

Twinning methodology (peer exchanges) in the field of violence against women and domestic violence



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TWINNING METHODOLOGY (PEER EXCHANGES) IN THE FIELD OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Partnership for Good Governance II 2019-2022 -
“Raising awareness of the Istanbul Convention and
other gender equality standards in Azerbaijan”

Prepared by
Patricia Munoz Cabrera
and
Turgut Mustafayev

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All other correspondence concerning this document should be addressed to the Gender Equality Division of Council of Europe, F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex, E-mail: vaw.gender.cooperation@coe.int

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms for Discrimination Against Women
CoE	Council of Europe
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease (2019)
DV	Domestic violence
EU	European Union
GFP	Gender Focal Point
GREVIO	Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. GREVIO is the independent expert body responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Istanbul Convention by the parties.
PGGII	Partnership for Good Governance II 2019-2022
Q&A	Questions and answers session
SCFWCA	State Committee for Family, Women, and Children Affairs
VAW	Violence Against Women

INTRODUCTION

Globally, the prevalence of violence against women and domestic violence (VAW/DV) continues to pose a serious challenge to states' efforts to ensure *de jure and de facto* equality on the ground. Violence against women and domestic violence are serious violations of women's human rights and have proven to be remarkably persistent. Violence against women and domestic violence affect all women, regardless of their race, age, geographical or physical characteristics, economic, cultural and/or religious background.

Evidence suggests that violence against women is a result of gender inequality, that is to say, of unequal power relations between women and men resulting from gender roles and social norms which ascribe women a lower status in society (WHO, 2009). For this reason, promoting and achieving gender equality is a critical element of prevention of violence against women and protection of victims of VAW/DV.

This pioneering Twinning methodology has been developed under the project "Raising awareness of the Istanbul Convention and other gender equality standards in Azerbaijan", a joint European Union and Council of Europe's project under their Partnership for Good Governance II (PGGII). The purpose of this Twinning methodology is to promote peer exchanges among state administrations to improve legislative and policy frameworks in the field of violence against women, domestic violence and gender equality. This methodology aims at enhancing peer exchanges of the implementation of the main standard in the field: the Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, also known as the Istanbul Convention.

To date, few Twinning experiences have been developed and implemented on violence against women, domestic violence and gender equality, as the original Twinning mechanism is not topic-specific, but rather a general tool to promote exchanges among countries. In addition, so far, no specific methodology for Twinning actions has been developed, even though some guiding principles have been established for these type of peer exchanges. This Twinning methodology therefore represents a unique tool for three main reasons:

- it offers a structured approach on how to develop this type of peer exchanges;
- it is focused on violence against women, domestic violence and gender equality, and uses the Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention) as the main standard for improving policy, legislation and practice in these fields; and
- it can be used as a tool for state authorities wishing to engage in peer experiences in a more autonomous way, and based on their respective institutional settings, needs and priorities. This is an important fact, as at present, Twinning projects are mainly available to non-European Union (EU) countries (European Neighbourhood or under the pre-accession mechanism), even if EU countries can participate as peers – but not be direct beneficiaries or request Twinning projects at their initiative. This methodology therefore seeks a bigger outreach.

In addition, this Twinning Methodology brings an added value by promoting the standards set in the Istanbul Convention across countries, regardless of their ratification status and can therefore be transposed beyond Council

of Europe (CoE) member states. For these reasons, the methodology presented in this document represents a pioneering experience.

The development of this Twinning Methodology is consistent with the [Council of Europe's Gender Equality Strategy for the period 2018-2023](#), and its objective 2 on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence. Indirectly, it is also relevant to the other objectives set in the strategy. The Council of Europe's Gender Equality Strategy is prepared and approved by the Gender Equality Commission and member states have to implement it and report on it. The strategy is therefore applicable to the 46 members states that are part of the Council of Europe, regardless of their ratification status of the Istanbul Convention, thus reinforcing the relevance of this Twinning Methodology.¹

Organised around three-phases with clear steps to follow, this Twinning Methodology is intended to be user-friendly and based on a learning-by-doing approach. This includes gaining new knowledge, learning from peers and exchanging good and promising practices which will enable state authorities from different public institutions to share their experiences, learn from each other, jointly reflect and apply the knowledge gained in their respective institutional settings.

Finally, this methodology provides practical recommendations and guidance on how to plan, facilitate, monitor and assess the impact of Twinning experiences on violence against women, domestic violence and gender equality based on the standards set in the Istanbul Convention.

1. The Council of Europe's Gender Equality strategy is available at: www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/gender-equality-strategy

THE TWINNING METHODOLOGY (PEER EXCHANGES)

Background and justification

The methodology outlined in the following sections is based on good and promising practices of peer-exchanges coordinated by the Council of Europe in the field of violence against women and domestic violence. It extends the outreach of the EU Twinning instrument, which was developed within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations. It also provides an important focus on violence against women and domestic violence by placing the standards set in Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, known as the Istanbul Convention, at its core. The Twinning instrument has since been widely used across Europe as a tool to enhance institutional co-operation between public administrations of EU member states and beneficiaries or partner countries across sectors.

The aim of Twinning projects is to create a space for the development and enhancement of public sector expertise in view of achieving concrete operational results at the institutional level through peer-to-peer activities.² Twinning projects also aim at enhancing the capacities of public authorities in a partner country through the training of their staff and support to the reorganisation of their structure. Twinning projects can also support the harmonisation of national laws and regulations with European and international standards, and the strengthening of multi-stakeholder dialogues and co-operation, including dialogue between the state and civil society.

The beneficiary or partner country in a Twinning project is a public administration with staff and capacity to work with an EU member state institution having a similar structure and mandate. In Twinning experiences, the beneficiary mobilises its staff, and demonstrates commitment and ownership. Additionally, the partner country takes on board changes and good practices in a sustainable way.

Twinning is not a one-way technical assistance instrument, but rather a process of mutual learning where shared commitment plays a crucial role. In this sense, Twinning is therefore a type of peer exchange. This method is a valuable approach to generate and disseminate knowledge. It also serves as a tool to facilitate institutional strengthening of the public sector, as it encourages peer countries to participate in a mutual learning process based on shared commitment, goals and expectations. Moreover, Twinning relies on the "learning-by-doing" principle and the sharing of good practices and promising experiences. Twinning projects can include a series of activities such as workshops, training sessions, expert missions, study visits, internships and provision of legal and or policy advise/recommendations.

