

Resolution 2289 (2019)¹

The Istanbul Convention on violence against women: achievements and challenges

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Violence against women is a crime. It is one of the most widespread human rights violations, a form of gender-based discrimination and a manifestation of deeply rooted inequality between women and men. It occurs irrespective of the social status of the perpetrator or the victim and no country is immune to this scourge. Violence against women cannot be justified or rationalised under any circumstances. Yet, one in three women in the European Union reports having been a victim of gender-based violence, once or several times, since the age of 15.

2. In order to tackle this scourge, co-ordinated action at policy, legislative and institutional level is needed. The Parliamentary Assembly therefore strongly supported the drafting of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No. 210, “Istanbul Convention”). The Assembly has called relentlessly for the signature, ratification and implementation of this convention since its entry into force on 1 August 2014. The Assembly’s Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence and its general rapporteurs on violence against women have played an essential role in promoting the convention, with targeted action in national parliaments across the member States, and at regional and international level. The network has also provided a useful forum for sharing experience and promising practices, as well as for disseminating practical tools for addressing violence against women.

3. The Assembly reiterates its firm support for the Istanbul Convention, which remains the most advanced and comprehensive international legal instrument on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. The convention sets high standards and takes a comprehensive approach focusing on prevention, protection of the victims, prosecution of the perpetrators and integrated policies, and it places the rights of the victim at the centre of all action taken and measures implemented. It also promotes gender equality and challenges gender stereotypes. The United Nations refers to it as the “gold standard” and uses it as a reference standard in its work.

4. The Istanbul Convention has been ratified by 34 Council of Europe member States to date, and signed by 11 others and the European Union. Two Council of Europe member States have neither signed nor ratified it. The convention is open to non-Council of Europe member States and constitutes a strong awareness-raising and advocacy tool on the need to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence. Although drafted in Europe, it is not meant for Europe only and several non-Council of Europe member States and other regional organisations use it when preparing their own policies and legal frameworks. The Assembly strongly supports the work carried out by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, especially the co-ordination she has initiated between the regional mechanisms.

5. It is important to ensure the implementation of regional and international standards at national and international level and to strengthen their positive impact and the co-operation and partnerships among the different regional and international mechanisms promoting and upholding women’s rights and combating

1. *Assembly debate* on 25 June 2019 (22nd Sitting) (see [Doc. 14908](#), report of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, rapporteur: Ms Zita Gurmai). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 25 June 2019 (22nd Sitting).



violence against women. In this regard, the Assembly welcomes the commitment of the Finnish and French presidencies of the Committee of Ministers, as well as several previous ones, to making combating violence against women a priority and to increasing efforts to promote the ratification of the convention.

6. Monitoring of the implementation of the Istanbul Convention is carried out by the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), which has already completed its baseline evaluation of Albania, Austria, Denmark, Monaco, Montenegro, Portugal, Sweden and Turkey, in a spirit of constructive dialogue and co-operation with these States. The evaluation procedures in respect of Finland, France, Italy, the Netherlands and Serbia will soon be completed. The Assembly commends GREVIO for its work and achievements. It welcomes the positive approach of the States that have been monitored in responding to the proposals put forward in the reports.

7. The Assembly recalls that parliamentary involvement in monitoring is foreseen in Article 70 of the Istanbul Convention, at national level and at the level of the Assembly, which is invited to regularly take stock of the implementation of the convention. In this regard, the Assembly welcomes GREVIO's engagement with parliamentarians during its evaluation visits.

8. Five years after its entry into force, the Assembly believes that the Istanbul Convention has already had a tangible and positive impact. It has contributed to raising victims' awareness and to raising awareness in society in general with regard to the urgent need to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence. Higher legislative and policy standards have been introduced in national law in several Council of Europe member States. Discussions on the possible ratification of the convention have led to debates on violence against women, its extent and impact on victims and on the urgency of combating it to save lives. Furthermore, focused training for legal professionals and the police have proven important to eliminate obstacles to access to justice by women victims of violence.

9. The Assembly regrets that a number of challenges are delaying some countries' accession to the convention or hindering its implementation by States parties. Too often, an important gap remains between law and implementation. There is also a lack of data, co-ordination and resources, which can delay legislative and policy changes. The Istanbul Convention is misrepresented by its opponents as an attack on family values or as promoting a hidden agenda. These misconceptions and deliberate misinterpretations for political purposes undermine the added value and high potential of the convention, the considerable achievements made in past years and the effective implementation of the convention.

10. The Assembly refers to its [Resolution 2274 \(2019\)](#) on promoting parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment and to the Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 to member States on preventing and combating sexism, and underlines the importance of complementing the Istanbul Convention by action to change mindsets and harmful gender stereotypes, as well as combating different types of violence against women.

11. In the light of these considerations, the Assembly calls on the Council of Europe member States to:

11.1. sign and ratify the Istanbul Convention, for those which have not yet done so;

11.2. implement the convention without further delay, taking into account the comments, findings and proposals made by GREVIO in its baseline evaluation reports and the recommendations adopted by the Committee of the Parties;

11.3. co-operate with GREVIO in involving national parliaments when preparing the State report to GREVIO and when preparing follow-up action;

11.4. actively support and promote the Istanbul Convention, at national and international level, and combat misconceptions and disinformation about the convention;

11.5. engage in awareness-raising activities on all forms of violence against women with a view to contributing to changing mindsets and stereotypes;

11.6. strengthen services providing assistance to victims of gender-based violence;

11.7. make full use of the tools provided by the Council of Europe's European Programme for Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (HELP) online course on violence against women and domestic violence to ensure that every link in the legal chain is familiar with the provisions of the Istanbul Convention;

11.8. provide or strengthen training for all relevant legal and non-legal professionals dealing with victims or perpetrators of violence, in the spirit of the convention;

- 11.9. recognise, encourage and support, at all levels, the work of relevant non-governmental organisations and members of civil society active in combating violence against women, and establish effective co-operation with them.
12. The Assembly invites the European Union to speed up its accession to the Istanbul Convention.
13. The Assembly also encourages non-Council of Europe member States to consider acceding to the convention.
14. The Assembly calls on national parliaments to:
- 14.1. participate actively in the monitoring procedure of the implementation of the convention;
 - 14.2. undertake activities, such as debates and hearings, to discuss findings and proposals put forward in the evaluation reports by GREVIO and recommendations by the Committee of Parties concerning their countries;
 - 14.3. step up efforts to raise awareness of the achievements and added value of the Istanbul Convention, with a view to dispelling misconceptions about the convention;
 - 14.4. actively promote the Istanbul Convention at national, regional and international level;
 - 14.5. support the work of the Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence with the aim of bringing practical solutions to end violence against women and domestic violence;
 - 14.6. support the #NotInMyParliament initiative on preventing and combating sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments and follow up on proposals made in its [Resolution 2274 \(2019\)](#).
15. The Assembly decides to examine ways to step up its co-operation with GREVIO and the Gender Equality Commission of the Council of Europe, with a view to taking stock of the implementation of the Istanbul Convention. The Assembly further decides to enhance efforts to mobilise parliamentary support for the Istanbul Convention.
16. The Assembly decides to consider establishing partnerships and co-operation with other parliamentary networks to promote the Istanbul Convention. The Assembly also decides to consider strengthening its dialogue and co-operation with non-governmental organisations, grass-roots organisations, representatives of civil society and of the academic sector active in the field of preventing and combating violence against women.