

The Council of Europe Istanbul Convention also protects children from violence

In honour of International Children's Day, the Council of Europe presented the topic, "The Istanbul Convention: also protecting children from violence", at the international roundtable in Lithuania, "How to Protect a Child: on preventing domestic violence against children" on 1 June 2021.

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The international roundtable was held under the [EEA/Norway Grants Lithuania Justice and Home Affairs programme](#), and was hosted by the National Courts Administration of Lithuania. The roundtable featured addresses by Lithuanian Judicial Council, the National Courts Administration, the Lithuanian Criminal Police Bureau and Prosecutor General's Office, as well as the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Norwegian Frostating Court of Appeal and the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Lithuania, among other compelling presentations.

Jenna Shearer Demir from the [Council of Europe's Gender Equality Division](#) noted that the [Istanbul Convention](#) considers the need to [protect children](#) who have been the subject of direct physical, sexual or psychological violence as well as those who have witnessed domestic violence. [The mid-term horizontal review](#) of reports by the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence ([GREVIO](#)) presents a number of findings on children and domestic violence, including:

- Specialised support for children in situations of domestic violence should include age-appropriate psycho-social counselling and respect for the best interests of the child. However, parties to the Istanbul Convention have mostly failed to achieve proper access to appropriate specialised services for children. Access to counselling services outside of shelters is particularly limited.
- Awareness-raising campaigns on domestic violence should be emphasising the consequences on children who have witnessed violence between parents, as well as the direct impact of domestic violence on children.
- Shelters may not be well-enough equipped to deal with children who accompany their mothers, and children may feel uprooted or isolated, with interruptions to their schooling. A careful balance will need to be struck in such cases.
- The Istanbul Convention requires judges to take into consideration any known incidents of domestic violence when they decide on custody or visitation rights, factoring this violence into decisions regarding visitation or custody rights which prioritise safety for victims of violence. In the countries examined, there are often great shortcomings on custody and visitation rights both in the legal framework or how it is applied.

- Special protection should be provided to child victims and child witnesses at all stages of investigations and judicial proceedings, given their vulnerability to intimidation and manipulation when facing the perpetrator in court.
- In many cases, victims of forced marriage are below the age of 18. The Istanbul Convention criminalises forcing a child, a girl or a boy, to enter into a marriage, as well as luring a child to another country with the intention of marrying the child, against his or her will.
- Female genital mutilation is criminalised under the convention, which is a violation of the right to personal integrity of women and girls and needs to be protected by law.
- “Honour-related violence” can never be justified by culture, custom, religion or tradition and is also harmful to children sometimes pressured to commit the crime.
- The Istanbul Convention entrusts children with great responsibility as agents of change, and mentalities and attitudes supporting inequality between women and men should be challenged to break the continuity of domestic violence.

A video of the roundtable can be accessed [here](#).

The Council of Europe [cooperates on issues of violence against women and domestic violence](#) with [EEA/Norway Grants](#) in the [Lithuania Justice and Home Affairs programme](#) as an [International Partner Organisation](#), and is the main international partner in the SYNERGY Network.

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