https://www.eeagender.org/the-synergy-network/news/article-1-the-istanbul-convention-the-best-tool-to-combat-violence-against-women/

The Istanbul Convention: The best tool to combat violence against women

As many European states are ratifying the Istanbul Convention, Romania welcomes European states to a high-level conference in Bucharest 4–6 June to share experiences and join forces in combating violence against women.

BY MARI LILLESLÅTTEN, KILDEN GENDERRESEARCH.NO | PUBLISHED 10 MAY 2019 | LAST UPDATED 27 APR 2022



In 2011, the Council of Europe opened their convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence for signatures and ratification. The Istanbul Convention entered into force in 2014. (Illustration: iStockphoto)

"Domestic violence is one of the most serious social problems in our societies," says Aurelia Grațiela Drăghici, State Secretary for the National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men (ANES) in Romania.

Romania has taken on the task of combating violence against women. The country is one among a growing number of European states realising the importance of an international treaty as a legal framework for violence against women. In 2019, Romania holds the presidency of the Council of the European Union, and in this period, they have selected the Istanbul Convention as one of their top priorities. They are collaborating with Norwegian and Portuguese authorities on putting violence against women on top of the agenda in the EU.

"There is nothing more vulnerable than feeling unsafe in your own home," says Thor Kleppen Sættem. He is State Secretary in the Ministry of Justice and Public Security in Norway, the government body responsible for the EEA cooperation on violence against women.

"We are committed to working with issues related to domestic violence, because this infringes the most important feeling of safety that women – or children – should enjoy in their home and family," he continues.

As part of this commitment, Norway and Romania now collaborate in promoting the Istanbul Convention. This spring, the two countries have teamed up with Portugal, who has experienced an important shift in the attitudes towards domestic violence. Teresa Fragoso is president of The Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality (CIG) in Portugal, the national body responsible for gender equality in Portugal.

"The public is now intolerant to this type of violence," Fragoso says.

"In the past, it was tolerated and considered a private matter between the couple or the family. Now it is rather considered a public matter, because it is in fact violence, and the state, but also individuals and communities, have a responsibility to protect the members of their community against this," she emphasises.

A convention to combat domestic violence

In 2011, the Council of Europe opened their convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence for signatures and ratification. After three years and ten ratifications, the convention, which has been named The Istanbul Convention after the city in which it was finalised, entered into force in 2014.

"Portugal was the first country in the EU to ratify the Istanbul Convention. We were involved from the very beginning, contributing to the first draft of the convention," says Teresa Fragoso.

She is convinced that the Istanbul Convention has been crucial to the positive developments in Portugal. The Commission for Gender Equality has existed in Portugal for almost 42 years. For the past 20 years, it has developed policies based on a national action plan to prevent and fight violence against women and domestic violence.



"Since then, many relevant policies have been put into force. However, the ratification of the Istanbul Convention brought additional commitment from the state," Fragoso says.

Fragoso points to the importance of having a legal framework and political commitment to handle violence against women. The Istanbul Convention has been ratified by 34 European countries. 12 countries have signed it, but not yet ratified the convention. Romania ratified the convention in 2016, and Norway in 2017.

"The Istanbul Convention is widely recognised as the most far-reaching legal instrument to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence as an infringement of human rights," says Romanian State Secretary Grațiela Drăghici.

“The Istanbul Convention gives a very strong theoretical and practical explanation of the root of gender-based violence and what types of situations are considered gender-based violence,” says Teresa Fragoso, president of The Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality (CIG) in Portugal, the national body responsible for gender equality in Portugal.

> There is nothing more vulnerable than feeling unsafe in your own home.
>
> THOR KLEPPEN SÆTTEM, STATE SECRETARY IN THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SECURITY IN NORWAY

Adjusting national legislation to the Istanbul Convention

Romania is now working to harmonise their national legislation in accordance with the provisions of the Istanbul Convention.

"This was partly achieved by the adoption of Law no. 174/2018, and the completion of a law from 2003 on preventing and combating domestic violence," says Drăghici.



“The Istanbul Convention is widely recognised as the most far-reaching legal instrument to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence as an infringement of human rights,” says Grațiela Drăghici, State Secretary for the National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men (ANES) in Romania.

"Through the new legal provisions, the Romanian Government aims to support victims of domestic violence through an immediate and coherent intervention by all responsible actors and, at the same time, to increase the victims’ level of trust in the authorities' ability to intervene," she continues.

Drăghici believes the convention has already helped victims of domestic violence in Romania.

"The central pillar of the modification of law 174/2018 was the provisional protection order, which has already produced positive effects. Since it was adopted, over 2000 Police Protection Orders were issued in just a few months. This is the reason why the Istanbul Convention is so important for Romania. Because above all, it really saves lives," she says.

The four P’s of the Istanbul Convention

One of the reasons why the Istanbul Convention is celebrated as an important legal instrument is its applicability. It provides clear directions on how states should adjust and apply measures within the four fields beginning with a P: prevention, protection, prosecution and policies (see fact box).

Norwegian State Secretary Kleppen Sættem believes some of the P’s are more well-known than others.

