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# PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: ARTICLE 12 OF THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION



A collection of papers  
on the Council of Europe Convention  
on preventing and combating violence  
against women and domestic violence

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# PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: ARTICLE 12 OF THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION

A collection of papers  
on the Council of Europe Convention  
on preventing and combating violence  
against women and domestic violence

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# Introduction

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**P**revention is a core element of a co-ordinated and strategic response to end violence against women, and needs to be implemented alongside adequate and effective service provision, protection and prosecution. The area of prevention is one of the four core pillars of the comprehensive approach to violence against women that underlies the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (hereinafter Istanbul Convention). Prevention measures are particularly strategic in a long-term vision of ending violence against women, as they aim to ensure far-reaching changes in attitudes and, ultimately, behaviours. No interventions to reduce gender-based violence can be effective without a change in mind-sets. The Istanbul Convention expounds this long-term vision and, as an overarching principle for all prevention measures, it requires states parties to promote changes in the social and cultural patterns of behaviour of women and men in order to eradicate prejudices, customs and all practices based on negative gender stereotypes.

The purpose of this paper is to offer policymakers and practitioners a theoretical framework together with practical examples of how comprehensive preventive measures can contribute to reduce violence against women. It concludes with recommendations to policymakers and others wishing to implement effective preventive measures that work to challenge gender stereotypes, involve men and boys, address the needs of vulnerable groups and empower women, as contained in Article 12 of the Istanbul Convention.

## The scope of Article 12

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**F**irmly grounded in the understanding that gender inequality is a cause and consequence of violence against women, the Istanbul Convention provides for an entire prevention chapter that envisages measures to stop violence against women from happening by achieving greater gender equality. This means recognising the gendered nature of violence against women as rooted in power imbalances and inequality between women and men. This also means working to prevent a continuum of forms of violence against women, including physical violence, sexual and psychological violence, stalking, sexual harassment, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, forced abortion and forced sterilisation. Furthermore, states parties to the Istanbul Convention have the option of applying the convention to all victims of domestic violence and, in case they choose to do so, may consider specific factors associated with domestic violence against children or the elderly, and adopt adequate measures to prevent such violence from happening.

Article 12 contains the general obligation to prevent violence against women, followed by Articles 13 to 16 that outline this obligation more specifically by calling for detailed preventive measures in the area of awareness raising, education, training and perpetrator treatment programmes.



## **Article 12 – General obligations**

1 Parties shall take the necessary measures to promote changes in the social and cultural patterns of behaviour of women and men with a view to eradicating prejudices, customs, traditions and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority of women or on stereotyped roles for women and men.

2 Parties shall take the necessary legislative and other measures to prevent all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention by any natural or legal person.

3 Any measures taken pursuant to this chapter shall take into account and address the specific needs of persons made vulnerable by particular circumstances and shall place the human rights of all victims at their centre.

4 Parties shall take the necessary measures to encourage all members of society, especially men and boys, to contribute actively to preventing all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention.

5 Parties shall ensure that culture, custom, religion, tradition or so-called “honour” shall not be considered as justification for any acts of violence covered by the scope of this Convention.

6 Parties shall take the necessary measures to promote programmes and activities for the empowerment of women.

The purpose of Article 12 is to reach the hearts and minds of individuals to ensure changes in mind-sets, attitudes and beliefs towards women, their role and status in society, their sexuality, as well as women’s agency. The ultimate aim is to change the behaviour of men and women, boys and girls, that is currently all too often influenced by prejudice, gender stereotypes or gender-biased customs and traditions, and that helps to perpetrate or condone violence against women (Article 12, paragraphs 1 and 2).

The explanatory report to the Istanbul Convention further explains in more detail what this entails. In particular, it specifies that any preventive measures must specifically address and take into account the specific situation and

needs of vulnerable people<sup>1</sup> (Article 12, paragraph 3). This means that policy approaches aimed at long-term prevention of all forms of violence against women must find ways to raise awareness of just how much women with disabilities, substance abusers, prostitutes, persons of national or ethnic minority background, migrants – including undocumented migrants and refugees, gay men, lesbian women, bisexual and transgender persons, as well as HIV-positive persons, homeless persons, children and the elderly, pregnant women, but also persons living in rural or remote areas, are affected by violence and how important it is to challenge stereotypes and prejudices among the majority population.

Recognising the potential of involving men and boys in efforts to prevent violence against women by changing attitudes towards gender roles, stereotypes and accepted behaviour, Article 12, paragraph 4 requires states parties to encourage all members of society, but particularly men and boys, to play an active part in preventing violence against women – by acting as role models, agents of change or simply by leading by example.

