Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 2650 (2026)[1]

Paving the way for a culture of consent

Parliamentary Assembly

1. In a post #metoo context, the fight against gender-based violence, including sexual violence, has gained visibility at the political and societal levels. The issue of consent in sexual relations, considered for too long a taboo, has made the headlines of mainstream media and led to broad public debates. Consent has become an issue of political concern and can no longer be sidelined or undermined.

2. The Parliamentary Assembly stresses the importance of including free and informed consent in national legislation on preventing and combating sexual violence. It calls for the end of impunity for perpetrators of gender-based violence, the end of rape culture and a global change of mindsets. The Assembly is deeply concerned by the phenomenon of impunity for the elite and the structural impunity which protects perpetrators of sexual violence. Such impunity cannot be tolerated or prevail: the silence protecting perpetrators of sexual violence puts lives in danger and is an attack on human dignity and personal integrity.

3. Socialisation patterns, gender norms and perceptions of sexual communication influence how individuals interpret consent in their daily lives. Consent has multiple dimensions, it can never be forced nor assumed and should be understood depending on surrounding circumstances. Specific attention needs to be paid to disability, age, origin, sexual orientation, sex characteristics and social status. Economic dependency, chemical submission or structural discrimination can create situations of vulnerability and are obstacles to the expression of free consent. An absence of reaction is not equivalent to consent. Additional protections also apply where children are concerned: any sexual activity with a child below the legal age for sexual activities is a crime. Children above the legal age for sexual activities must also be protected against the use of coercion, force, threats, abuse of a recognised position of trust, authority or influence, or abuse of a particularly vulnerable situation of the child, irrespective of their purported consent.

4. Each and every individual bears the responsibility of committing to the fight against sexual violence and to integrating the principle of free and informed consent in interpersonal relationships, as a marker of fundamental respect. Building a culture of consent involves challenging sexism and so-called traditional gender roles and is a key element in the fight for gender equality and against gender-based violence.

5. Attacks on women's rights, attempts to control women's bodies and behaviour, gender-based violence, including sexual violence, disrespect for women's work, their elected functions and their place in society all aim at undermining women's rights, their empowerment and bodily autonomy, and at downgrading their achievements. These attacks are perpetrated with a view to sustaining a patriarchal organisation of society and have intensified in recent years to constitute a backlash in increasingly polarised societies. The Assembly expresses its concern at the worrying change in attitudes related to the fight against patriarchy in younger generations. Promoting a culture of consent is a way of combating these phenomena.

6. The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No. 210, "Istanbul Convention") clearly establishes in its Article 36 that sexual violence and rape are defined by the absence of consent. Several member States have changed their national legislation to bring it in line with the provisions of the Istanbul Convention, but not all have included the notion of consent in their national legislation. Referring to its Resolution 2649 (2026) "Promoting the Istanbul Convention and improving its implementation: building on lessons learnt", the Assembly reiterates its support

1. *Assembly debate* on 22 April 2026 (14th sitting) (see Doc. 16370, report of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, rapporteur: Ms Zita Gurmai). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 22 April 2026 (14th sitting).

for the Istanbul Convention. It denounces the myths surrounding the content of the Istanbul Convention and its political instrumentalisation, which are detrimental to the protection of women survivors' rights and to women's rights in general. The Assembly calls for the full implementation of the Istanbul Convention.

7. The Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (CETS No. 201, "Lanzarote Convention") requires States to criminalise all forms of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, in addition to consent-based definitions of sexual violence and rape. The Assembly also calls for the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention.

8. Working on consent must not be an isolated action, but part of a comprehensive set of measures necessary for building a more equal society and combating deeply rooted gender stereotypes. The Assembly refers to its Resolution 2490 (2023) "Innovative approaches to sexual and reproductive health and rights" and reaffirms that comprehensive affective, emotional and sexuality education should be both a mandatory part of all school curricula and a right for all.

9. The Assembly also refers to its Resolution 2614 (2025) "Women's rights in Europe – Progress and challenges", in which it expressed concern about the political instrumentalisation of family values with the aim of undermining women's rights and deplored the spread of gendered disinformation and the growing backlash against women's rights in Europe. It reiterates that attacks on women's rights are attacks on democratic values. The backlash against women's rights will have negative consequences on the lives of women and girls, in all their diversity, in decades to come.

10. In its Resolution 2480 (2023) "The role and responsibility of men and boys in stopping gender-based violence against women and girls", the Assembly underlined that all genders, including men in all their diversity, can and should be allies and partners in the fight for gender equality and against gender-based violence.

11. The Assembly welcomes steps taken by the European Parliament and other international organisations to make the question of consent a priority and supports the important work carried out by civil society organisations on this topic.

12. In the light of these considerations, the Assembly calls on Council of Europe member and observer States as well as States whose parliament enjoys observer or partner for democracy status with the Assembly:

12.1. with regard to the inclusion of consent in legal frameworks, to:

12.1.1. sign, ratify and fully implement the Istanbul Convention;

12.1.2. develop a comprehensive legal definition of consent in matters of sexual violence as outlined in the Istanbul Convention, stressing the importance of autonomy, mutual agreement and the absence of coercion, considering surrounding circumstances;

12.1.3. adopt the "only yes means yes" approach in their legislation on combating sexual violence and ensure that the perpetrator assumes the burden of proof;

12.1.4. outlaw the concept of marital duty, thus recognising the crime of marital rape;

12.1.5. prohibit the non-consensual transformation and diffusion of photos and videos to make nude content;

12.1.6. refrain from any changes of law to weaken the legal position and protection of survivors of sexual violence;

12.2. with regard to awareness raising on the importance of consent, preventing gender-based violence and combating gender-based stereotypes, to:

12.2.1. launch awareness-raising campaigns on preventing gender-based violence;

12.2.2. invest in awareness-raising campaigns on consent and the varying (mis)perceptions of consent, targeting different age groups, on social media and on traditional media;

12.2.3. launch specific campaigns on the importance of consent for sexual relations within marriage;

12.2.4. include sessions on consent in comprehensive emotional and sexuality education programmes, ensuring that they are held regularly during the school curriculum and are sufficiently funded;

12.2.5. prevent and combat gender-based stereotypes through educational programmes from a young age, promoting models of positive masculinities;

12.2.6. promote gender equality in all fields and pursue efforts to end the gender pay gap;

12.3. with regard to the protection of and support for survivors of sexual violence, to:

12.3.1. provide training on consent for law-enforcement officers, legal professionals, the judiciary and medical staff so as to better support and interact with survivors of sexual violence in trust-building conditions, thereby ensuring that these stakeholders do not contribute to a situation of secondary victimisation;

12.3.2. ensure sufficient provision of legal support;

12.3.3. give every priority to the prosecution of perpetrators;

12.3.4. provide medical care to survivors of sexual violence, including sexual and reproductive care and psychological support;

12.3.5. support public administrations and services, medical staff and civil society organisations working in this field;

12.3.6. invest in mental health services.

13. Considering the multiple financial constraints faced by women's rights organisations, the Assembly encourages member States to support them, both politically and financially.

14. The Assembly reiterates its call to hold regular debates in national parliaments on the protection of women's rights and the fight against gender-based violence, including on the importance of consent.