

First meeting of the SYNERGY Network against Gender-based and Domestic Violence in 2021

In a gathering of governmental and non-governmental professionals dedicated to combatting violence against women, the EEA/Norway Grants' SYNERGY Network against Gender-based and Domestic Violence held its first assembly of the year on Thursday, 18 March 2021.

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With a focus on mitigation measures for violence against women during COVID-19, the discussion featured multiple speakers from the Council of Europe, including the keynote speaker Nina Nordström, Ambassador of Finland to the Council of Europe and President of the Committee of Parties to the Istanbul Convention. Ambassador Nordström addressed the consequences of COVID-19 on violence against women, and practical ways the convention can guide state response during the pandemic, presenting the [Declaration](#) published by the [Committee of the Parties to the Istanbul Convention](#) on the implementation of the Convention during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as a compilation of national practices gathered by the [Gender Equality Commission](#) and the Committee of the Parties to [the Istanbul Convention](#), on the webpage '[Promoting and protecting women's rights at national level](#)'.

Ambassador Nordström also took the opportunity to discuss the impact of the [Istanbul Convention](#) in its first decade, providing a few examples of progress seen following ratification. She stated that specialist support services for women victims of sexual violence have been bolstered in Portugal, Belgium and Turkey, and several states parties have amended their legislation on sexual violence as the result of ratification. National telephone helplines for victims have been reinforced in Monaco, Albania, Montenegro, Finland, and Serbia. Higher legislative and policy standards have been introduced at the national level in Andorra, Austria, Malta, Monaco and Portugal. Protections against forced marriage have been further developed in Albania, Sweden, Italy, Serbia, Spain, Andorra and Malta. Finally, Ambassador Nordström noted that [GREVIO's baseline evaluation reports](#) show that progress has been achieved regarding combatting stalking, particularly in Albania, Finland, Italy, Malta, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Portugal, Serbia, Spain and Sweden.

"We are now, at 10 years since the opening of the Convention for signatures, at a stage where we have the evidence that the Convention makes a difference. It delivers."

Daniele Cangemi, the head of the Human Dignity and [Gender Equality Department](#) of the Council of Europe, also addressed the SYNERGY Network to speak of the potential of the Istanbul Convention as a source of guidance for effective European cooperation, as seen in Chapter VIII of the Istanbul Convention. Mr Cangemi emphasised the importance of international cooperation to better prevent, combat and prosecute all forms of violence under the convention, as well as protect and provide assistance to victims, and stressed the importance for all states to discuss their respective experiences as a way to put in practice the principle of international cooperation and also, for the states concerned, to overcome the remaining obstacles to the ratification of the Convention.

Finally, Ana Medarska-Lazova and Jenna Shearer Demir presented the HELP e-learning platform and a first of its kind opportunity for SYNERGY Network members to participate in a regional, tutored [online course on Access to Justice for women](#), which combines elements of gender equality and an examination of barriers to justice encountered by women when facing violence.

Council of Europe speakers joined informative and compelling presentations and examples of practice during the gathering, by [Hilde Barstad](#), the State Secretary for the Minister of Justice and Public Security in Norway; Sandra Ribeiro, the President of the Portuguese Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality; Tori Hoven the Head of Programmes Department from the Financial Mechanism Office of EEA/Norway Grants; Kilden gender research and SYNERGY members from Iceland, Romania, Lithuania, Portugal, and Norway.

The conference was organised by the Ministry of justice and Public Security in Norway on behalf of the EEA/Norway Grants SYNERGY Network against Gender-based and Domestic Violence. [The Council of Europe cooperates under the EEA/Norway Grants](#) as an International Partner Organisation and is the main international partner of the SYNERGY Network.

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