2. EU Twinning website: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/tenders/twinning_en

The 'gold standard': the Istanbul Convention

The focus of this Methodology on the Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, known as the Istanbul Convention. This convention is a normative framework that approaches the eradication of violence against women and domestic violence as a crucial step towards achieving gender equality both *de jure* and *de facto*.

The preamble of the Istanbul Convention acknowledges that violence against women and domestic violence result from unequal power relations which are of a structural nature and further disempower women and girls, thereby hampering their social, economic and political agency. The Istanbul Convention establishes therefore that the elimination of VAW/DV should be understood in the wider context of eliminating discrimination against women and achieving gender equality. An important element of the convention is the understanding that VAW and DV are gendered phenomena. By this it is meant that in everyday life women may be subjected to violence because of their gender, that is, because they are women, and that certain forms of violence, especially domestic violence, affect women disproportionately. The convention proposes measures to ensure that preventive measures, protective and support mechanisms, as well as investigations and judicial proceedings be based on this gendered understanding of violence. The convention focuses on forms of violence that affect women more than men, including domestic violence, but it also recognises that boys and men can be victims of domestic violence.

The Istanbul Convention was opened for signature in Istanbul in 2011, and since then it has been widely acknowledged as the "gold" standard in the field of violence against women and domestic violence. To date, it is the most comprehensive international treaty to tackle VAW/DV. States are responsible for ensuring that measures are taken to achieve *de facto* gender equality and to end VAW and DV, hence the peer exchanges and institutional learning process of a Twinning methodology can clearly benefit from the measures proposed in the Istanbul Convention.

In a nutshell, the Istanbul Convention is grounded on four main pillars,³ which are:

PREVENTION	PROTECTION	PROSECUTION	CO-ORDINATED POLICIES
If a country has ratified the Istanbul Convention, it will have to take some of the following measures:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage the media and the private sector Awareness-raising campaigns Education in non-violence and equality between women and men Training professionals Challenging gender stereotypes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that the safety and needs of victims and witnesses is at the heart of all protective measures adopted by a country. Guarantee the rights of victims, including information on their rights, support services, access to regional and international complaints mechanisms, shelters, rape crisis or sexual violence centres, free telephone helplines 24/7, respecting the rights and needs of child witnesses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guarantee that law enforcement and judicial proceedings include: Dissuasive sanctions for perpetrators, effective public prosecution, consideration of aggravating circumstances, existence of legislation criminalising violence against women, effective police investigation. Guarantee the rights of victims, including: Protection of child victims and witnesses, no victim-blaming, victims' right to privacy and their protection during investigation and judicial proceedings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inter-agency co-operation Support and work with civil society and NGOs Co-ordinate action and monitor implementation Human rights-based policies Funding for policies and services Comprehensive legislation and gender-sensitive policies Research and data collection

3. For a more detailed list of the requirements under the 4 pillars of the Istanbul Convention, see this brochure: www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/home

This Twinning methodology therefore seeks to promote the standards set in the Istanbul Convention and act as a sustainable tool to support countries in their promotion of gender equality and the elimination of VAW/DV through peer exchanges.

The Twinning Methodology: objectives

This pioneering Twinning Methodology aims to create and/or reinforce a community of practice on VAW/DV and gender equality, based on the standards set in the Istanbul Convention, that can inspire and mobilise state authorities in peer countries to participate in a shared learning process in these areas and apply the learnings in their respective functions and institutional settings.

The objective of this Twinning methodology is therefore three-fold:

- ▶ to provide guidelines and tools on how to develop peer exchanges among state authorities in the field of violence against women and domestic violence and gender equality focusing on improving frameworks of preventing and combating VAW/DV in line with the Istanbul Convention and other gender equality standards;
- ▶ to enhance the capacities of state authorities to design, implementation and evaluation of peer exchanges on violence against women, domestic violence and gender equality standards, including how to pair countries and how to develop tailor-made approaches to their specific needs;
- ▶ to support the sharing, dissemination and upscaling of peer learning results, including good and promising practices on preventing and combating violence against women, domestic violence and setting gender equality standards. This is in line with one of the key principles of Twinning, namely, to improve national legislation and policies relevant to these areas, including their harmonisation with the Istanbul Convention and other international gender equality standards.

THE TWINNING MODEL: PHASES, STEPS AND TOOLS

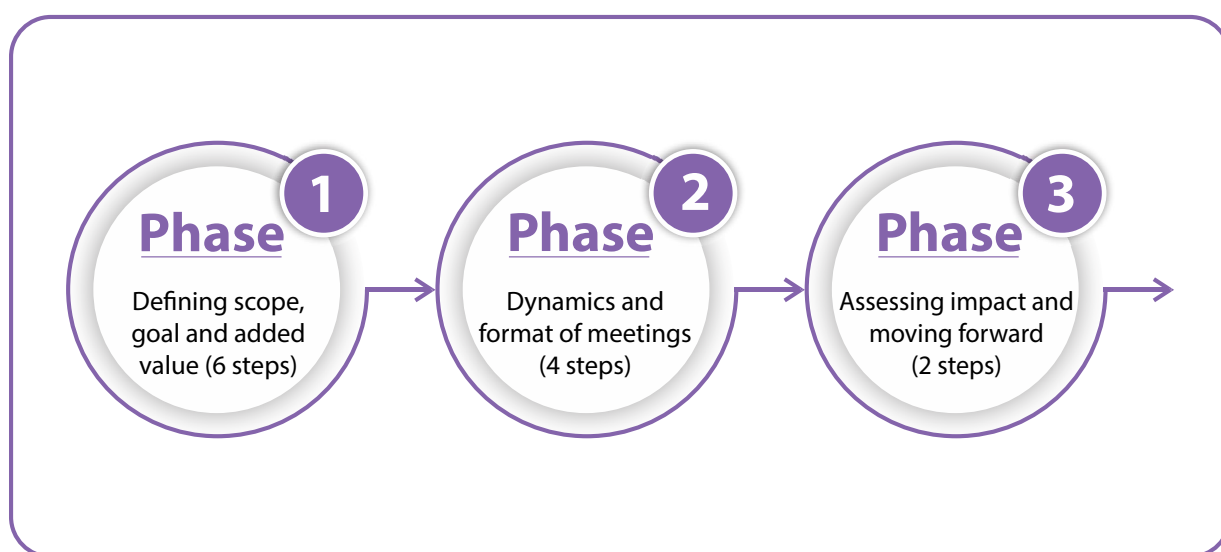
The twinning model presented in the following sections is based on good and promising practices of peer-exchanges undertaken in the framework of Council of Europe projects, as well as on the EU Twinning instrument, which was developed within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations. It follows three specific phases. Each phase includes specific steps and guidance for their implementation.

