talk to young people about these issues openly and guide them on how to find additional information, counselling and the necessary resources. This is stressed in the [guidelines](#) on how to support young people growing up in alternative care. Young people also need information about [youth counselling centers](#) which offer advice on sexual health and intimate relationships.

In one place, young people had to ask the head of the institution for condoms. The Chancellor noted that young people must have access to sexual and reproductive health products without having to ask anyone for permission or consent, as noted in [General Comment no. 20](#) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. The Chancellor recommended to ensure that young people have access to the necessary means anonymously, for example in an agreed [place](#), and sufficient pocket money so that they can buy suitable products themselves.

The Chancellor of Justice sends her findings from inspection visits to substitute and family homes also for their information to the Ministry of Social Affairs who is responsible for policies related to alternative care and the Social Insurance Board that heads counselling and supervision.

### **Children's safety in sports**

Prompted by an increasing number of cases in recent years in which a trainer has allegedly ill-treated a pupil during [training](#), the Chancellor's advisers thoroughly studied the requirements imposed on work as a trainer. Potential problems were analysed with trainers, athletes, federations and experts in sports ethics. According to sport experts, not all sports federations individually, or also collectively, have established rules to determine what constitutes ill-treatment or other unethical activity in sports. Many sports federations lack guidelines for

investigating violations of these rules and applying sanctions outside the criminal proceedings and a trainer's professional ethics. There is a need to raise awareness among children, parents, coaches, and sports organizations about how to prevent and recognize abuse in sports and what to do in the case of suspected abuse. In 2023, the Chancellor of Justice published information material for raising awareness among [children](#) and [parents](#).

The Chancellor of Justice recommends the State to help sports organisations establish clear rules of behaviour to prevent ill-treatment of children in sport and adequate procedural rules for investigating violations and implementing consequences, and raise awareness among children, parents, coaches and sports organizations about abuse in sports.

### **Protection of children in criminal proceedings**

The Chancellor of Justice has recommended the State also to analyse whether the rights of children who have become victims of crime are sufficiently protected in criminal proceedings and whether exceptions or adjustments for children should be provided with regard to warning witnesses. This recommendation derived from the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgment of 22 June 2021 in the case of *R. B. v. Estonia* ([case No 22597/16](#)) that the Estonian State had violated Articles 3 and 8 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms since it had failed to ensure protection in criminal proceedings of the rights of a child who had allegedly been the victim of a crime. The ECtHR found that there were significant flaws in the authorities' response to the applicant's allegations since the authorities failed to sufficiently take into account the applicant's particular vulnerability and needs as a young child so as to afford her effective protection as the alleged victim of sexual crimes.

### **Safety of vulnerable persons in welfare institutions**

As a result of flagrant [violation](#) of rights of disabled children staying in a state social welfare institution, the Chancellor [recommended](#) that the Riigikogu should consider establishing new rules in order to protect people in a vulnerable or helpless situation against ill-treatment or against degradation of their human dignity. This concerns care for both children with disabilities and adults with disabilities, as well as care for people in need of assistance and support due to age or illness. The Chancellor asked the Riigikogu to also consider adding a provision to the Code of Criminal Procedure to enable provision of mandatory state legal aid to a broader range of victims with restricted active legal capacity. The Chancellor also asked that the Child Protection Act should expand the scope of application of a ban on working with children. The Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs is [planning](#) to create a penalty for the abuse of a helpless person and to toughen penalties for harming mental health.

Recently, there was widespread public dissatisfaction that there were no court proceedings initiated against a [care home](#) where an employee raped several older women suffering of dementia. The matter touched many people's sense of justice and security. The prosecutor's office initiated criminal proceedings against the employee, accusing him of rape and brought the charges to court. The court is currently considering the crime and the punishment of its perpetrator. The prosecutor's office could have submitted a claim for compensation for damages together with the criminal case to the court only at the request of the victims' lawyer, which the latter did not do. The Bar Association imposed a [disciplinary penalty](#) on the lawyer. The prosecutor's office reconsidered initiating criminal proceedings against the care home but still found [not enough basis](#) for this. The prosecution relied, among other things, on the supervision

of the Social Insurance Board, which found that although there were shortcomings in the organization of the care home, their absence would not have prevented the abuse.