In line with the convention's stated aim of changing attitudes and beliefs towards women, Article 12, paragraph 5 ensures that crimes against women are considered crimes irrespective of the intention behind them. Culture, custom, religion, tradition or so-called honour shall not be considered as justification for any acts of violence against women.

Flowing from the premise that violence against women is a cause and a consequence of gender inequality, paragraph 6 of Article 12 requires specific activities or programmes for the empowerment of women in order to reduce women's vulnerability to violence by achieving greater gender equality in all spheres, including the political and the economic empowerment spheres.

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1. Throughout this paper, the term "vulnerable groups" is used to refer to "persons made vulnerable by particular circumstances", in the sense of Article 12, paragraph 3. This is done in the interest of brevity and the use of the term "vulnerable groups" or "vulnerable people" should not be interpreted to mean that the authors of the paper or the Council of Europe consider certain groups to be inherently vulnerable. The sources of vulnerability are rather to be found in social, economic and cultural processes and inequalities that are changing and shifting over time, so that indeed certain groups are "made" vulnerable.

# Preventing violence against women

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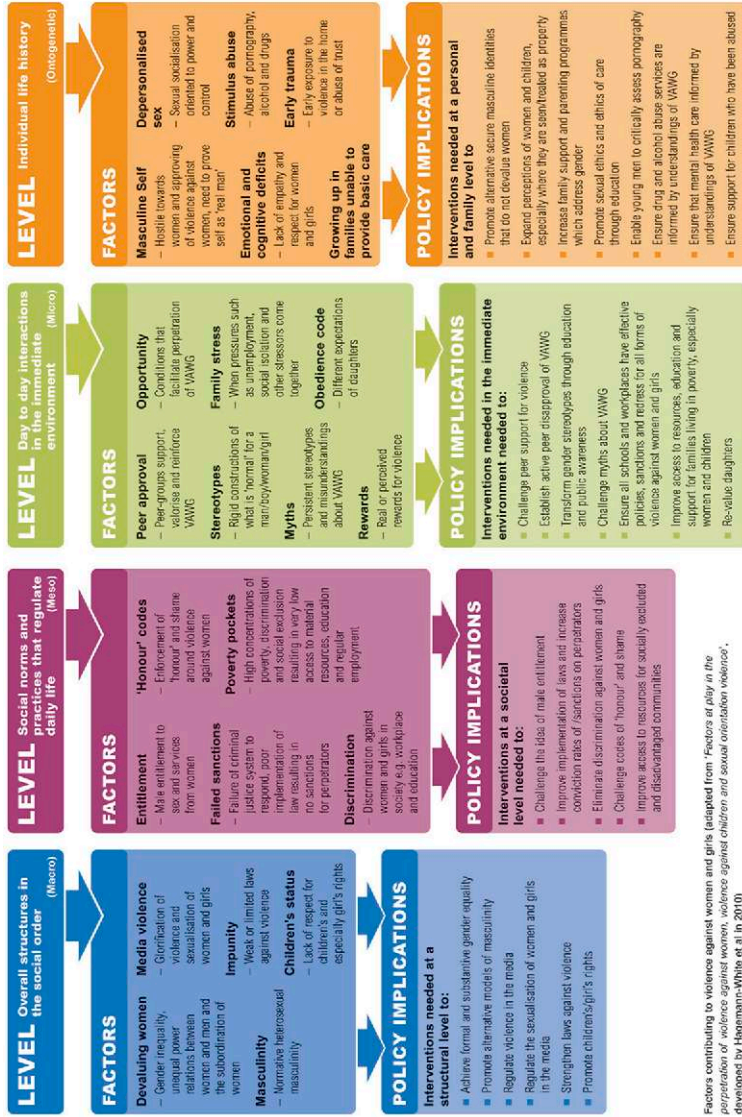
**G**ender-based violence against women violates women and girls' human rights and negatively affects their ability to fully participate in society. It may take the form of, for instance, domestic violence, sexual violence, forced marriage, female genital mutilation.

