Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Doc. 16372
30 March 2026

Promoting the Istanbul Convention and improving its implementation: building on lessons learnt

Report[1]
Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination
Rapporteur: Ms Zita GURMAI, Hungary, Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group

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1. Reference to committee: Doc 15942, Reference 4807 of 19 April 2024.

A. Draft resolution[2]

1. Women continue to be disproportionately affected by gender-based violence, whether it is physical, sexual, psychological, or economic, online and offline. Such violence constitutes a serious violation of human rights and a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men, based on the idea of the inferiority of women and leading to exerting control and domination over them.

2. Violence against women and domestic violence occur in all territories and across all socio-economic groups and sectors in society. Their prevalence remains very high while perpetrators often go unpunished, as reporting and conviction rates are low. European Union data from 2024 indicate that one in three women experience physical and/or sexual violence, while just 1 in eight report the incident to the police.

3. Women victims of violence continue to face stigma, negative attitudes and victim-blaming. Many of them need a long time to address feelings of shame and fear, which leads to non-reporting or reporting many years after the violence took place. There is also a lack of awareness among victims about their rights and how to access support services, as well as a lack of trust in the justice system.

4. Women in all their diversity are subjected to gender-based violence regardless of age, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, sex characteristics, migration status, disability, origin and any other characteristic. All measures to prevent and combat this violence and to protect victims should be designed and applied without discrimination on any ground and adopting an intersectional approach, as not all women survivors of violence have equal access to support services and justice.

5. Online violence against women is increasingly prevalent and harmful, and many forms are created and facilitated by the rapid development of technology, including artificial intelligence. The Parliamentary Assembly welcomes General Recommendation No. 1 on the digital dimension of violence against women, adopted by the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) in 2021, and Recommendation CM/Rec(2026)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member States of the Council of Europe on accountability for technology-facilitated violence against women and girls, which provide valuable guidance for member States.

6. The Assembly actively supported the preparation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No. 210, "Istanbul Convention") and its entry into force, in August 2014. This landmark treaty sets the highest standards in a comprehensive approach by focusing on prevention of violence against women, protection of victims, prosecution of perpetrators and integrated policies, always placing the rights of the victim at the centre of all actions.

7. The Assembly's Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence and its successive general rapporteurs on violence against women have played a crucial role in promoting the Istanbul Convention. The Network also provides a forum for sharing experiences and practical tools to prevent and combat violence against women.

8. The Assembly has followed up the implementation of the Istanbul Convention in its Resolution 2289 (2019) "The Istanbul Convention on violence against women: achievements and challenges", and Resolution 2479 (2023) "The Istanbul Convention: progress and challenges", and reiterates the recommendations made in those texts.

9. The Assembly underlines the need to engage with men and boys to prevent and combat violence against women, and calls for the implementation of its Resolution 2480 (2023) "The role and responsibility of men and boys in stopping gender-based violence against women and girls". This is critical, given the rising levels of sexual violence affecting and perpetrated by young people.

10. Nearly 12 years after it entered into force, with 38 ratifications by member States and the accession of the European Union in 2023, the Istanbul Convention has demonstrated its positive impact on the ground. The Assembly calls for renewed efforts, political will and adequate resources to counter the growing attacks on the Convention, which are being carried out through organised disinformation.

11. The Assembly regrets the decision by Türkiye to leave the Istanbul Convention in 2021, thereby depriving women and girls of the high standards of the convention, in a context where civil society monitoring has continued to report a high number of suspicious female deaths and femicides in the country.

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2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the Committee on 20 March 2026.

12. The Assembly underlines the need to meet relevant targets under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, including target 5.2 (eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls), target 5.3 (eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation), and target 16.3 (promote the rule of law and ensure equal access to justice for all).

13. In line with its decision to hold regular discussions on the Istanbul Convention, the Assembly renews its call for the universal ratification and full implementation of the convention, highlighting its positive impact and identifying issues where progress is needed to ensure the right of all women and girls to a life free from violence.

14. The Assembly calls on the member and observer States of the Council of Europe, and States whose parliament enjoys observer or partner for democracy status with the Assembly:

14.1. with regard to supporting the Istanbul Convention and its implementation, to:

14.1.1. promote its ratification by the Council of Europe member States that are not yet Parties (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Lithuania and the Slovak Republic, as well as a renewed ratification by Türkiye), and beyond;

14.1.2. counter disinformation campaigns and organised attacks using false narratives and misconceptions about the convention;

14.1.3. allocate sufficient funding for the implementation of integrated policies and measures to prevent and combat all forms of violence covered by the convention, ensuring co-ordination among relevant bodies and stakeholders throughout their territory;

14.1.4. apply a gender perspective in the implementation of the Istanbul Convention and in the evaluation of the impact of measures taken;

14.1.5. co-operate with, involve and support the work of civil society organisations defending women's rights and providing support and specialised services to women victims of violence;

14.1.6. take legal and policy measures to prevent and combat the forms of violence against women created and facilitated by technology companies, online platforms and internet intermediaries, including by artificial intelligence;

14.1.7. improve the collection and publication of data on violence against women, disaggregated by sex, age, type of violence, relationship of the victim to the perpetrator and geographical location, to evaluate progress and inform policy making;

14.2. with regard to awareness raising and other prevention measures, to:

14.2.1. invest in primary prevention to address the root causes of all forms of violence against women, including the digital dimension of such violence, through education and awareness raising on gender equality and non-stereotyped roles, and age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education;

14.2.2. take measures to raise awareness of vicarious violence, whereby children are instrumentalised with the aim of causing psychological trauma to women by harming, or even murdering, their children;

14.2.3. set up programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence and sexual violence to help them adopt non-violent behaviours in order to prevent re-offending, in line with international best practices;

14.3. with regard to protecting and providing support to all women victims of violence, in all their diversity, to:

14.3.1. ensure the effective implementation of protection orders and their availability for all women victims of violence, irrespective of related legal proceedings;

14.3.2. take measures to address the needs of women victims of violence exposed to multiple and intersectional discrimination, including women with disabilities; Roma and Traveller women; migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women; lesbian, bisexual and queer (LBQ) women; women with addictions; women in prostitution; older women; women in rural areas; and ensuring their access to protection, support and redress;

14.3.3. address the different types of barriers to reporting violence against women and domestic violence in different settings, including those preventing women with disabilities from reporting violence and accessing support services;

14.3.4. establish rape crisis and sexual violence referral centres in sufficient numbers and with adequate geographical spread, to provide a holistic support to women victims that includes medical attention, short- and long-term psychological support and legal counselling;

14.3.5. take measures to ensure that decisions on children's custody and visitation rights in cases of parental separation take into account the context of domestic violence, and that mediation, especially in civil procedures, is neither imposed nor perceived as obligatory;

