



Factsheet

Istanbul Convention

Council of Europe

Opened for signature in May 2011, the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) is the most far-reaching international treaty to tackle this serious violation of human rights.

Preventing violence, protecting victims and prosecuting the perpetrators are the cornerstones of the convention. In essence, it is a renewed call for greater equality between women and men.

What does the convention require states to do?

Prevention

- change attitudes, gender roles and stereotypes that make violence against women acceptable; train professionals working with victims;
- raise awareness of the different forms of violence and their traumatising nature;
- include teaching material on equality issues in the curricula at all levels of education;
- co-operate with NGOs, the media and the private sector to reach out to the public.

Prosecution

- ensure that violence against women is criminalised and appropriately punished;
- ensure that excuses on the grounds of culture, custom, religion or so-called “honour” are unacceptable for any act of violence;

- ensure that victims have access to special protection measures during investigation and judicial proceedings;
- ensure that law enforcement agencies respond immediately to calls for assistance and manage dangerous situations adequately.

Integrated policies

- ensure that all of the above measures form part of a comprehensive and co-ordinated set of policies and offer a holistic response to violence against women and domestic violence.

Who is covered by the convention?

The convention covers all women and girls, from any background, regardless of their age, race, religion, social origin, migrant status or sexual orientation. The convention recognises that there are groups of women and girls that are often at greater risk of experiencing violence, and states need to ensure that their specific needs are to be taken into account. States are also encouraged to apply the convention to other victims of domestic violence, such as men, children and the elderly.

What does the convention criminalise?

The convention requires states parties to criminalise or otherwise sanction the following behaviours:

- domestic violence (physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence);
- stalking;
- sexual violence, including rape;
- sexual harassment;
- forced marriage;
- female genital mutilation;

- forced abortion and forced sterilisation.

To emphasise the particularly traumatising effect of crimes within the family, a heavier sentence can be imposed on the perpetrator when the victim is a spouse, partner or a member of the family.

How is the implementation of the convention monitored?

The convention sets up a monitoring mechanism to assess how well its provisions are put into practice. This monitoring mechanism consists of two pillars: the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), an independent expert body, and the Committee of the Parties, a political body composed of official representatives of the States Parties to the Convention. Their findings and recommendations will help to ensure states' compliance with the convention and guarantee its long-term effectiveness.

Other Frameworks

International organizations have defined a set of minimum standards which governments and service providers should achieve and implement in order to meet their international obligation to exercise due diligence to investigate and punish acts of violence, provide protection to victims and prevent domestic violence. It is striking that all minimum standards refer almost exclusively to women as victims of domestic violence. Men, but also specific other risk groups, are not yet represented in international frameworks at this time.

WHO Clinical and Policy Guidelines

Responding to intimate partner violence and sexual violence against women:

<https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/violence/9789241548595/en/>

UN Resolutions on Violence Against Women

Outcome of the UN General Assembly on violence against women:

<https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/v-work-ga.htm>

Sources

General Leaflet on the Istanbul Convention (2014):

<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=0900001680464e97>

Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul, 11.V.2011):

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/rms/090000168008482e>

More information about the Istanbul Convention:

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/violence-against-women>