Three important aspects should be considered when designing a Twinning project on violence against women, domestic violence and gender equality.

- ▶ They should be flexible and adapted to the needs and priorities of participating countries (peers);
- ▶ peer learning outcomes (results) are most effective when objectives are jointly defined, clearly outlined and peer engagement is ensured; and
- ▶ peer exchanges maximise peer learning outcomes when peers not only undertake jointly planned activities but are also engaged in a process of joint reflection on what they are learning and its possible applications in their respective institutional settings.

Consistent with the principles outlined earlier, the Twinning model proposed is to be considered as an example of how the Twinning project could be designed and implemented. Depending on contextual realities, and due to the need for shared commitment and goals that distinguish Twinning projects in general, state authorities engaged in peer exchanges could consider adjusting the phases, the steps and the tools proposed.

Fig. 1: The Twinning on VAW/DV and gender standards: a roadmap



As shown in Figure 1 above, the three phases of the Twinning model proposed combine into a peer learning step-by-step roadmap. This step-by-step roadmap is outlined in the following sections.

Phase 1: Defining the scope, goals and added value of the Twinning experience

Step 1: Why do I need a twinning on VAW/DV and gender equality? What would I like to achieve?

These are crucial questions in a Twinning process. These questions will help you identify the reason why you may consider engaging in peer exchanges on VAW/DV and gender equality. In a similar way, it is important to think about your expectations and the added value that a peer exchange would bring to your work. The box below lists some basic questions to consider for your own engagement. They have been designed to help you assess the nature and scope of your commitment in the peer exchange. Peer commitment is an important element of ownership in Twinning experiences, and it can also facilitate sustained peer engagement.

Guiding questions:

1. Why does my department/unit need a Twinning project?
2. What would be our reasons for engaging in a Twinning on VAW/DV and gender equality, including the CoE's Istanbul Convention?
3. What would be the added value for us to exchange on gender equality and/or the Istanbul Convention?
4. What would my department/unit like to achieve (our goal) when it comes to our mandate related to VAW/DV and gender equality?
5. What knowledge gaps would I like to fill in through this Twinning experience?
6. What could I and/or my department/unit contribute with?
7. Why would we want to engage with peers on this specific Twinning?
8. What would be the added value of engaging with other peers in this Twinning in relation to gender equality and/or implementing the standards of the Istanbul Convention?
9. What would be some of the challenges for our engagement in the peer exchanges?
10. Is there an ongoing peer experience in my country in the area of gender equality and/or VAW/DV or in other policy areas with which synergies could be established?
11. Is there a peer network on VAW/DV and gender equality in my country from which this Twinning could benefit?

Step 2: Mapping key state/public authorities and their competences

Identifying the relevant state institutions within your country and their competencies is important to then mapping out their knowledge gaps, needs and priorities (step 3). A first step would be to define the dimensions that you would need to include in this mapping. Some relevant dimensions are:

- ▶ level of competence: national, regional, local;
- ▶ area of competence with regards to the three interrelated areas (violence against women, domestic violence, gender equality);
- ▶ position: high or middle management level; years in institution, level of decision-making power (important for the post-Twinning dissemination work);
- ▶ respective mandates of their institutions, in case there is more than one institution involved from one state and their functions are somehow similar;
- ▶ status on implementation of activities to prevent violence against women, domestic violence and to promote gender equality standards, including the Istanbul Convention.

Step 3. Assessing needs and how to do it - Guiding questions

Once the relevant national authorities have been identified, you may need to find out the gaps, needs and priorities of your country's authorities.

The questionnaire below will help you in this exercise. This questionnaire will provide you with an overview of efforts made by state authorities in implementing legislative and normative frameworks related to preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, and promoting gender equality, in addition to results achieved and challenges encountered. In a similar way, it will also help you become more familiar with peers' expectations regarding the peer exchanges.

These questions can be shared with your country's authorities. The idea behind this scoping is to jointly explore the common needs and challenges.

Template and guiding questions for needs assessment

1. Name:
2. Position:
3. State entity (Ministry/Committee/Agency, Unit, other):

1. Which activities related to preventing and combating violence against women, domestic violence (VAW/DV) and promoting gender equality standards have you been able to undertake (e.g. awareness-raising activities, capacity-building of government officials, legislative reviews, other)? What specific results were achieved?
2. What were the key challenges encountered when implementing these activities?
3. What types of resources (human, financial, technical) are currently in place to help build institutional staff's awareness and capacity related to preventing and combating VAW/DV and promoting gender equality, in line with international standards, including the Istanbul Convention?
4. What would be your expectations from the peer-to-peer exchanges in the field of VAW/DV? What would you like to obtain from it (at individual level)? What would your institution gain from it (added value)?
5. Which aspects of violence against women, domestic violence and gender equality would you like to know about most?
6. Which specific areas of your work would you expect to improve by engaging in peer exchanges on VAW/DV and gender equality (please mention three)?

Step 4: Setting criteria for selection of potential peer countries

Setting the criteria for the selection of potential peer countries is an important step in peer exchanges, as it can help build a more solid basis for shared learning on how to enhance implementation of normative frameworks related to VAW/DV and gender equality. Considering the thematic scope of this Twinning methodology, the following set of criteria may help you:

1. Countries which have ratified the Istanbul Convention.
2. Countries which could provide good or promising practices in preventing and combating violence against women, domestic violence and gender equality.
3. Countries with strong prevention, protection, prosecution and co-ordinated policies systems.
4. Countries with a record of implementing capacity-building for state authorities to develop or improve national legislation and policies in line with CoE and other international standards on preventing and combating VAW/DV, including the Istanbul Convention.

You may also wish to consult with your own country’s authorities. In this case, you may wish to add the following questions to the needs’ assessment forms:

- In your view, which countries could be included in the peer-to-peer exchanges, for example, countries which could provide good or promising practices in preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence and promoting gender equality standards?
 - Please, name three countries in order of priority to your institution: 1) high priority; 2) medium priority; 3) low priority. Thanks for explaining briefly why they would be of added value to you..
- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

It is important to note that by asking other public institutions within your own country, you are taking steps to ensure ownership of the Twinning process from the outset.