14.3.6. ensure the safety of women victims of violence and their children through rigorous and repeated risk assessment and risk management procedures and measures, kept under regular review;

14.4. with regard to ensuring effective investigation and prosecution of perpetrators of violence against women, to:

14.4.1. provide compulsory initial and in-service training for judges, prosecutors and other legal professionals involved in cases of violence against women, including to prevent secondary victimisation;

14.4.2. promote the use online courses of the Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (HELP) Programme on violence against women and domestic violence, and the new module on technology-facilitated violence against women and girls, and their integration in the training curricula of relevant justice professionals (law enforcement, prosecutors, judges, lawyers);

14.4.3. adopt legal definitions of sexual violence, including rape, based on the lack of freely given consent and following the "Only yes means yes" approach, and implement the actions called for in Resolution ... (2026) "Paving the way for a culture of consent";

14.4.4. address the minimisation of domestic violence claims in parental separation cases based on ill-founded concepts such as "parental alienation", which should not be legitimised nor given legal recognition;

14.4.5. conduct research on the reasons for the low rates of prosecution and conviction in cases of violence against women and domestic violence.

15. The Assembly calls on all parliaments of Council of Europe member and observer States, as well as on the parliaments of States that enjoy observer or partner for democracy status with the Assembly, to:

15.1. actively promote the Istanbul Convention, including by raising awareness of the achievements and added value of the convention, with a view to dispelling misconceptions and disinformation based on false narratives;

15.2. organise parliamentary inquiries and hearings to give visibility to, and discuss, the findings and recommendations included in GREVIO's evaluation reports;

15.3. participate in the monitoring procedure assessing the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, in accordance with its Article 70;

15.4. carry out periodical assessments and reviews of national legislation and measures to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence and propose legislative and policy changes to align them with the high standards of the Istanbul Convention, and allocate appropriate budgets to ensure their adequate implementation on the ground;

15.5. promote and use the forthcoming new HELP course on violence against women and domestic violence specifically adapted for, and addressed to, parliamentarians;

15.6. continue to participate in, and support, the work of the Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Zita Gurmai, rapporteur[3]

1. Introduction

1. The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No. 210, "Istanbul Convention") entered into force on 1 August 2014 – it has been in force for nearly 12 years. The convention's independent monitoring body, the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) is completing the first monitoring round – assessing the implementation of the convention by 39 Parties (38 States Parties and the European Union) – while also carrying out its first thematic evaluation round, assessing the Parties' implementation of the convention with a focus on "Building trust by delivering support, protection and justice".

2. The Parliamentary Assembly should welcome the work carried out by the convention's monitoring mechanism, including the 52 country monitoring reports published to date by GREVIO, and the recommendations and declarations of the Committee of the Parties to the convention.

3. The two pillars of the convention's monitoring system, GREVIO and the Committee of the Parties, have identified both shortcomings and promising practices in the implementation of the convention. Other relevant stakeholders, including civil society organisations and the Assembly's Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence, have highlighted areas where improvement is needed, despite the progress already made.

4. The Istanbul Convention requires Parties to invite national parliaments "to participate in the monitoring of the measures taken for the implementation of [this] Convention", and to submit GREVIO's evaluation report to the national parliament. The Assembly is also invited to "regularly take stock of the implementation of [this] Convention" (Article 70, paragraph 3).

5. Assembly Resolution 2289 (2019) "The Istanbul Convention on violence against women: achievements and challenges" included a number of recommendations inviting national parliaments to take an active role in the promotion of the convention, its implementation and monitoring.

6. The latest Assembly report on this issue was adopted in 2023. In its Resolution 2479 (2023) "The Istanbul Convention: progress and challenges" the Assembly recognised a number of achievements, but also referred to the persistent "alarmingly high levels of violence and tragic femicides", which in several States continue to increase. The Assembly decided to hold an annual exchange of views to take stock of progress on the ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention, as part of its monitoring responsibilities under the convention.

7. The ratification of the Istanbul Convention by the European Union in 2023 was a major development and a recognition of the convention's value and importance, while five EU member States signed the convention but have not yet ratified it (Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Lithuania and the Slovak Republic). GREVIO is currently carrying out the first baseline evaluation of the European Union (EU), which reported to GREVIO in November 2025 about the measures taken to implement the convention and covering areas under EU competence. This includes Directive 2024/1385/EU "on combating violence against women and domestic violence", adopted in May 2024, which criminalises certain forms of violence against women and includes provisions on victim protection. This directive complements Directive 2012/29/EU "establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime". GREVIO's evaluation report on the EU is scheduled for publication in 2027.

8. In addition, Ukraine's ratification of the convention in 2022 – despite strong opposition by different Churches in Ukraine and dissemination of disinformation about the convention – while the country was under aggression by the Russian Federation, sent a powerful message about human rights protection for women victims of violence. GREVIO conducted an evaluation visit to Ukraine in May 2025. The evaluation report on Ukraine will be published in 2026.

9. As regards Council of Europe member States who have not yet ratified the convention, outside the EU, Armenia signed the convention in 2018, but has not yet ratified it. Azerbaijan is the only Council of Europe member State that has not signed the convention. Türkiye was the first country to ratify the convention in 2012, but withdrew from it in 2021, by presidential decree, and it is no longer a Party. The decision of the President of Türkiye has been legally contested and there have been many calls, inside and outside the country, to reverse this decision.

3. The explanatory memorandum is drawn up under the responsibility of the rapporteur.

10. Resolution 2614 (2025) "Women's rights in Europe – Progress and challenges" expressed the Assembly's deep concern about the high prevalence of violence against women and femicides, calling for stronger financial support to transform the commitments of the Istanbul Convention into tangible change. The resolution underlined the urgent need for concerted and innovative efforts to respond to the false discourse of anti-gender movements, welcoming the work of the Council of Europe's Gender Equality Commission to develop positive narratives to promote gender equality and prevent and combat violence against women.

11. On 11 December 2025, the 38 States Parties to the Istanbul Convention issued a joint statement recalling that "gender-based violence, whether physical, sexual, psychological, or economic, online or offline, is a serious violation of human rights". The document states that "wherever women and girls' rights are threatened, the fundamental principles of the rule of law, democracy and human rights are challenged". The Parties underlined that the convention has "created a common language of dignity, equality, and justice".

12. The latest report on violence against women in the European Union, published on 3 March 2026,[4] indicates that 29.9% of women have experienced psychological violence perpetrated by their partner, and that, for 12.7% of them, such violence is frequent. 9.8% reported having been physically injured by their partner and 9.6% had suffered psychological trauma. This EU survey shows that 8.5% of women had been victims of cyber harassment and that 7% of working women had experienced online sexual harassment. Other interesting data in this report show that 10.2% of women had had their geolocation monitored or tracked by their partner, and that 32.9% of girls had suffered physical or psychological violence at the hands of their parents. As research consistently shows over the years, most forms of violence against women are significantly under-reported. The EU report reveals that only 6.1% of women had reported to the police the physical or sexual violence committed by their partner, and 11.3% when assaulted by someone other than their partner.

