Violence against women: MEPs demand the EU ratify the Istanbul Convention

• Court of Justice has confirmed that the EU can ratify the Istanbul Convention without unanimity in the Council
• Member states must fight disinformation about the Convention and implement it fully
• Support victims by providing law enforcement and relevant public services with gender-sensitive training
• One in three women in the EU has experienced physical and/or sexual violence
The European Union should ratify the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women, in line with a 2021 Court of Justice opinion, MEPs insist.

The text, adopted by 469 in favour, 104 against and 55 abstentions, says the Istanbul Convention remains the international standard and a key tool in eradicating gender-based violence, including domestic violence. MEPs strongly condemn attempts in some member states to revoke measures already taken in applying the Istanbul Convention and call on them to implement it fully.

MEPs condemn the backlash against gender equality, women's rights and the Istanbul Convention in some member states - for example in Poland, where the government is looking to withdraw from the Convention and has introduced a de facto ban on abortion. They demand national authorities fight against disinformation about the Convention.

Six years after the EU signed the Convention, it has still not ratified it because of the refusal of a few member states. However, the EU Court of Justice's opinion of 6 October 2021 stated that the European Union can ratify the Istanbul Convention without having the agreement of all member states. The EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention does not exempt member states from ratifying it themselves, say MEPs, who urge the remaining six countries - Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovakia - to ratify the Convention without delay.

Concrete proposals for implementation

Criminal justice should only be one part of a comprehensive response to gender-based violence, MEPs say. The EU's response should also encompass prevention, protection, and prosecution. Member states should ensure gender-sensitive training, procedures and guidelines, as well as specialist support and protection measures with a victim-centred approach for all professionals involved, including law enforcement agencies, the judiciary and public prosecutors.

Quotes

Arba Kokalari (EPP, Sweden), rapporteur for the Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee, said: "We as Europeans now have a window of opportunity to take the necessary measures to combat violence against women, which affects as many as one third of all women in Europe. It is time for the EU to ratify the Istanbul Convention. The EU must step up and go from words to action to stop gender-based violence, protect victims and punish perpetrators."

Łukasz Kohut (S&D, Poland) rapporteur for the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee said: "Six years ago, the EU signed the Istanbul Convention, which aims to prevent violence, protect victims, and prosecute perpetrators. Our report is a strong signal supporting the Swedish Presidency's efforts for the EU to accede to the Istanbul Convention. The reality - that violence is happening in many homes - must change soon!"
Background

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

Further information

The report will be available here (15.02.2023)
Watch the debate again
Steps of the procedure
Legislative train schedule
Press release on FEMM/LIBE committee vote (25.01.2023)
European Parliament Study on the legislative framework for victims of gender-based violence, October 2022
European Parliament Research Service: EU Accession to the Istanbul Convention - At A Glance, February 2023
Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality
Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs
Free photos, video and audio material

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