Step 5: Understanding other countries’ context, policy and normative settings

One of the driving factors for successful Twinning experiences is the understanding of the context, policy and normative settings of other peer authorities taking part in the exchanges. A shared understanding of the policy and normative settings of peer countries implies taking stock of factors and actors that enable or hamper progress towards desired outcomes regarding VAW/DV and gender equality in the other countries.

You may wish to consider planning a short working session to share views and analysis of peer countries’ context, policy and normative settings. Some relevant questions to facilitate joint analysis and learning in this specific step would be:

1. What is the national legal and policy framework to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence in the other countries?
2. In what way is it in line with the Istanbul Convention and other international gender equality standards (for example the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women - CEDAW)?
3. Where are the challenges and gaps that may need to be considered in the Twinning experience?

Step 6: Identifying and mapping topics for a Twinning on VAW/DV and gender equality.

The mapping exercise consists of a selection of topics that bear significance to your own institution as well as other relevant authorities in your country. These topics can be selected based on what other authorities in your country may have stated in the needs’ assessments (see step 3). You may also consider sending a direct message to colleagues or other institutions in your own country containing the following question:

Which specific topics in on VAW/DV and gender equality, including specific articles of the Istanbul Convention would you like to see included in the peer exchanges? Please mention three and in order of priority: 1) highly important; 2) moderately important; 3) less important:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

The list below shows examples of potential topics that may be relevant in the three interrelated areas of this Twinning Methodology: violence against women, domestic violence, and gender equality. However, they need to be considered indicative, as the selection of topics would need to be made by you and your country's authorities and your peers during the needs' assessment exercise, and in accordance with your respective institutional settings, gaps in knowledge and competencies.

Topic 1: National laws, policies and programmes to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence (and harmonisation with international standards).

Topic 2: Support services for victims of violence (VAW/DV), including shelters for women victims/survivors of violence (measures to improve and expand existing networks).

Topic 3: Methodologies for data collection, analysis and reporting of complaints, investigations, prosecutions and convictions of cases of domestic and sexual violence (disaggregated by sex, age, urban and rural areas, disaggregated based on data of perpetrators i.e. offender, among others).

Topic 4: Mechanisms to improve protection and prevention measures (e.g. national helpline/hotlines, online platforms that would speed up and facilitate the delivery of information about violence in order to prevent violence against women and domestic violence).

Topic 5: Co-ordination mechanisms to oversee the implementation of laws on violence against women and domestic violence law and related gender equality policies.

It is recommended that other authorities in your country take part in the final selection of topics. Importantly, selection of topics by peers ensures ownership of the Twinning process and can lead to better learning outcomes (results) and higher level of dissemination of peer-to-peer gains (at country level) after the peer exchanges.

Phase 2: The dynamics and format of the Twinning peer-to-peer exchanges

Usually the exchange of practical experience among peers in different countries is limited. Based on this need, targeted Twinning projects should focus on experiences and methodologies for addressing specific issues. They are expected to leverage the varying levels of practical knowledge in selected area. The aim is to enhance the practical capacity of stakeholders on specific issues.

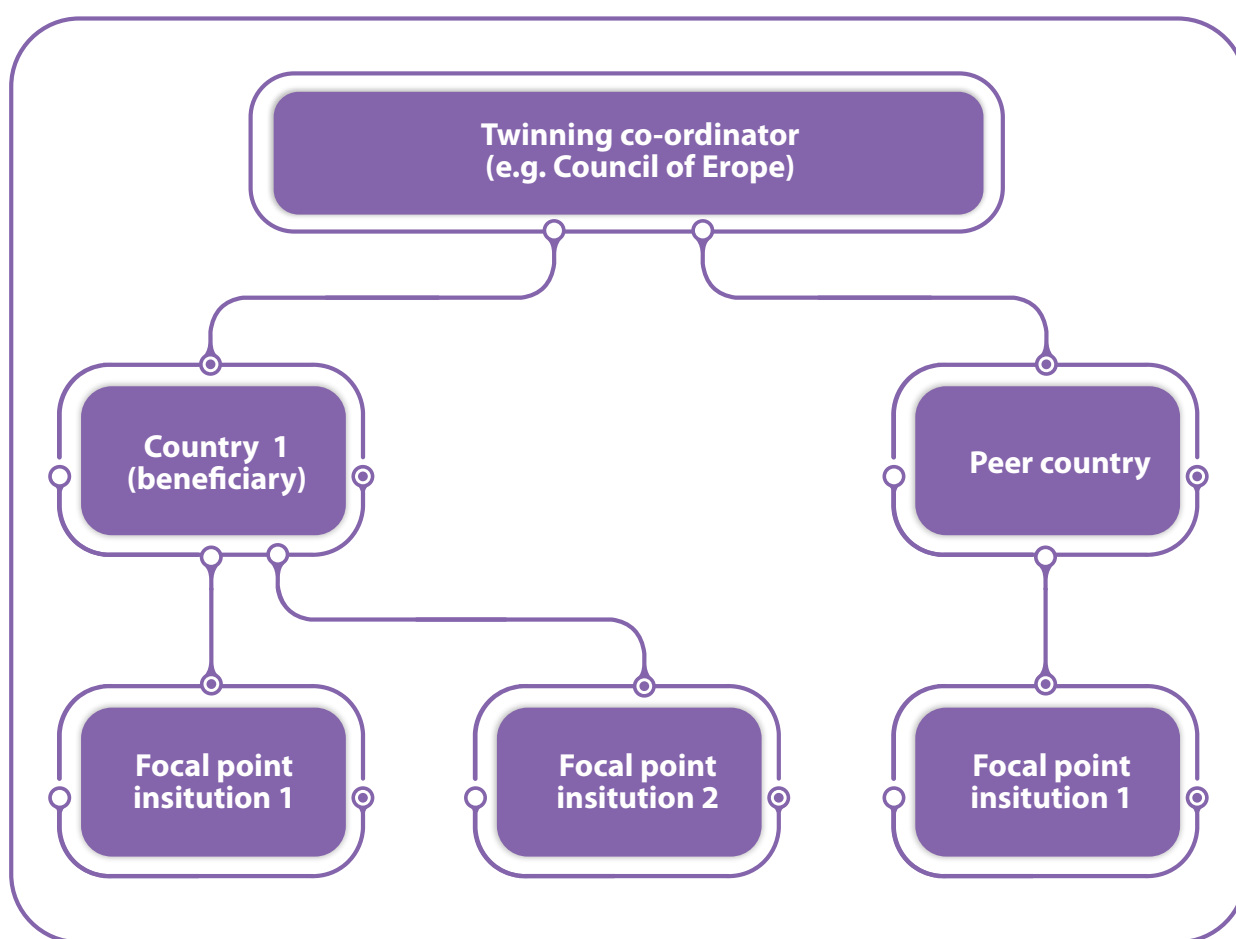
Each Twinning project should designate a local facilitator to co-ordinate the overall process. In order to get the most out of meetings, the facilitators should be requested to focus both on the process and on the content, to prepare a structured setup for the meetings, to create inclusive dialogue, and to use visual and physical materials whenever possible. Participatory meetings allow the involved actors to be engaged in discussions and gather necessary information from peers.