2. Aims and scope of the report

13. This report aims to take stock of the first decade of implementation of the Istanbul Convention, at a crucial time for women's rights in Europe and beyond. It was my objective to recognise the progress made by Parties to the Istanbul Convention, while also pointing to some of the areas where improvement is needed, as identified by the monitoring bodies of the Istanbul Convention (GREVIO and the Committee of the Parties) in their evaluation work, as well as by the civil society organisations that play an active and critical role in supporting women victims of violence.

14. I have also looked into the "emerging trends" that GREVIO has identified in the 15 country-by-country assessment reports so far published under its first thematic evaluation round, which is dedicated to the need to build the trust of women victims of violence in the system designed for their protection and support, and to provide them with redress.

15. I have examined gaps in data on gender-based violence against women and domestic violence at the national level, including the findings of GREVIO and the results of the survey by the European Union, published in November 2024 by the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) and Eurostat.[5] I also took note of the report published by FRA and EIGE on 3 March 2026 referred to at the end of the previous section.

16. Furthermore, I decided to present good practices and point to areas where experience has demonstrated that more efforts are required to improve the implementation of this important convention at the national level in order to increase its impact.

17. This report covers the work carried out by the Council of Europe to prepare the recommendation of the Committee of Ministers on accountability for technology-facilitated violence against women and girls,[6] adopted in early March 2026. This legal standard is very timely and needed so that the growing digital manifestations of gender-based violence against women can be better addressed, including those created and facilitated by the use of artificial intelligence.

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4. "EU gender-based violence survey – evidence for policy and practice", published on 3 March 2026.
5. The "EU gender-based violence survey – Experiences of women in the 27 EU Member States" includes, for the first time, results based on data from 27 member States of the EU, following interviews with 114 023 women. The report focuses on the prevalence of various forms of violence against women in the EU and contains data about women's experiences of violence, including the consequences of violence and contacts with services that provide assistance to victims.
6. Recommendation CM/Rec(2026)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on accountability for technology-facilitated violence against women and girls, adopted on 4 March 2026.

3. Working methods

18. The previous rapporteur appointed for the present report, Ms Etilda Gjonaj (Albania, SOC), organised a hearing on 30 September 2024, with the participation of the President of GREVIO and the First Vice-Chair of the Committee of the Parties to the Istanbul Convention. She organised a second hearing, held on 25 June 2025, to gather the views of relevant civil society organisations about the impact and experience in the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, to draw on the lessons learnt. I have of course taken into account the valuable information and views shared at these hearings.

19. Ms Gjonaj also carried out a fact-finding visit to Austria on 16-17 December 2024, to look into Austria's experience as a case study for this report, as Austria was one of the very first countries that ratified the Istanbul Convention and has undergone two evaluations by GREVIO. The visit produced valuable information as well as relevant recommendations from national authorities, members of parliament and civil society organisations working to prevent violence against women, protect victims and those working with the perpetrators.

20. After my appointment as rapporteur, on 3 December 2025, I continued updating relevant information for this report, including as regards consent in relation to sexual violence against women, as I am also rapporteur on that issue and both reports have been prepared simultaneously, with a view to having a joint debate during the April 2026 part-session.

4. Progress made in the implementation of the Istanbul Convention: promising developments

21. Since the entry into force of the Istanbul Convention, in August 2014, a key recurring priority finding by the convention's monitoring bodies (GREVIO and the Committee of the Parties) has been the need to step up efforts to acknowledge the structural link between gender inequality and violence against women, as well as to take more action at the political level. Continuous political will is essential to achieve an effective implementation of the convention, even if the convention has brought real change over the years.

22. GREVIO's first general report of activities, published in 2020 and covering the period from June 2015 to May 2019, already indicated that the convention was having "a tangible and positive impact", illustrated by the way it had propelled gender-based violence to the forefront of public debate and increased victims' and society's awareness of the urgent need to combat it. Five years after the convention's entry into force, GREVIO reflected on the introduction of higher legislative and policy standards at the national level. GREVIO also reported that the convention was "extremely well regarded by women's organisations, victims' associations and state authorities alike".

23. In 2022, the Council of Europe published a "Mid-term Horizontal Review of GREVIO baseline evaluation reports", aimed at providing a panoramic view of the challenges identified by GREVIO in its first 17 country evaluation reports, which presents a comprehensive analysis of the level of compliance of Parties with the convention. The review identified promising practices as well as challenges and shortcomings faced by those Parties, as regards each Article of the convention. It served as a stock-taking exercise and as a "call to action", both for the Parties that had been evaluated, and for those that awaited evaluation by GREVIO. The review showed the progress made by Parties to the Convention, with positive examples that could serve as an inspiration to others. The GREVIO secretariat is currently preparing an updated version of this horizontal review, to cover the country-evaluation reports published within the baseline evaluation round.

24. The Secretariat of the Istanbul Convention and its monitoring mechanisms have published a collection of papers to provide guidance to Parties as regards the implementation of certain provisions of the convention. These publications explain the content of each relevant obligation for Parties and offer examples about how they are being implemented. They are all available online and address the following issues: ensuring the non-discriminatory implementation of measures against violence against women and domestic violence (Article 4.3); setting up Co-ordinating Bodies responsible for policies on violence against women (Article 10); ensuring data collection and research (Article 11); prevention of violence against women (Article 12); raising awareness of violence against women (Article 13); preventing violence against women through formal and informal education (Article 14); domestic and sexual violence perpetrator programmes (Article 16); encouraging the participation of the private sector and the media in the prevention of violence against women and domestic violence (Article 17); emergency barring orders in situations of domestic violence (Article 52); and gender-based asylum claims and non-refoulement (Articles 60 and 61). A paper on the implementation of Article 25 of the convention, as regards the setting up of rape crisis centres, is scheduled for publication in 2026.