## Theoretical models for understanding the prevention of violence against women

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Rooted in gender inequality and unequal power relations, gender-based violence against women is the result of multiple risk factors and influences, rather than a single cause. Several models exist to show the interconnections between risk factors and influences and how they lead to perpetration. The "ecological model";<sup>2</sup> for example, organises the risk factors on the different levels in which they occur (societal, institutional, community and individual). Hagemann-White (2010) has developed this into an interactive model, based on a wide range of research into the different causal factors for the perpetration of abuse, to illustrate how the various risk factors intersect at the different levels to form different pathways that lead to gender-based violence against women. This interactive model provides a useful framework for developing strategies for prevention – defined as *the disruption of means, pathways and mechanisms of gender inequality* – because it highlights those contexts that are conducive to perpetration and which therefore need to be disrupted to effectively prevent violence against women.<sup>3</sup> The model locates factors that need to be disrupted on four levels – society, institutions, family/peers and individual – depending on where the impact appears.

2. Heise L. (1998), "Violence against women: an integrated, ecological framework", *Violence against women* 1998 vol. 4, No. 3, p. 262.
3. Hagemann-White C. et al. (2010), "Factors at play in the perpetration of violence against women, violence against children and sexual orientation violence – A multi-level interactive model", in European Commission, *Feasibility study to assess the possibilities, opportunities and needs to standardize national legislation on violence against women, violence against children and sexual orientation violence*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg; Kelly L. and Lovett J. (2012), *Exchange of good practices on gender equality: awareness-raising activities to fight violence against women and girls*, discussion paper – United Kingdom, European Commission (Justice), available online: [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/exchange\\_of\\_good\\_practice\\_uk/uk\\_discussion\\_paper\\_uk\\_2012\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/exchange_of_good_practice_uk/uk_discussion_paper_uk_2012_en.pdf).



Source: End violence against women (2011), A different world is possible: A call for long-term and targeted action to prevent violence against women and girls, London: EVAW Coalition, p. 18-19. [www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/data/files/resources/19/a\\_different\\_world\\_is\\_possible\\_report\\_email\\_version.pdf](http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/data/files/resources/19/a_different_world_is_possible_report_email_version.pdf)

At the societal (*macro*) level, preventive interventions are needed by the state to disrupt existing social structures. Changes in attitudes that contribute to perpetuate gender-based violence against women can and should be promoted, for example, through providing positive ideas of what constitutes “masculinity” and regulating the portrayal of violence and the sexualisation of women in the media. Laws should also be strengthened and implemented effectively, not only to hold perpetrators accountable, but to also balance power relations between women and men through the elimination of discrimination and empowerment of women.<sup>4</sup>

Below this high level intervention, measures are needed at the institutional (*meso*) level to change existing norms and values about compliant behaviour of women. Policies need to address long-standing beliefs of men’s “entitlement” over women, “honour-codes” that exist within some communities, gender-based “discrimination” within education and employment and the failure of agencies to implement sanctions for all types of gender-based violence against women resulting in widespread impunity.

At the next level, that of family and/or peers, places (*micro*), factors leading to violence within the context of the family or peer group structure, where general social norms are translated into expected or socially approved practices, that is, historical and cultural gender stereotypes that may exist either within families or, for example, in adolescent peer groups that support anti-social behaviour and/or physical and sexual aggression. Policy and practice that effectively engages men and boys, for example through work with youth groups, through sport or other community-based can work to change social norms by challenging existing gender-based stereotypes, and by removing the “rewards” of, or “opportunities” to, target potential or vulnerable victims.

The individual (*ontogenetic*) level – or life history – refers to the characteristics of individuals that contribute to a disposition towards violence and suggests that influences such as poor parenting or early exposure to violence in the home, the existence of a hostile “masculine self-concept” or “stimulus abuse” (drugs, alcohol) contribute to violence against women. Preventing violence at this level should involve educational and therapeutic interventions for perpetrators, specialist work with abused children or children exposed to parental domestic violence, preventive parent education programmes and interventions to reduce harmful substance use. Targeted support to women experiencing gender-based violence is also important at this level.

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4. Ibid.

## Overview of preventive measures taken in Council of Europe member states

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Across member states, prevention measures for tackling violence against women largely take the form of awareness raising, education, training and community intervention programmes. National anti-domestic violence campaigns are widespread and tend to be implemented jointly by government bodies and non-governmental organisations (NGO), combining strength from government support with specialist knowledge and expertise in gender-based violence against women. Recent trends in campaigning methods include the use of websites and information materials specifically designed to meet the needs of particularly vulnerable target groups, such as migrant women, black and minority ethnic groups, and disabled women victims of domestic violence. Only a small number of campaigns have been aimed at challenging attitudes towards lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) groups.<sup>5</sup> In terms of sexual violence against women, few member states have implemented awareness-raising campaigns or professional training programmes, and there are significant differences between member states in providing specialist services and materials for victims and for professionals dealing with sexual violence.<sup>6</sup> Across the European region, campaigns and other awareness-raising activities have mainly addressed intimate partner violence or domestic violence.

