

Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence: EU accession

2016/0062R(NLE) - 02/02/2023 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs and the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality adopted the interim report by **ukasz KOHUT** (S&D, PL) and **Arba KOKALARI** (EPP, SE) on the proposal for a Council decision on the conclusion, by the European Union, of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

One in three women in the EU, totalling around 62 million women, have experienced physical and/or sexual violence, while more than half of women (55%) in the EU have been sexually harassed at least once since the age of 15.

Members welcomed the Commission's proposal on 4 March 2016 for the **EU to accede to the Istanbul Convention**, the most comprehensive legally binding instrument at international level on preventing and combating violence against women and gender-based violence, including domestic violence.

While welcoming the signing of the Istanbul Convention by the EU on 13 June 2017, Members regretted that, six years later, the EU has still not ratified the Convention due to the refusal of some Member States in the Council of the European Union. The Council is urged not to delay any longer the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention, which should be considered as the **minimum standard to eradicate gender-based violence**.

The report strongly condemned all forms of gender-based violence against women and girls and LGBTIQ+ people and called on the Commission to ensure that the Convention is **fully integrated into the EU legislative and policy framework**.

The Commission and the Member States are asked to:

- refer to the Istanbul Convention's **definition** on violence against women in their relevant legislation;
- appropriately address, through **legislative and non-legislative means**, issues such as custody and visitation rights to children, civil consequences of forced marriages, stalking, denial of rights and access to reproductive health care, and to protect victims;
- carry out **information campaigns** on the Istanbul Convention and its provisions, as well as programmes to facilitate the implementation of the Convention's provisions;
- ensure the development of gender-sensitive **training**, procedures and guidelines, as well as specific victim-centred support and protection measures for all relevant professionals, including law enforcement, judiciary and prosecutors.

The report stressed the responsibility of Member States to **combat impunity** in cases of violence against women and other forms of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, and to preserve the dissuasive function of penalties and prosecutions. It acknowledged the extensive work of the GREVIO (body of independent experts) in monitoring the implementation of the Convention and called on all parties to follow the recommendations addressed to each country.

Given the important role played by the Istanbul Convention during the COVID-19 pandemic, Members called for an EU protocol on violence against women in times of crisis and emergency.

Members strongly condemned the **political instrumentalisation of the Convention** by some Member States and attempts to disparage the Convention and its positive impact on the eradication of gender-based violence. Member States are invited to **speed up the negotiations related to the ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention** and to strongly condemn all attempt to reverse measures already taken under the Istanbul Convention to combat violence against women. Parliament should be fully involved in the Convention's monitoring process after the accession of the Union to the Convention.

The report also condemns Poland's attempt to denounce the Istanbul Convention. It called on national authorities to **fight against disinformation** and launch awareness campaigns to dispel all doubts about the Convention and its benefits for society as a whole. The six remaining Member States that have not yet done so - Bulgaria, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and the Czech Republic - are called upon to ratify the convention without delay. Members reiterated their call on the Council to **urgently conclude the ratification of the Istanbul Convention** by the EU, on the basis of broad accession and without any limitations, and to encourage all Member States to ratify it.

Members called on the Commission to draw up a **holistic EU strategy** on combating violence against women and gender-based violence that includes a comprehensive plan to prevent and combat all forms of gender inequalities, integrating all EU efforts to eradicate violence against women.

The Council is invited to activate the passerelle clause by adopting a unanimous decision identifying gender-based violence as one of the areas of crime listed in Article 83(1) TFEU.