25. The country evaluation reports published by GREVIO[7] point to a number of areas where there is visible progress and promising developments in the implementation of the convention at the national level. These concern the different pillars of prevention, protection of victims, prosecution of perpetrators, and comprehensive co-ordinated policies, including:[8]

– the adoption of new national policies, including National Action Plans, that address violence against women in a comprehensive manner, based on the approach, definitions and obligations contained in the Istanbul Convention;

– the introduction of specific criminal offenses, or the amendment of existing ones, to more effectively prosecute stalking, sexual harassment, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, forced abortion, and forced sterilisation;

– the amendment of legislation on sexual violence, so as to base it on the lack of freely given consent to a sexual act, which allows to prosecute cases that could not be criminalised under prior legislation which required evidence of the use of force or threat by the perpetrator;

– the expansion of the range of available support services for women victims of violence, such as the creation or improvement of the accessibility of national helplines, the deployment of new support services for victims of sexual violence, as well as increased funding for specialist support services, including shelters;

– the adoption of new measures prohibiting perpetrators from approaching the victims, including new laws on emergency barring orders allowing law enforcement to temporarily evict perpetrators of domestic violence from a shared residence; laws offering longer-term protection orders to victims of domestic violence, forced marriage or other forms of violence; as well as the monitoring of such protective measures through electronic devices;

– the appointment of specialist law enforcement units, prosecutors, and judges to investigate and prosecute cases of domestic violence or sexual violence;

– the strengthening of data collection on cases of violence against women, including in the area of criminal justice, by harmonising and providing comparable data from law-enforcement bodies, prosecutors and the judiciary;

– in the area of education**,** the legal and policy changes have led to the amendment of school and university curricula to include the promotion of equality between women and men, and the prevention of violence against women and girls.

26. At the hearing organised in June 2025, NGOs[9] reported that the implementation of the Istanbul Convention has driven significant positive legislative and policy developments in the field, as well as improvements in support services for women victims of gender-based violence. They underlined that the convention's greatest outcome has been the rapid pace of change and progress at the national level to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence, including more and better laws and policies, the creation of national co-ordination bodies, and more protection measures for victims.

27. It should be underlined that the majority of support services for women victims of gender-based violence and domestic violence available in many Parties are run by NGOs or civil society organisations. Furthermore, the legal obligation for Parties to recognise and support NGOs has led to greater formalised involvement of NGOs in policy making to prevent and combat violence against women. NGOs and women's rights advocates are also important sources of information for the monitoring of the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, as they frequently submit "shadow reports" and contributions to GREVIO.

28. A critical and positive impact of the Istanbul Convention and its implementation is the complementarity and mutually reinforcing relationship between the convention and the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5). The two treaties have a close relationship since the Istanbul Convention was drafted considering earlier jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights and, upon its entry into force, the Istanbul Convention and GREVIO's findings started influencing the decisions of the Court. This is of particular interest since the Court's case law and interpretation of the European Convention on Human Rights are applicable to all member States of the Council of Europe.

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7. 37 baseline evaluation reports have been published by GREVIO since 2017 (including the one on Türkiye). The publication of the evaluation reports on Ukraine and Latvia is expected in September 2026.
8. Brochure "Sustaining Progress towards Ending Violence against Women and Girls", Council of Europe, 2023.
9. The hearing included representatives from Women against Violence Europe (the WAVE Network), the European Women's Lobby and the European Disability Forum.

29. The European Court on Human Rights has significantly advanced its case law on gender-based violence, in particular as regards domestic violence and rape, as it interprets the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights in light of the States' implementation of Istanbul Convention standards, as reflected in GREVIO's evaluation reports. Through their authoritative interpretations, the Court and GREVIO are key drivers in advancing the protection of women's rights across Europe. Over the years, the Court has devoted increased attention to the need to protect the rights of women victims of violence and domestic violence, focusing on issues such as consent, secondary victimisation, and intersectionality, when addressing positive obligations under Articles 3 and 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The relevant case law of the Court can be found in its factsheets on violence against women, and domestic violence.

5. Challenges in the implementation of the Istanbul Convention

30. The 2022 Mid-term Horizontal Review that analysed and compared the first 17 GREVIO evaluation reports, mentioned in paragraph 23 above, indicated that the road leading to a full implementation of the Istanbul Convention is riddled with challenges – but they can be overcome with sustained political commitment. Most of them are reflected below.

31. The monitoring bodies of the Istanbul Convention have identified areas where improvement is needed. One of the most concerning gaps in the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, which is critical as it lies at the core of its rationale, is the lack of a gender-sensitive perspective in policies and laws tackling violence against women and domestic violence. GREVIO has criticised the gender-neutral approach of national laws and policies addressing violence against women, noting that "such an approach fails to take into account that gender is a primary motive of gender-based violence against women and, consequently, policies and measures that are gender neutral will not effectively respond to the specific experiences of women and girls".[10]

32. An important aspect of this concern noted by GREVIO is the legal and policy shift in certain countries with a strong tradition of promoting gender equality and combating violence against women, from a strong gendered perspective to a strictly gender-neutral approach, where both men and women are included as perpetrators and victims of violence. GREVIO pointed out that this approach raises concerns as those policies fail to recognise that violence against women is both a cause and a consequence of the inequality between women and men, and a form of gender-based violence.

33. NGOs participating in the hearing held in June 2025 confirmed that there was a rise in gender-neutral policies to address violence against women throughout Europe. State-run services adopting a gender-neutral approach, for example catering to the needs of both women and men victims of violence, fail to comprehend the gendered dynamics of violence, and perpetuate systemic disadvantages faced by women. Such policies further obscure the diverse experiences and needs of women victims of violence, especially minority women and girls, and put women-only services under threat.

34. Some of the main shortcomings identified by GREVIO on the implementation of the convention by Parties are:[11]

– the lack of comprehensive measures tackling all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention, beyond domestic violence;

– insufficient allocation of financial and human resources for the implementation of integrated policies, measures and programmes to prevent and combat all forms of violence covered by the convention, which indicates a limited commitment to the implementation of a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach to preventing and combating violence against women;

– the limited scope, geographic distribution, and funding of specialist support services for women victims of violence, including shelters and other services run by women's rights NGOs;

– the physical, communication, cultural and/or administrative barriers to access protection, support, and justice faced by women at risk of multiple and intersectional discrimination, particularly women with disabilities; Roma and Traveller women; migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women; lesbian, bisexual and queer (LBQ) women; women with addictions; women in prostitution; older women; women in rural areas; women from ethnic or national minorities;

10. "Mid-term Horizontal Review of GREVIO baseline evaluation reports", paragraph 12.
11. Brochure "Sustaining Progress towards Ending Violence against Women and Girls", op.cit.

– the lack of systematic training for all relevant professionals on preventing and detecting violence against women, as well as on victims' needs and rights;

– gaps regarding mandatory training for judges and prosecutors on the dynamics of violence against women and domestic violence;

– gaps in collecting comparable administrative and judicial data disaggregated by sex and covering all forms of violence against women;

– lack of systematic recording of all reports of violence against women, and the reasons thereof;

– no effective implementation of protection orders and their unavailability for all women victims of violence, irrespective of related legal proceedings;

– lack of research on the reasons for the low rates of prosecutions and convictions in cases of violence against women;

– lack of duly taking into account the context of domestic violence in decisions in family law cases of parental separation, as regards children's custody and visitation rights;

– gaps in prevention measures through education and awareness-raising activities.