Most member states implement programmes and activities to educate children, teachers, young people and communities,<sup>7</sup> and training initiatives across all relevant agencies (judiciary, police, practicing lawyers, education professionals, social and health service professionals). These aim to enhance professionals' knowledge of all forms of violence against women, skills in responding appropriately to the problem, and/or cascade training to promote knowledge transfer within a community or institution.<sup>8</sup>

5. EIGE (2013), Study on "Collection of methods, tools and good practices in the field of domestic violence (area D of Beijing Platform for Action)" – Awareness raising, available at <http://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EIGE-DOMESTIC-VIOLENCE-AWARENESS-RAISING.pdf>.
6. EIGE (2012), *The study to identify and map existing data and resources on sexual violence against women in the EU*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.
7. <http://eige.europa.eu/content/domestic-violence>.
8. Council of Europe (2014), Analytical study of the results of the 4th round of monitoring the implementation of Recommendation Rec(2002)5 on the protection of women against violence, available at [www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/convention-violence/Docs/Analytical%20Study%20ENG.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/convention-violence/Docs/Analytical%20Study%20ENG.pdf); EIGE (2013); Study on "Collection of methods, tools and good practices in the field of domestic violence (area D of Beijing Platform for Action)" – Training, available at <http://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EIGE-GOOD-PRACTICES-TRAINING-Domestic-Violence.pdf>

## The evidence base

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Due to a general lack of robust evaluation the evidence base on prevention measures is in its early stages. From a research perspective, the effectiveness of programmes that aim to promote gender equality and prevent intimate partner violence can only really be demonstrated using particular research designs, such as randomised-controlled trials or quasi-experimental designs. Most of the evidence that does exist is generally presented based on the *potential* of programmes to be effective on the grounds of theory or known risk factors, even if there is little or no evidence to support them.<sup>9</sup> However, absence of evidence should not be seen as evidence of absence<sup>10</sup> and programme developers are encouraged to base programmes on the results and lessons learned from existing prevention work considered as “promising”, that is, practice that:

- ▶ uses a gendered and human rights approach;
- ▶ provides a local evidence-base;
- ▶ is sustainable and replicable;
- ▶ enables excluded sectors of society;
- ▶ includes community ownership;
- ▶ includes partnerships.<sup>11</sup>

This paper draws on the evidence from evaluated practice (where available) alongside practice considered as “promising” in addressing the obligations under Article 12, with the purpose of formulating practical advice for designing prevention measures in line with the requirements of the Istanbul Convention.

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9. For a longer discussion, see World Health Organization/London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (2010), *Preventing intimate partner and sexual violence against women: taking action and generating evidence*, WHO, Geneva, especially p. 36 and pp. 70-75.

10. Heise L. (2011), “What works to prevent partner violence? An evidence overview”, available at [http://strive.lshtm.ac.uk/system/files/attachments/Heise%20Partner%20Violence%20evidence%20overview\\_0.pdf](http://strive.lshtm.ac.uk/system/files/attachments/Heise%20Partner%20Violence%20evidence%20overview_0.pdf).

11. Kelly L. and Lovett J. (2012), op. cit. (note 3)

# Addressing the obligations under Article 12

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■ A number of preventive measures should work together at different levels to create the systemic change needed to eliminate gender-based violence against women. Across member states, measures are being taken to improve equality between women and men by challenging social norms based on gender stereotypes, and by involving men and boys in wider scale efforts deemed necessary for the empowerment of women and girls. Below are examples of how this can be done. The aim is to offer guidance to policymakers looking to implement Article 12 of the Istanbul Convention.

## Challenging gender stereotypes

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“Stereotyping is part of human nature. It is a way we categorise individuals, often unconsciously, into particular types or groups, in part to simplify the world around us”.<sup>12</sup> Stereotypes are both descriptive (perceiving all members of a certain group to have the same attributes regardless of individual differences) and prescriptive (setting the parameters for “acceptable” behaviour). Gender stereotypes perpetuate myths about women and men as “truths”. For example, in many societies and cultures, women are thought to be more “emotional” and less rational and, consequently, less reliable and trustworthy than men. Such notions often reflect historic and contemporary discriminatory (patriarchal) attitudes and perceptions of women. These attitudes are frequently rooted in cultural, religious and traditional values. Stereotyping becomes problematic when it is used as a vehicle to degrade and subjugate women both in general and in particular.