However, if the situation does not allow for travel, such as during the COVID-19 times, the exchange programme can use various online platforms which feature enhanced meeting functions, such as allowing for breakout rooms. The materials should be shared in advance for review, meeting priorities should be set, and a clear meeting agenda should be communicated. Peer organisers should keep meetings short, ideally no more than 45-60 minutes per session. The agenda should include a significant amount of time for discussions and questions and answers sessions (Q&A). Materials should be shared 1-2 weeks before the exchanges. Lastly, a summary of the meeting together with a synthesis of the discussions should be shared with the participants as a follow-up.

Step 1: Getting to know each other, building common ground for understanding, and setting shared objectives and outcomes

Prior to the start of the Twinning, a co-ordination team consisting of a focal point from each one of the represented institutions (initiating country and peer country) should meet with the authorities who will be the beneficiaries of the Twinning project in an initial meeting. The main requirements for taking part in the co-ordination team are having members who have some expertise on the topic, and ideally be external, for example, a representative from the Council of Europe. The participating authorities involved need to have the necessary set of skills and competencies to contribute to the learning process. The main purpose would be to get to know each other better, to go through the Twinning and agree on the next steps. Such a meeting could be beneficial for all actors as it would help all sides to be on the same, and to come up with joint targets (objectives) and expected outcomes (results) until the end of the Twinning project. These preparatory meetings can be done online or in person, depending on the possibilities at the time of implementation of the Twinning. The pre-twinning surveys will be used in the preparatory meetings of the co-ordination team.

Fig. 2: Twinning co-ordination team setup



Step 2: Preparing a joint work plan and a timeframe

Guidance on the planning, facilitation and monitoring of the Twinning meetings

The Twinning co-ordination team consisting of focal points who represent each participating institution from both the beneficiary and peer country should prepare a collaborative plan of action with detailed timeframes and responsible actors (the work plan). The work plan should mostly foresee short-term exchanges, training events, and awareness-raising visits. It should be reviewed on a regular basis and revisions made as necessary (frequency of revisions will depend on the length of the Twinning project, e.g. once a month). The document should set the tone for planning the activities, for facilitating the sessions and for monitoring the meetings and activities that will be implemented under the Twinning project.

Learning-by-doing and sharing experiences

The guiding principles of Twinning experiences are “learning by doing”, sharing of good and promising practices and lessons learned. The Twinning can foresee a number of activities including workshops, training sessions, expert missions, study visits, internships and provision of advice, depending on availability of resources and the capacity of absorption by the beneficiaries.

If offered during the COVID-19 times, due to the virtual nature of the Twinning activities, sessions should be highly interactive, as online learning reduces intervals of concentration and motivation. Each session should not be longer than 45 minutes and should include short tea/coffee breaks. Tools used in online sessions can vary and can include a mix to keep motivation and concentration going, for example:

- short PowerPoints;
- short inspirational videos;
- quizzes or polls;
- Q&A chat features
- individual “pitches” (short presentations) on lessons learnt and good practices for collective knowledge-building.

Online format

Various videoconferencing platforms can be used if the activities cannot be carried out face-to-face. These platforms should have the necessary functionality for the requirements of the concrete activity, such as break-out sessions, and allowing for sharing of presentations and videos.

A mix of small work-out groups and plenary sessions can contribute to building common understanding and agreeing on joint action points to be taken further. One internal facilitator per group could ensure active participation from involved state authorities. It is recommended that each break out group chooses one rapporteur who later presents the results of group discussions in plenary.

Videoconferencing platforms should be tested before the activity to ensure that it is suitable and that it provides the necessary tools and means to guarantee interactive online possibilities adapted to the specific activity, and time for connection checks should be given at the beginning of each activity.

Step 3: How to sustain peer engagement

It is important to motivate peers and sustain their engagement throughout the whole duration of the Twinning project. This can be done by facilitating communication between peers, ensuring that agendas for meetings and visits and other relevant activities allow for an easy interaction. The needs and aspirations of peers should be reconsidered whenever necessary, and adjustments should be regularly made to keep the participants as engaged as possible.

It is more difficult to keep the beneficiaries concentrated on the learning process when the medium of instruction is online, rather than face-to-face. For this reason, the Twinning co-ordination team should ensure that participants are not overwhelmed with excessive and lengthy sessions, and that there is an interval between meetings, so that they can absorb what they have shared and can reflect on what they have learned. In between those peer engagement sessions, the co-ordination team might organise meetings to discuss what has been learned and how the beneficiaries plan to implement the learnings in their daily work.

Building trust among peers is another important element, as it facilitates sustained peer engagement. Some tools which peers could use to build trust and confidence could be

- ▶ joint online peer needs assessment;
- ▶ joint peer reflection on a selected topic which has been previously identified as being of common interest;
- ▶ peer-produced knowledge products on the key topics selected;
- ▶ training sessions, workshops or seminars (online and in person);
- ▶ online networking (on an ad hoc basis)..

Guiding questions

The Twinning co-ordinator (e.g. Council of Europe) should prepare a check list of questions to guide the learning process and to constantly keep the participants engaged in the process. Some sample questions include:

1. What is the most important thing you have learned today?
2. How well did you and your team communicate today?
3. How did you help the other peers during this process?
4. Based on your learning, what would you do differently if you were to approach the same problem again?
5. How can you better support and encourage your teammates on future initiatives and projects related to gender equality and/or VAW/DV?

Step 4: Format and working modalities for meetings (presentations, questionnaires, online break-out groups, reporting templates, etc)

All presentations made from both beneficiary and peer country representatives involved in a Twinning should be requested to ensure presentations are kept short and to keep the sessions as engaging as possible. This can be done through face-to-face/online break-out groups, if the number of participants is large. If not, the whole group can take part in interactive discussions during the sessions. In order to find out what the participants have learned, what they liked about the session, how they would like the following sessions to be improved, the co-ordination team should introduce short surveys right after the sessions (see Annex 2). Survey answers should be used to help the co-ordination team of the initiating country representatives re-adjust upcoming sessions to the learning needs of the participants.