35. The NGOs that participated in the hearing held in June 2025 referred to some of the issues where further progress is needed, including those listed in the previous paragraph and the following challenges in the implementation of the convention by Parties:

– high prevalence of violence against women, including an escalation of online and technology-facilitated gender-based violence against women;

– an "impunity crisis" – as only one in 200 rapes in the EU leads to a conviction;

– a pressing need for investment in primary prevention to address the root causes of violence against women;

– lack of global ratification of the Istanbul Convention in Europe;

– increasing attacks on the convention as part of the global backlash against women's rights – spread of disinformation and propaganda against the Istanbul Convention, including by some Churches and religious groups;

– shrinking space for NGOs working to protect women's rights, together with increased scrutiny of civil society organisations;

– cuts in some public services for victims, resulting from public budget cuts, alongside a shift in public spending towards defence and security issues;

– reductions in NGO funding, including underfunding or de-funding of specialised women's rights organisations that support and assist women victims of violence;

– gaps in addressing the needs and circumstances of all women and girls victims of violence in all their diversity, including:

  - women with disabilities, who need alternative ways to access support other than the helplines;

  - women fleeing conflict zones, who are generally afraid of reporting the violence;

  - women with addictions, who often have difficulties in accessing support services;

– systemic problems for women victims of violence to access justice, including barriers to reporting, accessibility of courts and secondary victimisation in judicial proceedings;

– difficulties as regards evidentiary issues in court;

– use of the "Parental Alienation Syndrome" and similar concepts which continue to be frequently applied, indicating that there is a disconnection between criminal and family courts, putting the safety of children and their mothers at risk and rendering violence against women invisible. This is compounded by gender stereotypes against mothers and lack of training for judges and court-appointed experts – whose advice the courts tend to follow – on separation, custody and visitation rights.

36. The European Disability Forum reported that women with disabilities are two to five times more likely to suffer violence than other women. Other relevant data indicates that 34% of women with health problems or disabilities have experienced physical or sexual violence by a partner; and 61% of women with health problems or disabilities have experienced sexual harassment since the age of 15 (compared to 54% in the

case of women without disabilities). There are particular barriers to reporting gender-based violence by women and girls with disabilities, who need to see the multiple and intersectional discrimination against them addressed, also with regard to the gender-based violence affecting them.

37. The European Disability Forum has welcomed GREVIO's inclusion of women and girls with disabilities in its country-based monitoring reports, as well as the Assembly's Resolution 2514 (2023) "Preventing and combating violence against women with disabilities". It is of critical importance that organisations of persons with disabilities are involved in, and contribute to, the evaluation of the implementation of the Istanbul Convention.

5.1. Concerns about the implementation of the convention regarding the role of civil society organisations

38. While the implementation of the Istanbul Convention requires commitment and action from the authorities, it also envisages a strong role for women's rights organisations. However, in recent years, GREVIO has noted a growing and worrying trend affecting the environment where such women's rights organisations operate, including a reduction of funding opportunities, lack of accessibility to funding for certain NGOs, and competition with non-specialist and for-profit organisations in the provision of support services to women victims of gender-based violence.

39. The 6th General Report on GREVIO'S Activities, covering the year 2024 and published in May 2025, includes a "focus section" that addresses the shrinking space for women's rights defenders. The section takes stock of the findings of GREVIO in its 36 baseline evaluation reports, where it has noted "varying degrees of recognition and partnership, with the level of involvement of NGOs in policy making, their overall support, recognition and funding opportunities ranging from comprehensive to minimal". The report underlined that variations do not only exist across the Parties to the convention, but frequently also within the territory of a country, "as funding for NGOs and priorities in service provision for victims often fall within the competence of local authorities and municipalities". The underfunding of NGOs providing support services to victims of gender-based violence is also a source of concern, as too much short-term funding does not allow long-term planning and sustainability, or staff retention.

40. GREVIO has also found that NGOs that provide support services for women and girls from specific communities, such as migrant women, or for specific forms of gender-based violence, such as "honour-related" violence, forced marriage or female genital mutilation, experience difficulties when seeking partnership with the authorities, or in accessing public funding. Structural barriers and complex bureaucracy around funding opportunities often prevent them from competing with non-specialist entities that lack the experience of grassroots or community-based organisations. GREVIO has also found tendering procedures or licensing systems that add layers of bureaucracy and make it hard for specialist support services for women victims of violence to compete with larger, non-specialist organisations. It is important to guarantee funding to high-quality and specialised support services for all forms of violence against women, which place the rights and needs of women victims at their centre.

41. NGOs providing support services to women victims of violence report defunding and exclusion of women's specialist services from policy processes in many countries, often under the pretext of "inclusivity and equality", threatening the reliability and expertise offered by these services. Specialised civil society organisations working on the ground are seeing that increased public resources are diverted to gender-neutral services, which do not have gender specific expertise but compete for the same funding opportunities. Research furthermore shows that gender neutral discourses are compounded by an organised backlash and conservative campaigns which aim to unravel global advances in women's rights, including preventing and combating gender-based violence against women.

42. In its Resolution 2554 (2024) "Protecting women human rights defenders in Europe", the Assembly called for Council of Europe member States to publicly recognise the role and contribution of women human rights defenders, in all their diversity, and to support their participation in legislative processes, policy and decision making, on matters concerning them. The rise in populism and misogyny, anti-gender equality and anti-rights movements, in Europe and beyond, is having a negative impact on the work of women's rights organisations. It is therefore essential to combat disinformation about women's rights and the organisations that support them, and to ensure the safety of women's rights defenders, online and offline. The Assembly recalled the responsibility of States to provide an enabling environment for women human rights defenders and to ensure their protection, in line with international obligations.

5.2. Other key areas of concern regarding the implementation of the convention

43. In 2025, the Secretariat of the Istanbul Convention published a compilation of the "focus sections" included in the first five GREVIO activity reports, covering the period from 2015 to 2023. These reports are not just a record or collection of activities, as they showcase ten years of action at the national level, including progress as well as setbacks. The 1st General Report on GREVIO's activities, published in 2020, included a section on "first trends and challenges emerging from country monitoring", which already identified some shortcomings mentioned earlier in this section, such as:

– the gender-neutral approach of legal provisions and policy documents, which fails to recognise domestic violence as a social mechanism that helps keep women in a subordinate position to men;

– the insufficient funding for the implementation of integrated policies and measures to prevent and combat all forms of violence covered by the convention;

– national action plans that do not always address all forms of violence against women, or which prioritise certain forms of violence over others, which results in the compartmentalisation of approaches and prevents the holistic implementation of the convention;

– some national co-ordinating bodies have a limited mandate and inadequate powers, while others struggle to fulfil their goals for lack of sufficient and/or dedicated financial and human resources;

– relevant NGOs are not systematically involved in the design and co-ordination of policies, contrary to the requirements of the convention;