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12. Cook R. and Cusack S. (2010), *Gender stereotyping: transnational legal perspectives*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, p. 1.



Efforts to change social and cultural based attitudes and behaviour of women and men must be rooted in measures that effectively challenge gender stereotypes. This can be promoted through a number of measures at different levels including non/anti-discriminatory legislation, developing prevention strategies, public awareness-raising campaigns, collaborating with media organisations, involving the educational sector, but also designing community-based programmes for population groups in which negative gender stereotypes and resulting harmful practices run particularly deep. How this can be done in practice is explained below, followed by a selection of good practice examples.

## **Legislation and policy reform**

The use, both conscious and unconscious, of gender stereotypes within the law, policy and practice can reinforce and perpetuate discrimination against women.<sup>13</sup> It is therefore essential to identify the role of policy measures in reinforcing social norms and values that work towards achieving gender equality and preventing violence against women. Legislation and policy processes need to be clear of gender stereotypes and discriminatory language and concepts. Policies must be developed to ensure that efforts to prevent violence against women are designed and implemented in a strategic and comprehensive manner.

An example of a comprehensive and gendered legal approach to tackling violence against women is the Spanish Integrated Protection Measures against Gender Violence Act, which incorporates numerous prevention measures spanning the public and private sector. Recognised internationally as an example of good practice in gender-based violence legislation, Spain is considered to have one of the most advanced legal frameworks in the world for addressing domestic violence, stalking and sexual assault.

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13. Ibid.

## Spain

### ■ Organic Act 1/2004 on Integrated Protection Measures against Gender Violence

**Intervention:** The aim of the legal framework is to prevent, punish and eradicate domestic violence and guarantee the rights of all women who have suffered such violence in Spain, regardless of their nationality and their legal situation. It takes a gender-based approach in order to ensure that the traditional, differentiated manner in which women and men are socialised is recognised and tackled in order to bring women and men closer to genuine equality. Measures set out in the law include awareness raising and intervention in formal education and efforts to reinforce respect for the equality and dignity of women. The aim is to promote changes in traditional attitudes that contribute towards violence against women by addressing the cultural subordination and devaluing of women.

**Results:** Evaluation suggests that the law's implementation has resulted in greater social awareness of, and critical attitude towards, gender-based violence against women, alongside an increase in confidence in the criminal justice system. Education and targeted training of professionals, social welfare support and extended rights for victims within the workplace have all contributed to an improved social awareness of the issue, empowering women to leave violent relationships, an increase in third party reporting including people close to the victim, and an understanding of gender-based violence as a common and social problem, rather than a personal or private matter.

**Lessons learned:** States must ensure there is institutional capacity to implement new legal measures in a swift and comprehensive manner. To ensure wider impact, new laws must be applied simultaneously with measures specifically aimed at changing existing attitudes in society that condone violence against women, such as education, training and awareness raising. Successful implementation will depend on how the relevant agencies (including criminal justice agencies, trade unions, health and education authorities and specialist support services) adopt and promote the new provisions. Care must also be taken to address any possible contradictions and counter-productive effects (Bodelón 2012).

**How the approach works to prevent violence:** The provisions in this Spanish law work to interrupt the pathways of perpetration of gender-based violence on a number of levels. The law provides a substantial body of penal and civil regulations to secure and extend the rights of victims of gender-based violence. It reflects the seriousness of the crime by making abuse against a female partner with whom the perpetrator has an emotional relationship an aggravating factor in court cases<sup>14</sup>. At the institutional level, educating and training all relevant agency professionals helps them to recognise gender-based violence as more serious than similar crimes where no intimate relationship exists and increases their ability to enforce sanctions, thus addressing any discrimination and inaction that might occur despite the existence of legal measures or policies.

Prevention measures work best when they are not taken in isolation, but integrated into a wider, holistic response to violence against women. The UN *Women's Handbook for national action plans on violence against women* (2012)<sup>15</sup> recommends that prevention measures be included in a national action plan on violence against women. The Istanbul Convention asks states parties to develop “integrated policies”, which are “State-wide effective, comprehensive and co-ordinated policies encompassing all relevant measures to prevent and combat all forms of violence”. The convention leaves it up to the parties to decide whether these policies would be laid out in one or several policy documents, such as a national action plan or strategy.