### **Safety of women with disabilities**

According to the relationship survey mentioned above, half of the women with [physical disabilities or limitations](#) have had to endure intimate partner violence in their lifetime (the prevalence among all women irrespective of health status is 41%). Among women with physical disabilities or limitations 45% have experienced physical or sexual violence by any perpetrator and 39% have experienced domestic violence in their adulthood. In comparison, the same indicators for all women are respectively 33% and 26%.

According to the representatives of civil society, women support centers' services are accessible also for women with disabilities, irrespective of the type or severity of the disability. Even though shelter offered in rented apartments may not be wheelchair-accessible, when needed the support centers together with the local government find safe accommodation elsewhere, where also other services can be offered. Over the years, there have been few cases where a victim in a wheelchair has sought help and has always received it. Optimal would be to remove the perpetrator from the home of the victim with disability and to offer all services to the victim at her home.

At the same time, representatives of civil society find that all specialists working with victims could benefit from more training to appropriately understand and respond to the needs of victims with disabilities, incl. intellectual disabilities and mental disorders.

It is very commendable that there is information available on violence against women and on domestic violence for people with disabilities. [Estonian Chamber of People with Disabilities](#) has explained on the website on [family care](#) the risks and types of violence when caring for a person with disabilities. NGO Vaimupuu, which helps people with intellectual disabilities and mental disorders, explains on their website in [easy-to-read](#) language what is domestic violence and violence against women. The website also gives instructions on where victims of violence find help.

### **Safety in closed institutions**

Chancellor of Justice has also recommended to the [closed childcare institutions](#) to make sure that a young person can always address their concerns to an employee of the same sex as them. Young people who find themselves in difficult situations should also be dealt with by staff of the same sex as them.

The Chancellor of Justice has inspected at the Police and Border Guard Board [detention facilities](#) that it is unacceptable, and also contrary to the law, that, due to working arrangements and shortage of staff, a detainee brought into a detention cell sometimes has to be examined by police officers of the opposite sex if no officer of the same sex is nearby.

### **Advisory Committee on Human Rights**

The Chancellor's activities have among other been for the benefit of understanding and raising awareness about violence against women. For example, the Chancellor consults with the [Advisory Committee on Human Rights](#), to be informed and ready to react about problems

relating also to violence against women. The Advisory Committee has been operational under the Office of the Chancellor of Justice for seven years and its main task is to advise the Chancellor on issues of human rights protection and promotion.

Among the Committee's 50 members there are several persons who are advocates of gender equality and the rights of women, representing among other a feminist organization, women's shelters union, gynecologists' society, attorneys representing victims of intimate partner violence, survivors of violence etc. The Chancellor of Justice has sought advice from them for example on equal treatment and on protection from sexual abuse.

The Chancellor of Justice initiated a discussion with the Advisory Committee on the compliance of the statutory definitions of offences against sexual self-determination with the Istanbul Convention. The meeting addressed the issue of sexual violence and touched upon the so-called consent law mentioned above, which seeks to change the definition of sexual violence. At the meeting, the Praxis study and the ministry's analysis were examined.

In addition, the Committee members and advisers to the Chancellor gathered to discuss over the safety of nursing homes, instigated by the raping case noted above.

### **Funding of civil society organisations and public institutions**

The Chancellor of Justice has received information that civil society organisations face some financing concerns in relation to public funding. Ministries are supporting NGOs of particular policy areas through strategic partnerships that are formed usually for three-year periods. However, due to delayed partnership calls, there may be financing gaps that can jeopardise the functioning of especially smaller organisations. Strategic partnership calls were lagging in the area of equality and non-discrimination, putting organisations working on gender equality and rights of LGBTQ+ in a financially difficult situation.

The Equality Commissioner has also faced financial challenges, as well as [obstacles](#) to their involvement in the preparation of legislative amendments concerning their institution.

### **Media**

In 2024, the research centre Praxis completed a report "[Alphamales and Little Flowers: The Normalization of Misogyny and Sexism in the Estonian Media Landscape](#)".

The report highlights that gender stereotypes and attitudes that belittle women are spreading increasingly in Estonian society, especially among young people. This indicates that sexist and misogynistic attitudes are becoming normalized, particularly in media and social media. The logic of the attention economy amplifies harmful and oversimplified understandings of gender roles, targeting young men and boys in particular. This reflects the impact of global social media on the local context, increasing both gender and social polarization. The study also addresses how terms of endearment (such as "little flowers") can be used ironically or derogatorily, indicating lower status or helplessness, especially toward women. This is one way in which sexism and misogyny are normalized in media and society. Additionally, the report emphasizes the responsibility of journalists and media in protecting women and combating sexism, showing that media plays a significant role in the spread and normalization of gender stereotypes.