– inadequate collection of data; the judiciary, police, social welfare and health-care services need to have data systems that, as a minimum, collect data on victims and perpetrators disaggregated by sex, age, type of violence, relationship of the victim to the perpetrator and geographical location. Recorded data should also contain information on conviction rates of perpetrators of all forms of violence against women;

– the number of specialist support services for victims of violence against women is still insufficient and their funding extremely volatile. Counselling services and shelters for victims of domestic violence are better serviced, while specialist support services that address different forms of sexual violence are often insufficient;

– gaps have also consistently been noticed in the protection given to women victims of domestic violence and their children, including in the context of custody and visitation decisions, as well as regarding the ban of obligatory mediation, especially in civil procedures;

– the lack of adequate implementation of legal frameworks providing for protection measures and/or protection orders, as well as inadequate enforcement of such orders by the relevant authorities;

– gaps in the non-discriminatory implementation of the provisions of the convention, including the absence of effective measures addressing the needs of women victims of violence from groups exposed to multiple and intersectional discrimination (women with disabilities; Roma and Traveller women; migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women; lesbian, bisexual and queer (LBQ) women; women with addictions; women in prostitution; older women; women in rural areas; women from ethnic or national minorities), who frequently face specific barriers with regards to the application of the convention, including access to protection and assistance;

– difficulties experienced by States Parties in ensuring gender-sensitive asylum determination procedures and gender-sensitive reception facilities, in line with the convention.

44. The selection of topics covered in GREVIO's subsequent annual reports provides a good overview of particularly important and challenging areas of the Istanbul Convention, where further progress is needed, such as:

44.1. the importance of specialist support services as a lifeline for women victims of violence: their accessibility and proper functioning require significant investment and a sense of urgency;

44.2. child custody and visitation rights in a context of gender-based violence: it is urgent to effectively take into account the context of domestic violence in decisions in family law cases of parental separation, as regards children's custody and visitation rights, as well as to ensure the safety of women victims and their children. GREVIO has alerted against representations of women as hostile, unco-operative and alienating, often driven by pseudo-scientific concepts, which may be used to minimise evidence of domestic violence in civil proceedings. National courts continue to refer to "parental alienation", or similar concepts, which GREVIO and others have refuted as lacking scientific basis;

44.3. the application of a consent-base definition of sexual violence: The investigation and prosecution of sexual violence against women face many barriers which lie behind the low rate of convictions. The wide range of behavioural responses by victims of sexual violence and rape, including reactions such as freezing, need to be known and recognised by the justice systems. Rape crisis and sexual violence referral centres play a critical role in supporting women victims and securing evidence;

44.4. gaps in risk assessment and risk management: these measures must be conducted systematically and lead to safety plans for victims. They should always be comprehensive, reliable and ongoing, as otherwise victims may be led to a false sense of security, exposing them to greater risk. Risk-assessment tools should be periodically assessed, and all cases of gender-based killings, or attempted killings, of women, should be analysed.

45. On the issue of consent-based definitions of rape, I would like to refer to the Assembly's report entitled "Paving the way for a culture of consent",[12] which I also prepared. Directly relevant to this is the need to provide comprehensive sexuality education in schools, including the concept of consent and its manifestations. This is in line with the Istanbul Convention, and GREVIO has noted the particular importance of comprehensive sexuality education for teaching about violence against women and girls, in particular in relation to personal integrity and the notion that sexual violence is defined by the absence of freely given consent. The "focus section" of GREVIO's 4th General Report on Activities analyses the approaches taken by Parties as regards the criminalisation and prosecution of sexual violence, including rape. Many countries have already moved – or are in the process of moving – away from force-based definitions of sexual crimes, aligning their laws with the Istanbul Convention in order to criminalise non-consensual sexual acts.

46. The Assembly has already called for this education on consent in its Resolutions 2614 (2025) "Women's rights in Europe – Progress and challenges" and Resolution 2629 (2025) "Sexual violence against men and boys". A draft Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers "on the protection of children against violence through age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education" is currently under preparation and should be completed in 2026.

47. A critical gap in the implementation of the convention, which is consistently highlighted by GREVIO, is the need for Parties to take further measures to ensure the adequate training of professionals, including: (i) mandatory training for judges and prosecutors on the dynamics of violence against women and domestic violence, and (ii) initial and in-service training on all forms of violence against women for all professionals in contact with victims and perpetrators of gender-based violence. The lack of mandatory training for judges and prosecutors is among the reasons for the low conviction rates for gender-based violence against women and contributes to the pervasive secondary victimisation of women victims of violence during judicial proceedings. This situation has a huge negative impact on the victims' trust in the justice system that is supposed to protect them.

48. Another pervasive shortcoming in the implementation of the convention is the incomplete data collection and lack of relevant research. Data and research on gender-based violence against women and domestic violence at the national level continue to be incomplete, which deprives policy makers of the necessary evidence on which to base laws and policies, to identify gaps, and to assess and measure progress in the implementation of existing measures. Not all Parties have data collection systems that disaggregate data by sex, age, type of violence, relationship of the victim to the perpetrator and geographical location. Moreover, data collection systems often vary from one public body to another and are not harmonised, which prevents a comprehensive "case approach", particularly in the criminal justice sector.

49. New and emerging forms of violence against women need to receive more attention, such as technology-facilitated violence against women – including through the use of artificial intelligence systems. The new Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2026)2 on accountability for technology-facilitated violence against women and girls, and its Explanatory Memorandum, provide guidance for Council of Europe member States in tackling this increasingly prevalent and harmful form of gender-based violence against women.

50. A form of violence which targets children as well as women, and which merits increased attention, is vicarious violence: violence directed towards children with the aim of causing psychological suffering to the mother, as a means by the aggressor to continue perpetuating violence against the mother through the suffering of her children. Vicarious violence is frequently experienced by women who have suffered gender-based violence, including domestic violence. However, and despite its prevalence, vicarious violence is often not identified as such by the women victims, due to its still incipient social recognition.

12. Doc. 16370.

6. "Emerging trends" identified by GREVIO in its first thematic evaluation round

51. Looking at the 15 thematic evaluation reports published by GREVIO under the first thematic evaluation round, which focuses on "Building trust by delivering support, protection and justice", it is interesting to note the contents of a new section that has been added to GREVIO reports, and which addresses "emerging trends" noted during the country evaluation procedure. The list of issues and topics that comes out of the 15 GREVIO reports illustrates both new realities that need to be addressed by Parties, as well as positive developments and remaining shortcomings in the implementation of the Istanbul Convention.