The most recent data on the implementation of the Council of Europe's Recommendation Rec(2002)5 on the protection of women against violence shows that there is a certain trend towards choosing a national action plan or national strategy to lay out a progressively comprehensive national policy on violence against women. Among the 46 Council of Europe member states that responded to the questionnaire, 21 have a comprehensive policy laid out in one overarching national action plan or national strategy. In a number of other member states, this is done in several national action plans or strategies, each with a different focus.<sup>16</sup> It seems that the comprehensiveness of national policies has expanded, meaning that the number of forms of violence against

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14. Albarracin D. (2005), *New gender-based violence law has workplace implications*, available [www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/2005/01/feature/es0501105f.htm](http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/2005/01/feature/es0501105f.htm).

15. [www.unwomen.org/ru/digital-library/publications/2012/7/handbook-for-national-action-plans-on-violence-against-women](http://www.unwomen.org/ru/digital-library/publications/2012/7/handbook-for-national-action-plans-on-violence-against-women).

16. Council of Europe (2014), *op. cit.*, p. 11. (note 8)

women targeted by national policy has increased in Council of Europe member states. While this may point to a trend towards more integrated policies in member states, no assessment of the integration of prevention measures in such integrated policies can be made based on the information provided.

It is important to ensure that prevention of violence against women and domestic violence is indeed an integral part of the national policy in the field. Furthermore, policy measures to prevent violence against women and domestic violence should address and work to transform attitudes and practices at the interrelated levels of the society, institutions, family as well as peers and individuals. They should also work across the areas of awareness raising, education, involvement of men and boys, media, involvement of the private sector, and empowerment of women. Sweden's Action Plan for Combating Men's Violence against Women, Violence and Oppression in the Name of Honour and Violence in Same-Sex Relationships (2007-2010), for example, contains integrated measures involving all relevant actors, including governmental agencies, municipalities and NGOs and it covered six areas of specific measures, including greater emphasis on prevention. However, ensuring effectiveness of comprehensive strategies may be a challenge and, in April 2012, the Government of Sweden appointed a domestic violence co-ordinator to bring together and support the relevant authorities, municipalities, county councils and civil society organisations involved in the measures to prevent and combat violence against women in close relationships.<sup>17</sup>

## Campaigns

Public awareness-raising campaigns are a central and long established tool in the prevention of violence against women, and can be an effective measure for challenging stereotypes that perpetuate gender-based violence against women, and can be targeted at different levels to interrupt the pathways to violence.

At societal level, campaigns can be an effective way to convey a strong message to society that any form of gender-based violence against women is a violation of human rights and should not be tolerated, including harmful

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17. Sandell K. (2013), *Swedish measures to combat men's violence against women*, p. 4. Comments paper presented at the Conference on exchange of good practices on gender equality – Measures to fight violence against women, Madrid, 16-17 April 2013, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/exchange\\_of\\_good\\_practice\\_es/se\\_comments\\_paper\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/exchange_of_good_practice_es/se_comments_paper_en.pdf)

practices that are often justified through concepts of culture, religion and “honour”, such as female genital mutilation or forced marriage.

At institutional level, campaigns can be used to mobilise both the public and the private sector in prevention, for example by targeting employers’ associations or trade unions.

At community level, campaigns should frame gender-based violence against women as a health and human rights issue and show the benefits to the community of eliminating it. They should offer practical solutions about how members of society can work together to prevent violence against women, for example by encouraging the community to prepare safer family environments for mothers, sisters, wives or daughters.

At the individual level, campaigns can be used to convey safety messages to women, inform victims about their rights and existing laws as well as the services available for victims and/or perpetrators. Traditionally, many rape and sexual assault prevention initiatives have targeted women in particular, to advise them on how to “stay safe”. But such campaigns that tend to tell women how they “ought” to behave can imply that rape and sexual assault are an inevitable feature of society and place the responsibility on the actions of women rather than the perpetrator, which may actually harden rather than challenge problematic attitudes. Campaigns should thus focus on the behaviour of abusive men and the cultural beliefs that condone sexual violence as a normative aspect of male sexuality, rather than on the “risky” behaviour of women.