Phase 3: Assessing impact of learning outcomes and moving forward

Impact is a long-term change directly resulting from the outcomes of a programme. It is usually difficult to measure, especially in the short term; however, efforts can be made to assess potential impact. By doing so, we can understand whether current strategies have contributed to the overall goal. We can also evaluate the effectiveness of Twinning projects, i.e. the degree of success of the project in achieving its goals.

Step 1: How to assess impact of the activities and of the overall Twinning project

The co-ordination team should request peer countries participating in the Twinning to complete pre-Twinning activity surveys right before the intervention (see Annex 1). The answers allow the co-ordination team to find out what kind of knowledge and skills the peers have at the beginning and what they are mostly interested in learning more about. The answers should also be summarised and shared with the peer country representatives, so that they too can adjust their materials and themes around the needs of the beneficiary countries.

At the end of the sessions, the participants should submit post-Twinning activity surveys (Annex 2). The answers will enable the co-ordination team to understand what the participants have learned, what they have found most and least useful and, most importantly, how they plan to use this new set of knowledge and skills in their daily work.

At the end of the Twinning project, participants should also be asked to assess the work of the co-ordination team, the Twinning project in general, the logistical arrangements, the learning process, etc.

Step 2: What do I take forward within my department/unit/institution/ministry and why?

Guiding questions for building a strategy for implementing of what was learnt.

The main objective of having a strategy to put into practice what was learned during the Twinning project (outcomes) is to be able guide the actions that will be taken by the participating institutions after the Twinning, and to use the knowledge and skills acquired.

At the end of the Twinning project, institutions and ministries involved in the peer exchanges should be requested to submit what they have learned in the process, how it will help them to refine their programmes and how they plan to specifically use the Twinning project in their respective institutions and/or for possible inter-agency work. Good practice would be to do this by means of drafting a strategy.

Some guiding questions for your strategy may include:

What knowledge and skills did you acquire in the topic/s selected?

Topic 1: National laws, policies and programmes to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence (and harmonisation with international standard s).

Example of knowledge/skills: better knowledge of international standards; identification of areas missing in the national law, policies or programmes; better understanding of gender sensitive policies.

Topic 2: Support services for victims of violence (VAW/DV), including shelters for women victims/survivors of violence (measures to improve and expand existing networks).

Examples of knowledge/skills: better understanding of the Istanbul Convention requirements for gender-sensitive victim-centred services; areas where co-operation among different agencies can be strengthened and how; means of co-operation with civil society.

Topic 3: Methodologies for data collection, analysis and reporting of complaints, investigations, prosecutions and convictions of cases of domestic and sexual violence (disaggregated by sex, age, urban and rural areas, disaggregated based on data of perpetrators i.e. offender, among others).

Examples of knowledge/skills: better understanding of the Istanbul Convention requirements; sex disaggregation, data categories and methodologies; how to increase co-operation and alignment of data between different agencies.

Topic 4: Mechanisms to improve protection and prevention measures (e.g. national helpline/hotlines, online platforms that would speed up and facilitate the delivery of information about violence in order to prevent violence against women and domestic violence).

Examples of knowledge/skills: what preventive means can be used in the country to prevent VAW/DV and promoting zero tolerance to VAW/DV; co-operation with civil society for awareness-raising.

Topic 5: Co-ordination mechanisms to oversee the implementation of laws on violence against women and domestic violence law and related gender equality policies.

Examples of knowledge/skills: areas where co-operation among different agencies can be strengthened and how; how to make the national coordinating body better deliver its mandate and/or how to set up a national coordinating body if it does not exist.

How do you plan to use this knowledge?

Examples: legal or policy revisions, training initiatives, round tables with relevant stakeholders, etc.

What are the steps that you will need to take to realise your desired goals, which were stated when the questionnaires were filled (step 1)?

Examples: plans to disseminate the knowledge gained in your department/unit and across relevant institutions, plans to engage stakeholders to make the legal/policy changes identified, etc.

Preparing an implementation strategy could be highly beneficial to co-ordinate efforts across institutions to apply lessons learned from the Twinning experiences and promote the change that was sought prior to engaging in the Twinning.

CONCLUSION

The Twinning Methodology proposed in this document has been designed to support efforts by state authorities and their peers to better respond to the urgent need to eradicate violence against women in all its forms, including domestic violence. The pervasive prevalence of violence against women has made this an urgent priority for states and the institutions responsible for ensuring gender equality. The Twinning Methodology was designed as a tool to implement the provisions of the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention because the convention offers a solid and comprehensive framework to eradicate violence against women and promote gender equality.

The three phases of this Twinning Methodology (namely *Defining scope, goal and added value; Dynamics and format of the Twinning peer-to-peer exchanges; and Assessing impact and moving forward*) can act as a useful tool for state authorities and their peers to enhance their work in preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, and to promote gender equality in their overall work, based on the main existing standards in this field, in particular, the Istanbul Convention.

GOOD AND PROMISING PRACTICES OF PEER-EXCHANGES UNDERTAKEN IN THE FIELD OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND GENDER EQUALITY

Georgia

Title	Preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence in Georgia
Type of activity	Study visits to peer countries and working meeting for legal professionals (domestic peer exchange meeting)
Description	<p>The exchanges mentioned below were part of the Council of Europe project “Preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence in Georgia.” The project was implemented between 2018-2019. It aimed at strengthening the capacity of key stakeholders involved in preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.</p> <p>The project included several peer exchanges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <p>■ Study visit to Spain: On 6-7 June 2018, a group of 9 (5 women and 4 men) prosecutors and staff members of the Chief Prosecutor’s Office and the Human Rights Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs participated in a peer-to-peer exchange visit to Spain, on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. The evaluation forms from the visit showed that all the participants found it to be very useful for their ongoing and future work. All participants reported that they learned new insights and practical ideas which they can apply in their work.</p> <p>■ Study visit to Sweden: On 18–19 June 2019, 10 (9 women, 1 man) prosecutors, inspectors, judges and other public officials participated in a peer exchange visit to Sweden to learn about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Swedish laws, policies and programmes to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence; – effective investigation and prosecution of crimes; – data collection and data analysis systems; – support services for victims of violence; and – the Swedish experience of the Istanbul Convention monitoring process by the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO). <p>■ Domestic peer exchanges: On 30 November 2018, a working meeting for 20 legal professionals (lawyers, prosecutors, judges, etc. – 14 women and 6 men) was organised to promote co-operation on dealing with cases of violence against women and domestic violence along the justice chain, as required by the Istanbul Convention. The meeting was the first of its kind organised in Georgia and participants found it extremely useful. Based on the meeting evaluation feedback, all participants wished for similar meetings to be organised in future and more time should be devoted for strengthening collaboration between legal professionals to enhance multi-agency co-operation. Gaps identified in the discussions guided the planning of similar kinds of workshop meetings in 2019 under the Council of Europe project.</p>

Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To learn about Swedish laws, policies and programmes to prevent and combat VAW/DV; effective investigation and prosecution of crimes of VAW/DV; data collection and data analysis system in the areas of VAW/DV; support services for victims of violence; Swedish experience of the GREVIO monitoring process; 2. to facilitate peer-to-peer exchanges of experiences and promising practices among the Swedish and Georgian authorities on the abovementioned topics; 3. to facilitate establishing contacts with the Swedish authorities, in case of potential future co-operation.
Beneficiary institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Georgian Chief Prosecutor’s Office • The Georgian Public Defender’s Office • The Georgian Supreme Court <p>The project additionally co-operated with different state institutions, non-governmental organisations and international and donor organisations working in the field of combating violence against women and domestic violence.</p>
Results achieved	<p>Based on the feedback gathered from the two study visits, 88% of participants who provided feedback increased their skills and knowledge and stated that they would use the knowledge gained in their work.</p> <p>With regard to both visits, and the working meeting with legal professionals, a total of 49 key law enforcement and legal professionals participated in capacity-building training and peer-to-peer exchanges, which increased their knowledge about the Istanbul Convention and the prevention of violence against women and domestic violence.</p>
Timeframe	June – November 2019
Link to the project	<p>https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/preventing-and-combating-violence-against-women-in-georgia</p> <p>https://www.coe.int/en/web/tbilisi/-/georgian-authorities-visited-spain-to-exchange-views-on-combating-violence-against-women</p>

Croatia

Title	Support to gender equality in Croatia
Description	<p>The main goal of this project was to exchange knowledge and good experiences between the Governmental Office for Gender Equality of the Republic of Croatia and the National Institute for Health and Welfare of the Republic of Finland. This Twinning project aimed at enhancing the institutional capacities of state authorities for co-ordinated implementation, monitoring and evaluation of national and international gender equality principles, and to raise public awareness and trust in the capacities of the Republic of Croatia to protect citizens from gender-based discrimination.</p> <p>In addition, the project aimed at strengthening the efficiency of the Croatian judiciary related to gender-based discrimination and co-operation with the Judicial Academy. The purpose was to secure advancement in gender mainstreaming of policies and elimination of gender-based discrimination at all levels.</p>

Objectives	<p>The expected outcomes of this project were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased public awareness on gender equality and human rights protection through public campaigns and active involvement of the media; • establishing a gender-sensitive public administration; • increased level of activity and visibility of members of the national institutional mechanism within their institutions; • Strengthened co-operation of the national institutional mechanism for gender equality and other relevant stakeholders; • enhanced professional capacities, competences and knowledge of the judiciary in the area of implementation of the gender equality legislation and their efficiency.
Beneficiary institutions	Croatian national institutional mechanism for gender equality, which consists of the Governmental Office for Gender Equality, the Gender Equality Ombudsman, the Parliamentary Committee for Gender Equality, coordinators for gender equality in state administration bodies and offices as well as local (municipal/towns and county) committees for gender equality.
Results achieved	<p>In line with set objectives, the project achieved the following outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the institutional mechanisms for gender equality and efficiency of judiciary in the area of gender-based discrimination were strengthened; • raising public awareness on gender equality was achieved through a public campaign that involved the distribution of audio-clip on radio stations, 1,500 posters in public transport and business buildings, street actions involving public persons and the active role of the media. • Gender sensitivity in public administration was achieved through the following activities: capacity-building for more than 200 representatives about the gender perspective in the work of state and local bodies, using a training manual, and a study visit to Finland in order to share and transfer good practices at the public administration level.
Timeframe	05/2016-07/2017
Link to the project	https://bim.lbg.ac.at/en/project/completed-projects-projects-womens-rights-projects-eunip-projects-twinning-eunip-projects-croatia-projects-antidiscrimination/croatia-support-gender-equality-twinning
Link to the results achieved	https://www.safu.hr/en/news/twinning-project-final-event-support-to-the-gender-equality

Russian Federation

Title	Co-operation on the implementation of the Russian Federation National Action Strategy for Women 2017–2022
Description	<p>A study visit to Sweden was undertaken under the framework of the project “Co-operation on the implementation of the Russian Federation National Action Strategy for Women, 2017-2022”, implemented in the period 2019-2020.</p> <p>Altogether, 19 participants from the took part in the study visit. These included representatives of relevant ministries, shelters and civil society.</p>
Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To learn about Swedish laws, policies, programmes to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence, and support services for victims of violence; 2. to facilitate peer-to-peer exchanges of experiences and promising practices among the Swedish and Russian authorities on the abovementioned topics.
Beneficiary institutions	Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Russian Federation, High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
Results achieved	Based on data from the evaluation surveys, participants found the study visits useful. 89% of participants stated that they had gained new knowledge and 100% stated that they would use the new knowledge in their work.
Timeframe	25–28 November 2019
Link to the project:	https://www.coe.int/en/web/moscow/-/project-launch-co-operation-on-the-implementation-of-the-russian-federation-national-action-strategy-for-women-2017-2022-

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND USEFUL LINKS

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ANNEXES

- I Twinning pre-training survey
- II Twinning post-training survey

ANNEX I

TWINNING PROJECT ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND GENDER EQUALITY STANDARDS: PRE-TRAINING SURVEY

Dear Madam/Sir,

On [date here], you will participate in a Twinning activity organised within the framework of the [Title] project. The main purpose of the survey is to collect your views and suggestions on how to improve the Twinning Methodology on VAW/DV and related gender equality standards.

We would like to ask you to fill in this pre-training survey, which will help us identify your views on the usefulness of attending this event, expectations from the learning experience as well as any follow-up you envisage after this event. The survey is anonymous. The data will be processed only by the co-ordination team for evaluation purposes.