52. The 15 evaluation reports published so far under the first thematic evaluation round include the issues listed below as "emerging trends" taking place in more than one country, thus requiring more work to be addressed:

– the digital dimension of violence against women;

– increasing of consumption of violent pornography among young men and boys and related high levels of sexual violence against girls and young women;

– gender-based killings of women;

– asylum-seeking and migrant victims of violence against women;

– the rise of discourses objecting to the promotion of gender equality and denying violence against women;

– patriarchal attitudes prevailing over the rights and needs of women victims of violence and of their children in court proceedings related to custody and visitation, through the application of the concept of "collaborative harassment".[13]

53. Other trends identified by GREVIO in individual Parties and pointing to the need for further work are:

– limited involvement of NGOs in public policy making and in the provision of services for victims;

– the shrinking space for women's rights organisations;

– the lack of economic independence of women victims of violence;

– the introduction of a licensing system for service providers: quality control or obstacle?;

– limited institutionalisation of processes for case management and multi-agency co-operation;

– persistent and structural barriers to provide support and justice for Roma women victims of violence;

– women victims of violence with mental health issues.

7. The experience of one of the first Parties to the Istanbul Convention: the case of Austria

54. Etilda Gjonaj, former rapporteur, carried out a two-day fact-finding visit to Vienna, on 16-17 December 2024, where she met with representatives of the Austrian Federal Ministries of Justice; of the Interior; of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Affairs; and of Education, Science and Research. She also met with representatives of the Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services, the National Co-ordinating Body for the Istanbul Convention in the Federal Chancellery, and members of the Court of Auditors. Ms Gjonaj also held a hearing with members of the Committee on Equality and the Committee on Justice of Austria's National Council. Her fact-finding visit furthermore included meetings with NGOs representatives and civil society organisations.

55. Over the years of implementation of the Istanbul Convention in Austria to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence, some concrete examples of positive developments reported by key stakeholders pointed to: the commitment of the country to implement the Istanbul Convention; more knowledge of the issue among the public at large thanks to campaigns; a greater awareness of the support available to victims; an increase in the number of calls to helplines. The work with perpetrators of domestic violence in Austria was highlighted as positive and well-funded, including work with young sexual offenders. Co-operation among government departments and NGOs was also referred to as a good practice.

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13. In its first thematic evaluation report on Denmark, published on 18 December 2024, GREVIO noted the worrying trend of discrediting reports of domestic violence by women, on the ground of "collaborative harassment". This term is applied to "situations wherein one parent consistently disrespects the visitation schedule, deliberately impeding access to the child, with the intent to harass and vex the other parent" (see paragraphs 8-9 and 113-116).

56. Both governmental and non-governmental organisations acknowledged the importance of the Istanbul Convention as a strong standard with a reliable international review mechanism. A concrete impact of GREVIO's evaluation was the setting up of an anti-violence unit in the police. A lesson learnt is the realisation that violence against women is an overall social problem which needs collective action by many authorities and stakeholders, as everybody has a role to play in preventing and combating it.

57. Some of the concerns raised included the lack of sustainable and long-term funding for support services for victims of gender-based violence against women, as many organisations providing assistance to victims rely on project funding, on an annual basis, and operate in a very fragmented donors' landscape. This means that access to shelters is not easy in some regions and in rural areas. Another challenge is data collection, as data on sexual violence is reportedly very poor. There is also a need to collect information on femicides as separate from murder and killings, to evaluate trends and devise evidence-based policies. Another issue raised was the increase in criminal complaints for rape and sexual harassment while convictions remain low. As it is the case in other Parties to the convention, the root causes of gender-based violence against women must be tackled, and the needs of all groups of women victims of violence, including women with disabilities, migrant and asylum-seeking women, older women, must be met.

8. Attacks on the Istanbul Convention: tackling the backlash against gender equality and women's rights

58. In recent years, organised disinformation campaigns and persistent misconceptions about the Istanbul Convention have gained visibility in public and political discourse in some countries, where some political parties, religious institutions and ultra-conservative groups have led a movement using false narratives about the convention. These narratives often misrepresent the convention as being contrary to traditional family values, constitutional principles or even national sovereignty. They also deliberately distort the concept of gender included in the convention. Such claims go against the convention's core purpose: preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, while upholding fundamental human rights.

59. These anti-rights movements take place in the context of a general regression in the area of gender equality and women's rights in the world, including in the fields of reproductive health and rights and the cutting of funds of women's rights NGOs and support structures. Detracting attention from the phenomenon of violence against women, its root causes and the ways to tackle it, this discourse has gained support, which in some cases has resulted in a delay or rejection of the ratification of the convention.

60. Those attacking the Istanbul Convention often label the treaty as "ideological" when it is a landmark human rights treaty focused on preventing violence against women, protecting victims and punishing the perpetrators. Disinformation campaigns often send the message that protecting family values is more important and even incompatible with fighting domestic violence, which is certainly contradictory and a direct attack on women who suffer this violence. Such anti-rights and anti-gender equality movements have led to political debates at the national level putting forward the withdrawal from the convention, as it was the case in Latvia in the autumn of 2025 and, very recently, in Georgia.[14] I call on any Party considering the possibility of denouncing the Istanbul Convention on the basis of disinformation to reflect on, and apply, the arguments of the Venice Commission in its 2022 report and 2025 opinion referred to in the next two paragraphs.

61. The Venice Commission's Opinion of 15 December 2025 on Latvia's draft law on the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention clearly states that the direct beneficiaries of international human rights treaties are not the States Parties but the individuals themselves. Therefore, withdrawing from treaties like the Istanbul Convention "should be carefully justified, consistent with democratic principles and the rule of law". The Venice Commission emphasised that "the more important the treaty is for individuals (e.g., human rights treaties), the more thorough and inclusive the denunciation procedure should be", adding that "political, ideological, economic, social, cultural and other considerations may inform a State's decision to withdraw, but they do not provide independent legal justification".

62. The Venice Commission had already addressed these issues in its Report of March 2022 "on the domestic procedures of ratification and denunciation of international treaties", prepared upon a request from the Assembly[15] that followed the withdrawal of Türkiye from the Istanbul Convention in 2021. One of the findings of the Venice Commission was that "No member state of the Council of Europe leaves treaty-making to the executive branch alone". The report provides a comparative study and arguments in support of

14. See media reports from 10 March 2026: Kobakhidze hints Georgia may reconsider its participation in a treaty against gender-based violence.
15. See Resolution 2376 (2021) "The functioning of democratic institutions in Turkey", paragraph 8.

parliamentary involvement in the denunciation of Council of Europe conventions. The National Assembly of Türkiye adopted an act of ratification of the Istanbul Convention on 24 November 2011, which made the convention part of domestic law, while the withdrawal was contained in a presidential decision, without parliamentary debate or vote.

63. The Council of Europe New Democratic Pact for Europe underlines the need to strengthen democratic resilience, counter disinformation, protect human rights and reinforce trust in democratic institutions. Addressing and countering disinformation about the Istanbul Convention directly contributes to these objectives. Ensuring that public debate and parliamentary decision making are informed by facts, legal clarity and human rights standards is essential for the credibility of democratic institutions.