Campaigns should also be targeted to challenge men’s views of acceptable violence, abuse and controlling behaviour in relationships. A social marketing approach, historically used in public health campaigns to promote and encourage positive alternatives to negative behaviour, seeks to understand the behaviour of the target audience and involve them in the design process. The approach has been adapted to change negative attitudes and behaviours associated with gender-based violence against women for example, by challenging sex role stereotypes and traditional views of masculinity that condone such behaviour.<sup>18</sup> Anti-rape and anti-domestic violence campaigns that use a social marketing approach have the potential to help men recognise the disparity between actual and perceived norms regarding aggressive

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18. Stanley N. et al. (2009), *Men’s talk: research to inform Hull’s social marketing initiative on domestic violence*, School of Social Work, University of Central Lancashire.

behaviour and attitudes. The United Kingdom Government's "This is Abuse" campaign<sup>19</sup> was launched in 2010 to encourage teenagers to re-think their views of acceptable violence, abuse or controlling behaviour in relationships through a series of short films that were available online, in cinemas and on national television. An examination of the response of the young men to the campaign found that they thought it was sexist, and a minority of them took the sexism as indicative of wider discrimination against young men. The lessons from this campaign, then, suggest that consideration should be given to how and where the meaning of the campaign message might be received or re-articulated by those it is "talking to", in order to avoid the possible "boomerang effect, whereby the message engenders the opposite effect of that intended".<sup>20</sup>

For effective prevention, campaigns need to do more than raise awareness. They must focus on delivering specific prevention messages to specific groups in society to dispel myths, stimulate debate and change societal attitudes to address the culture of victim-blaming, among others.

Campaigns must work with a clear and comprehensive definition of gender-based violence against women as defined by Article 3 of the Istanbul Convention, be evidence-based and target specific preventive messages to specific groups. They can be targeted at young people (dating violence), young women (situational safety advice initiatives), victims (regarding their rights and services available), perpetrators (to offer assistance to change their behaviour) or the community as a whole (to raise awareness and challenge attitudes towards a particular form of violence) or the private sector.

To work effectively, campaigning must seek to understand the behaviour of the intended audiences when developing the campaign message and therefore must include representatives of the intended audience in the design, implementation and evaluation of the campaign.<sup>21</sup>

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19. <http://thisisabuse.direct.gov.uk>.

20. Gadd D. et al. (2014), "This is Abuse ... or is it? "Domestic abuse perpetrators' response to anti-domestic violence publicity", *Crime, Media, Culture*, No. 10, April 2014, pp.3-22.

21. For more information on how to design campaigns on violence against women see the forthcoming Council of Europe (2014), *Raising awareness of violence against women: Article 13 of the Istanbul Convention*, part of a collection of papers on the Council of Europe Convention on prevention and combating violence against women and domestic violence, Council of Europe, Strasbourg.

## Croatia

■ Silence is Not Gold – A national media and education campaign (January 2007-August 2008)<sup>22</sup>

**Intervention:** The aim of the campaign, implemented by the Centre for Education, Counselling and Research (CESI) and Open Media Group (OMG) was to raise awareness about gender stereotypes, the causes of gender-based violence and to promote the values of gender equality in attitudes and behaviour of young people. Activities included an evidence-based media campaign, education and training of teachers to work more effectively with young people; creative workshops with young people and advocacy to change public policies. The evidence-based media campaign consisted of a series of four TV clips on the subjects of domestic violence, date rape and trafficking, and the fourth TV clip shows that all the three have the same root and are gender-based. The TV clips were broadcast on Croatian Television (public television channel) and RTL Croatia (national commercial television) with both providing free media time.

*Results:* The visibility of the campaign contributed to increased awareness and understanding of gender-based violence amongst the wider public and the importance of its prevention. The training of teachers and the active and public involvement of young people ensured wide impact and long-term effects. Positive changes related to prevention of gender-based violence were reflected in increased interest of the general public and the media. Through education activities various types and forms of gender-based violence were recognised with teachers better able to work with pupils on prevention and promotion of gender equality. Participation in awareness-raising projects had a positive influence on the attitudes of students who had been sensitised to recognise stereotypes and gender-based violence, and empowered to remove themselves from violent relationships.

**Limitations:** Despite the progress in the institutionalisation of gender equality standards and prevention of violence against women in Croatia, numerous problems stemmed from the lack of coherence of the legislative framework and lags in its implementation.

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22. Information in English on the campaign is available on the website of the European Institute for Gender Equality at <http://eige.europa.eu/content/national-campaign-to-prevent-gender-based-violence-%E2%80%93-silence-is-not-gold%E2%80%9D-%E2%80%9C%C5%A1utnja-nije-zlato>.

**Lessons learned:** Factors in the campaigns' success were its clear, appropriate and comprehensive definition of domestic violence within different types of gender-based violence; the co-operation between CESI and relevant state institutions; the different and creative tools employed to engage young people; a strong communication strategy involving different target groups; and the public reach and visibility of the awareness-raising campaign (through national TV).