"Out of necessity, much attention is paid towards protection of victims and prosecution of aggressors. However, the Istanbul Convention reminds us about the importance of prevention. We need to stop the violence before it occurs. If we can create attitudes that prevent these types of violent crimes to happen, that would be the best scenario," he says.



“There is nothing more vulnerable than feeling unsafe in your own home, ” says Thor Kleppen Sættem, State Secretary in the Ministry of Justice and Public Security in Norway, the government body responsible for the EEA cooperation on violence against women.

In addition to being a huge violation of the rights and dignity of the victims, intimate partner violence is costing the Norwegian society between NOK 4.5 billion and 6 billion annually.

Teresa Fragoso points to the strong analysis that serves as a foundation for the Istanbul Convention, as its strength.

"It gives a very strong theoretical and practical explanation of the root of gender-based violence and what types of situations are considered gender-based violence," she says.

"It is highly important that everybody understands why this type of violence happens. Sometimes, people say ‘but what about men who are victims of violence?’ Of course, we don't want to disregard men who are victims of violence, but there is a disproportionate level of violence against women."

"Let's say that out of the 27 000 complaints the police forces in Portugal receive every year, 20 per cent of the victims are male, whereas 80 per cent of the victims are female. Moreover, when we discuss child sexual abuse, the majority of the victims are female. It is important that people understand that this is disproportional, and that there is a structural and historical imbalance of power between men and women that is the root of the violence."

Fragoso encourages everyone to learn about what causes violence against women, and what states must do to prevent it. She says that good practices are being put into force, and that it is important to learn from these.

"You can have short-term measures for emergency situations, but violence against women is something that you need to address simultaneously with a mid and long-term perspective. Because this is entrenched in the culture, you need to work on various fronts: the education system, the labour market, the justice system, the police forces, the health care system and so forth."

High-level conference on integrated policies

Many countries are now working to improve their legal framework to make it comply with the Istanbul Convention and serve as a better tool to combat violence against women. However, as prevention, protection and prosecution are established as important measures to prevent this crime, the integrated policies remain as a work-in-progress in most states who have ratified the convention. To move the process of implementing the Istanbul Convention one step forward, Romania, Norway and Portugal will host a high-level conference on the Istanbul convention in Bucharest 4–6 June 2019.

"It will be an opportunity to bring together policy and decision makers, experts and civil society to showcase the usefulness of the Istanbul Convention by exchanging experiences, building competence and capacity and discussing solutions on how to implement the Convention," says Grațiela Drăghici.

The conference is the result of the partnership between Romania, Norway and Portugal, and it is organised within the framework given by Romania's presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2019. The European Union has not yet accessed the Istanbul Convention.

"Hopefully, our event will be an important vector to stress the relevance of the EU accession to the Istanbul Convention," says Drăghici.

Norway's State Secretary Kleppen Sættem is pleased with the Romanian initiative.

"We appreciate the enthusiasm Romania has demonstrated concerning this issue. I wish all countries in Europe could be as enthusiastic as them," he says.

The conference is enabled through funding from EEA & Norway Grants.

"From our point of view, the EEA funding is an important tool for strengthening multilateral cooperation on the issue of violence against women and domestic violence. We are encouraged and motivated to continue working with this topic, seeing the political engagement in Romania," says Kleppen Sættem.

The importance of sharing experiences and strategies

At the conference, high-level politicians from the European states will meet fellow politicians, NGO's, practitioners and scholars working to combat domestic violence. Drăghici and Kleppen Sættem are convinced that it will be a fruitful and inspiring event.

"This event will contribute to effective and sustainable implementation of programmes and projects aimed at preventing and combating gender-based and domestic violence under the EEA/Norway Grants," says Drăghici.

"We want to engage the main stakeholders in a reflection process targeted on the paradigm change at different levels: governmental and local authorities, civil society and national human rights institutions. Moreover, we want to involve parliamentarians in monitoring the implementation of the Istanbul Convention," she continues.

"This could also ensure that the implementers and monitors of the Istanbul Convention have comprehensive information on how the Convention and future recommendations for improvement are enforced on the ground."

Kleppen Sættem is looking forward to the dialogue and exchange of ideas, and says the event gives the participants a possibility to move the agenda forward, making Europe a safer place for women and girls.

"This gives us a chance to broaden the horizon and learn from other states. Exchanging ideas, brain storming and putting the issue on top of the agenda – that is the importance of such a conference. It all has to do with raising awareness, and I believe everyone has something to contribute, and everyone has something to learn," he says.

Teresa Fragoso from Portugal is convinced that sharing knowledge across borders is crucial to succeeding in the fight against violence against women.

"Many sectors should be involved. It's important that people seize this opportunity to hear about other countries' difficulties and challenges, but also successes. Because we want to learn from the best practices."

Fragoso stresses why, in her experience, cooperation between European states is so crucial.

"Quite often, victims of violence emigrate. They feel safer if they're farther away from their aggressor. Then they will need the support of the hosting country, meaning that some measures need to be designed from an international cooperation perspective."

"That is why a conference of this scale is also relevant for people in order to understand the interconnections, and how we should all work together to fight gender-based violence," says Fragoso.

Messages at time of print 11 November 2026, 16:56 CET

No global messages displayed at time of print.