64. Moreover, violence against women and girls is both a cause and a consequence of democratic fragility. Societies that fail to protect half of their population from violence and discrimination cannot fully uphold democratic values. The effective implementation of the Istanbul Convention supports the New Democratic Pact by promoting equality, inclusion, accountability and the rule of law.

65. In her foreword to the 1st General Report on GREVIO's activities, Ms Feride Acar, the first GREVIO President and GREVIO member from June 2015 to May 2019, recalled that from its coming into existence, the convention was confronted with false narratives and misinformation about its aims and purpose. Such attacks amounted at times to a downright distortion of the convention's founding principles.

66. The need to deconstruct false narratives and stand up forcefully for the principles and values of the convention has never been stronger. The Council of Europe has addressed many of these attacks on the Istanbul Convention with very clear messages, including through an accessible publication which exposes the disinformation and explains the aims and contents of the Istanbul Convention, namely to eradicate violence against women and protect women's human rights.

67. In 2022, the Council of Europe's Gender Equality Division published a methodology and a checklist to help civil society organisations run national communication and advocacy campaigns on the Istanbul Convention through positive narratives to dispel myths and misinformation regarding the convention. These tools were prepared in co-operation with Women Against Violence Europe Network (WAVE) and UN Women, to be used for campaigns in support of the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, and to increase the quality of its implementation. In 2025, the Council of Europe's Gender Equality Commission adopted "Guidance for the development of positive narratives to deflect anti-gender rhetoric – A practical guide for values-based communication to advance gender equality", aimed at assisting member States, civil society organisations and interested stakeholders in strengthening public support for gender equality and in promoting constructive, values-based narratives that place gender equality at the heart of democratic life.

68. In its Resolution 2479 (2023) "The Istanbul Convention: progress and challenges", the Assembly asked all parliaments of Council of Europe member and observer States, as well as parliaments that enjoy observer or partner for democracy status with the Assembly, to:

– firmly assert that the Istanbul Convention focuses on women and girls in all their diversity as people who are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence;

– acknowledge that the convention does not threaten the nuclear family or family values, nor does it impose certain lifestyles;

– further take into account that the convention does not encourage irregular or illegal migration when endeavouring to ensure that women victims of intimate partner violence are not dependent on the residency status of their aggressors;

– recognise that the Istanbul Convention provides a blueprint for national legislation and an efficient system of evaluation and assistance in its implementation, and that sharing best practices and international co-operation are important in combating violence against women and domestic violence.

69. Resolution 2614 (2025) "Women's rights in Europe – Progress and challenges" called on member and observer States of the Council of Europe to take action, with the aim of tackling the low reporting rates and the high levels of impunity of gender-based violence against women. The Assembly recommended further action to prevent and combat online forms of gender-based violence against women and to strengthen the fight against online sexual exploitation, paying particular attention to the risks posed by the development of artificial intelligence.

70. The Assembly further called on national parliaments to hold regular debates on the protection of women's rights and the issues raised in Resolution 2614 (2025), and to focus on securing and mainstreaming women's rights in national legislation in all sectoral policies.

9. The role of parliamentarians in promoting the Istanbul Convention, supporting it and monitoring its implementation

71. In 2008, the Assembly called for the adoption of legally binding European standards on violence against women: such standards were ultimately enshrined in the Istanbul Convention. The Assembly was closely associated in the negotiations and drafting of the Istanbul Convention, which signifies that the democratically elected representatives of European citizens were able to shape the content of the most progressive human rights treaty on ending violence against women.

72. The Assembly has consistently affirmed that the Istanbul Convention is an essential instrument for preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence and has repeatedly called on all member States to sign, ratify and effectively implement it. Through its resolutions, recommendations and debates, the Assembly has played a key role in keeping the convention high on the political agenda and in countering narratives that undermine its objectives.

73. Parliamentarians have a specific responsibility in this field. As recognised in Article 70 of the Istanbul Convention, parliaments contribute to monitoring its implementation and play a decisive role in ratification processes, legislative alignment, budgetary decisions and oversight of government action. Beyond their legislative functions, parliamentarians are also central actors in public debate and are well placed to challenge disinformation, explain the convention's legal content and objectives, and engage constructively with citizens.

74. Within the Assembly, the Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence provides a unique platform for mobilising and supporting parliamentarians committed to advancing the convention, and plays a key role in promoting the ratification and effective implementation of the Istanbul Convention. In recent years, the Network has organised peer-to-peer seminars, hosted by national parliaments, allowing parliamentarians to exchange good practices about their role and experience in monitoring the implementation of the convention. One of the key tools of the Assembly in this work is a Handbook for parliamentarians on the Istanbul Convention, which was revised in 2019 and is available in 11 languages, besides English and French.

75. Under the political co-ordination of the Assembly's General Rapporteur on Violence against Women, the Network has facilitated exchanges of experience, supported ratification and implementation efforts, and offered solidarity to members working in politically sensitive or hostile environments. The Network fosters dialogue and mobilises action to make the elimination of violence against women a political priority.

76. The Network plans further targeted seminars and hearings with parliamentarians and other relevant stakeholders on priority thematic issues, such as taking action to expose and address misconceptions about the Istanbul Convention and promote its main aims: to eradicate violence against women and protect women's human rights, as well as exchanges of promising practices.

77. In 2026, a new online free HELP course on violence against women and domestic violence targeted at parliamentarians will be launched. The course will include tailor-made practical, evidence-based tools to help members of parliament in their work to promote the Istanbul Convention and actively contribute to its implementation and monitoring at the national level.

10. Conclusions

78. My report aims to take stock of over a decade of implementation of the Istanbul Convention, at a crucial time for women's rights in Europe and beyond. It was my objective to recognise the progress made by Parties in their implementation of the obligations under the four pillars of the Istanbul Convention: from prevention of gender-based violence against women to the protection of victims, the prosecution of perpetrators and the need for comprehensive and co-ordinated policies.

79. I have based my assessment on the results of the monitoring work carried out by GREVIO, including their 37 baseline evaluation reports and the 15 evaluation reports already published under the first thematic monitoring round. I have also relied on the feedback provided by civil society organisations working actively on the promotion of women's rights and the protection of women victims of violence.

80. There is clear evidence showing that the Istanbul Convention has led to many positive legal and policy initiatives and developments at the national level, which have had a tangible impact on the prevention of violence against women and domestic violence, the protection of victims of gender-based violence, and the prosecution of perpetrators. But progress is not even or stable, as priorities, budgets and policies are subject to changes when governments change.

81. It is also important to note that attrition rates and levels of impunity remain very high. This requires both to restore the trust of victims in the justice system, and to ensure that law enforcement and justice officials are well trained to effectively investigate and prosecute all forms of gender-based violence against women.

82. Legal measures to combat violence against women are necessary but also insufficient without action to address the root causes that drive this violence. Investing in more gender-equal societies is beneficial to the whole society.