Gender:

- a) *Female*
- b) *Male*
- c) *Other*

Age group:

- a) *<30*
- b) *30-40*
- c) *41-50*
- d) *50<*

Working experience in your institution/organisation

_____years

1. Have you ever attended trainings related to violence against women, domestic violence and other gender equality related standards, including the Istanbul Convention?

- a) *yes*
- b) *no*

1.a. if yes, mention the title of the most recent training, the main topic(s) and the organiser (please mention up to 2 if more)

2. In your opinion what is the best way to raise awareness about violence against women and domestic violence?

3. How would you assess your knowledge on the underlying factors and structural causes of gender inequality, violence against women and domestic violence?

- 1 cannot assess
- 2 poor knowledge
- 3 average knowledge
- 4 above average knowledge
- 5 advanced knowledge

4. How would you assess your knowledge related to the Istanbul Convention? (please tick the appropriate box)

- 1 cannot assess
- 2 poor knowledge
- 3 average knowledge
- 4 above average knowledge
- 5 advanced knowledge

5. How would you assess your knowledge on other international gender equality standards?

- 1 cannot assess
- 2 poor knowledge
- 3 average knowledge
- 4 above average knowledge
- 5 advanced knowledge

6. How would you assess your knowledge on mechanisms to ensure prosecution of perpetrators of violence, especially of domestic violence?

- 1 cannot assess
- 2 poor knowledge
- 3 average knowledge
- 4 above average knowledge
- 5 advanced knowledge

7. How important is the role of your institution/organisation in fighting violence against women and domestic violence?

- 1 Not at all important
- 2 Slightly important
- 3 Moderately important
- 4 Very important
- 5 Extremely important

8. Are you personally interested in learning more about the key topics of this Twinning, namely VAW/DV and European or international gender equality standards, including the Istanbul Convention?

- 1 *not interested*
- 2 *slightly interested*
- 3 *moderately interested*
- 4 *very interested*
- 5 *Extremely interested*

8.a. If yes, what topics in particular are you interested in?

9. What are your expectations from the forthcoming Twinning activity (for ex. training seminar, study visit, workshop)?

10. How do you intend to follow-up on the activity and implement the gained knowledge and skills in your daily work? (Please list three concrete actions or activities that you may consider undertaking)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

ANNEX II

TWINNING PROJECT ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND GENDER EQUALITY STANDARDS: POST-TRAINING SURVEY

Dear Madam/Sir,

On [date here], you will participate in a Twinning activity organised within the framework of the [.....] project. The main purpose of the survey is to collect your views and suggestions on how to improve the Twinning Methodology.

We would like to ask you to fill in this post-twinning survey, which will help us identify your views on the usefulness of having attended this activity, expectations from the learning experience from your participation, as well as any follow-up you envisage after this activity. The survey is anonymous. The data will be processed only by the co-ordination team for evaluation purposes.

We thank you in advance for taking 20 minutes of your time to provide us with valuable feedback.

Gender:

- d) *Female*
- e) *Male*
- f) *Other*

Age group:

- e) *<30*
- f) *30-40*
- g) *41-50*
- h) *50<*

Working experience in your institution/organisation

_____ years

1. **Has your knowledge related to the Istanbul Convention increased? (please tick the appropriate box)**
 - 1 remained the same*
 - 2 slightly increased*
 - 3 significantly increased*

2. **Has your knowledge of other international gender equality standards increased?**
 - 1 remained the same*
 - 2 slightly increased*
 - 3 significantly increased*

3. **How would you assess your knowledge on how to provide redress mechanisms to victims of violence, especially victims of domestic violence, to ensure persecution of perpetrators and to prevent violence?**

- 1 *cannot assess*
- 2 *poor knowledge*
- 3 *average knowledge*
- 4 *above average knowledge*
- 5 *advanced knowledge*

4. **Has your knowledge on the underlying factors and structural causes of gender inequality, violence against women and domestic violence increased?**

- 1 *remained the same*
- 2 *slightly increased*
- 3 *significantly increased*

5. **How pleased are you with the programme, content and learning from the workshop?**

- 1 *Very dissatisfied*
- 2 *Moderately dissatisfied*
- 3 *Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied*
- 4 *moderately satisfied*
- 5 *Very satisfied*

5.a. **Please explain your choice.**

6. **Which sessions/activities did you attend? (please indicate date, session number and title)**

7. **How satisfied are you with this session/activity?**

- 1 *Very dissatisfied*
- 2 *Moderately dissatisfied*
- 3 *Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied*
- 4 *moderately satisfied*
- 5 *Very satisfied*

7.a. **Please explain your choice.**

8. **To which extent did the activity/event contribute to increasing your knowledge of international frameworks on VAW, DV and gender equality, including the Istanbul Convention?**

- 1 *not at all*
- 2 *slightly*
- 3 *moderately*
- 4 *considerably*
- 5 *completely*

9. **To what extent did the activity contribute to enhancing your capacities on ways to apply and implement European frameworks on VAW, DV and gender equality, including the Istanbul Convention?**

- 1 *not at all*
- 2 *slightly*
- 3 *moderately*
- 4 *considerably*
- 5 *completely*

10. **To what extent did the activity meet your expectations?**

- 1 *Very dissatisfied*
- 2 *Moderately dissatisfied*
- 3 *Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied*
- 4 *moderately satisfied*
- 5 *Very satisfied*

11.a. **Please explain your choice.**

11. **Which elements of the activity/event did you find most useful for your work?**

12. **How do you intend to implement the gained knowledge and skills in your daily work?**

13. **Are you personally interested in learning more about the topics included in the activity/ event?**

- 1 *not interested*
- 2 *slightly interested*
- 3 *moderately interested*
- 4 *very interested*
- 5 *Extremely interested*

14. **What improvements would you make to the activities/sessions in which you participated?**

This tool aims to promote peer exchanges across institutions in the field of violence against women, domestic violence and gender equality and based on the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, known as the Istanbul Convention. It puts forward practical steps that government institutions can take in order to encourage exchanges among peers about good or promising practices and to improve legislation and policy in the field of violence against women, domestic violence and gender equality. This tool is also available for every country to use, irrespective where it stands as regards ratification of the Istanbul Convention – it seeks to promote practices that will support any member state wishing to better prevent and combat violence against women and to protect the rights of women in its territory.

The Member States of the European Union have decided to link together their know-how, resources and destinies. Together, they have built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development whilst maintaining cultural diversity, tolerance and individual freedoms. The European Union is committed to sharing its achievements and its values with countries and peoples beyond its borders.

<http://europa.eu>

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