Findings of the study and concerns over spread of misogyny have been discussed in [public](#) and [private](#) media, in [articles](#), on [radio](#) and in [television](#) programs.

## **Cyber violence**

In the first ever handbook on human rights in Estonian that the Chancellor of Justice published, there is a separate [chapter](#) on violence against women that touches among other also upon cyber violence and prevention of violence in the digital world, incl. criminalizing cyber violence.

According to the 2021 analysis of the [European network of legal experts in gender equality and non-discrimination](#), Estonia is not among those countries that, have specifically criminalized the distribution and disclosure of intimate/sexual images without consent (one of the main forms of cyber violence). Estonia has taken preventive measures against cyber violence and has [web police](#) investigating violations. However, there is public [dissatisfaction](#) that victims are recommended to file civil court suits for protection.

Tackling technology-facilitated gender-based violence has also been in focus of the Chancellor's activities when promoting the rights of the child. For example, in 2019 the Chancellor publicized the recommendations of her young advisers to ensure the rights of children and young people in the digital world within the project "[Let's Talk young - let's talk about the digital world!](#)". The Estonian young advisers produced a [video clip](#) on the dangers of sexual violence online and the means to find help. The clip emphasizes the possibility to contact the [Child Helpline](#) and the web police. The video material is now part of online school material and widely used by pupils.

## **Education**

According to young people's [assessment](#), issues of sexual abuse are too little discussed with them, and they do not know exactly where to seek help. The Chancellor of Justice recommends the State to ensure systematic sexual education at schools. In the frame of this education, it is important to deal with problems of violence in relationships and sexual abuse and inform children about possibilities to receive help.

## **Information for victims**

The unifying concern for victims of crime who turn to the Chancellor of Justice is that there is no single place to get information. According to the law, The Chancellor may not review a petition if the matter is subject to criminal proceedings or court decision. In such a case, the Chancellor will respond with an explanatory response, which will inform the petitioner what rights they have, how the person can protect their rights, and what would be most effective to do in a specific situation (f.ex. filing a certain complaint, demanding compensation, contacting a victim support worker etc).

For example, a parent whose child had been a victim of crime found that there is quite a lot of information about when the perpetrator is a minor, but it is more difficult to find information on what are the particularities of the criminal proceedings when the victim is a minor. The Chancellor gave an overview of the rights of child victims, including information on how a parent can participate in procedural operations, but may not influence the course of it in any way. The parent can support the child, but the person conducting the proceedings decides in which parts of the proceedings the parent may be involved in. The reply included a lot of

references where to get information: the website of the [child-friendly proceedings](#), the website of the [prosecutor's](#) office, [materials](#) from the website of the Office of the Chancellor of Justice, etc. It is a concern that people do not find this information easily themselves.

### **Awareness raising**

In the [film programme](#) on the rights of the child as part of the youth film festival 'Just Film', there have on several occasions been films about gender-based violence. For instance, in 2023 the program included films like *My Killer Buddy*, which explored the issue of domestic violence. In previous years, the program has also showcased films highlighting various forms of violence against women and girls, including the dangers of grooming on social media. The Chancellor of Justice is among the key initiators alongside with the Estonian Union for Child Welfare, Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs and others, of this special film program, which focuses on raising awareness of children's rights through cinema.

Traditionally, the authors of the programme contribute to collaboration with teachers to encourage them to come to the cinema with pupils and discuss films in school lessons. Before the festival, the organisers introduce the programme of children's and youth films in schools. The organisers prepare worksheets to support discussions about the films screened in the programme and send them to the teachers, who go to see these films with their pupils. In addition, schools are able to invite programme makers to schools to carry out discussions about a film.

### **International complaints mechanisms**

In 2025, Estonia acceded to the [third Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure](#) and to the [Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#). The Chancellor of Justice has drawn attention to the ratification of these additional protocols in her reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2023 and to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women since 2020. It is very welcome that Estonia has decided to further strengthen the existing human rights protection system. The additional protocols provide the right to appeal to these committees if the applicant's rights have been violated and domestic legal remedies have been exhausted.