



WOMEN AGAINST VIOLENCE EUROPE

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## WAVE urges governments and international bodies to uphold their commitment to international legislation protecting women and girls from violence

Women against Violence Europe (WAVE) is a network of over 150 women's NGOs working towards ending violence against women in 46 European countries. The WAVE Network has been working for over 25 years to promote and strengthen the human rights of women and children in general and prevent violence against women and children in particular.

The WAVE Network notices with great concern the backlash against the *Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention)*. Most states that ratified and implemented the articles of the Istanbul Convention have reported subsequent positive developments in the areas of policy development, protection and prevention of violence against women. By applying a holistic and victim-centred approach when supporting women experiencing violence, states have increased their political commitments to end violence against women at a national and European level. European and international institutions, such as the Council of Europe, EU bodies and UN Women among others, play a key role in upholding these commitments and promoting women's human rights.

Although important milestones have been achieved when it comes to protecting women from violence, it **is very concerning to notice that regressive forces around Europe promote false interpretations and misleading messages about the Istanbul Convention**. As other European women's NGOs noted<sup>1</sup>, these messages are disseminated with the sole purpose of disrupting any legislative attempts to protect and uphold women's human rights.

The WAVE Network would like to express its **utmost support for the ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention**, as it represents an important milestone in combating gender-based violence and offers a holistic approach when it comes to the prevention, protection and prosecution of violence against women. Today violence against women is still extremely wide-spread and continues to be a global pandemic that affects 1 in 3 women in their lifetime<sup>2</sup>. Particularly violence within the family is still seen as a taboo in many countries, where women are afraid to testify against their spouses/partners. Research indicates that the cost of violence against women could amount to around 2 per cent of the global gross domestic product (GDP). This is equivalent to 1.5 trillion, approximately, the size of the economy of Canada<sup>3</sup>.

When it comes to the issue of **'gender'**, it is important to emphasize that the Istanbul Convention defines gender as **'socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes'** that a given society considers appropriate for women and men'. The purpose of this term to emphasize how **inequalities, stereotypes**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.womenlobby.org/EWL-rejects-attempt-to-withdraw-Poland-from-Istanbul-Convention>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2016/9/speech-by-lakshmi-puri-on-economic-costs-of-violence-against-women>

**and consequently violence do not originate from biological differences, but rather from a social construct**, namely from attitudes and perceptions of how women and men are and should be in society. **The term gender does not replace the biological definition of ‘sex’, nor the terms ‘women’ and ‘men’.**

**The Istanbul Convention promotes the principle of non-discrimination, a principle that can be found in every international human rights treaty, and in the constitutions of democratic states**, including for instance the Polish and Turkish constitution.

The **principle of non-discrimination on grounds of gender identity** or sexual orientation **builds on legal obligations that originate in other well-known legal instruments**, first and foremost the European Convention on Human Rights (Article 14 and Protocol no. 12) and the case law of the European Court of Human Rights (for example Oliari vs. Italy, 2015), as well as the Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)5 on measures to combat discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, economic and social stress coupled with restricted movement and social isolation measures, have led to an exponential increase in gender-based violence and femicide cases over the last months<sup>4</sup>, (for example in countries such as Turkey<sup>5</sup>). Many women have been forced to share their homes with their abusers around the clock, without any respite and crucially without having access to support services; many of which have been disrupted or made inaccessible.

In these challenging times it is absolutely vital for governments to uphold the principles enshrined in the Istanbul Convention, and to focus on clear political commitments to end violence against women and girls in Europe.

Considering the reasons mentioned above, the WAVE Network urges:

- **Member States** that have signed and ratified the Istanbul Convention to continue to uphold the values and principles promoted by the Convention and to ensure its full and effective implementation.
- **States** to dismiss false narratives that disrupt the proper implementation of human rights instruments, on national and/or European level.
- **The Council of Europe** to engage with member states to clarify any misunderstandings arising from the misinterpretation of the Istanbul Convention.
- **The six EU Member States that have not yet ratified the Convention, to do so** without further delay
- **The EU to accede to the Istanbul Convention.**
- **The EU to adopt a Directive on preventing and combating all forms of violence against women and girls to align existing relevant EU legislation** and strengthen measures to disrupt the full continuum of violence. The Directive should be coherent and complementary to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, the Istanbul Convention.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women-en.pdf?la=en&vs=1406>

<sup>5</sup> Turkey has experienced a 200% increase of femicide cases, in 2019 474 women were killed compared with 237 women in 2013. In 2020 alone, 146 Turkish have been murdered. More information here: <http://akdamdernegi.org/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://womenlobby.org/EWL-rejects-attempt-to-withdraw-Poland-from-Istanbul-Convention>