**How the approach works to prevent violence:** At societal level, the media campaign raised awareness and concern amongst the public and policymakers about gender-based violence. At the institutional level, the campaign targeted education professionals in order to empower and be empowered through improved knowledge and ability to challenge social norms that make gender-based violence acceptable or justified.

## Collaboration with media organisations

The media can have a huge influence on society today and therefore plays a vital role in constructing and deconstructing social norms and values in society.<sup>23</sup> There are a number of ways it can promote greater gender equality and awareness of gender-based violence against women through media-based actions, such as:

- ▶ initiatives to educate young people to recognise negative portrayals of women and girls in the media, thereby making them more media literate and critical of media content;
- ▶ programmes that aim to promote more responsible and informed reporting of gender and violence against women by educating media professionals on the issues of gender equality and the links to gender-based violence against women, for example the Zero Tolerance Handle with Care programme in the UK<sup>24</sup> or the work by the Hurriyet media organisation in Turkey;<sup>25</sup>
- ▶ initiatives that encourage the media to set guidelines and self-regulatory standards to enhance respect for women's dignity in order to help

23. Zero Tolerance (2010), *Briefing: primary prevention*, available at [www.zerotolerance.org.uk](http://www.zerotolerance.org.uk).

24. [www.zerotolerance.org.uk/sites/all/files/files/HWC\\_V5\(1\).pdf](http://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/sites/all/files/files/HWC_V5(1).pdf).

25. <http://hktest.hurriyet.com.tr/ENGLKurumsal/Content.aspx?kutuid=190&pageid=38>.



construct positive gender roles and ultimately prevent violence against women;<sup>26</sup>

- ▶ initiatives to promote women's professional presence in media, as well as programmes for strengthening women's media literacy in designing, accessing and managing information and content in media technologies;<sup>27</sup>
- ▶ challenging social media through initiatives such as Take Back the Tech<sup>28</sup> or Everyday Sexism.<sup>29</sup>

To enhance efforts among member states to co-operate with the media for the wider purpose of achieving greater gender equality, the Council of Europe adopted in 2013 Recommendation CM/Rec(2013)1 "on gender equality and media". This recommendation offers a number of policy measures that, if implemented, will help create the conditions under which the media can promote gender equality as a fundamental principle of their activities and institutional organisation in the new multidimensional media environment. Recognising the important link between preventing violence against women and the media, the Istanbul Convention requires states parties to encourage the media as well as the information technology sector and the private sector more generally to play a more active role in preventing violence against women and enhancing respect for their dignity (Article 17).

A number of practical recommendations to governments, media industries and international organisations were made at the 2013 Council of Europe conference on "Media and the image of women" in order to improve the current status of women in media and communications. The conference report indicates that the "media's treatment of women and their reproduction of female stereotypes are linked to violence against women", but that overall, women's status in the media industries has improved.<sup>30</sup> The recommendations made evolve around combating the proliferation of stereotyping through careful reporting, appropriate programming and by using appropriate language and terminology when covering stories of abuse. They serve as an important

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26. [http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/reg/avms/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/reg/avms/index_en.htm). An obligation on state parties to the Istanbul Convention to encourage the setting of such guidelines and self-regulatory standards is contained in Article 17 of the convention.

27. Council of Europe (2013), Report of the 1st Conference of the Council of Europe Network of National Focal Points on Gender Equality "Media and the image of women", Amsterdam, 4-5 July 2013, p. 23, available at: [www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/equality/03themes/women\\_media/index\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/equality/03themes/women_media/index_en.asp).

28. [www.takebackthetech.net](http://www.takebackthetech.net).

29. <http://everydaysexism.com>.

30. Council of Europe (2013), *Media and the image of women*, op cit. (note 27)

reminder of the need for a concerted effort of public authorities, media companies and international organisations to achieve change.<sup>31</sup>

Tool kits for individual journalists may help raise awareness of how their choice of story, language and imagery may work to reinforce gender stereotypes, and how this may inadvertently perpetuate violence against women. Several examples exist and serve as eye-openers to newsmakers wishing to use their power to combat gender stereotypes.<sup>32</sup> In addition, the Council of Europe has put together the “Compilation of contributions from member states on key challenges and good practices on gender equality and the media at national level” to show how sexism in the media can be countered, shedding light on what the issues are at national level.<sup>33</sup>

## Working with the education sector

Systematically educating young people from an early age can prevent gender-based violence against women by effectively challenging rigid concepts of masculinity and negative gender stereotypes that go on to form attitudes that accept and normalise gender-based violence against women, and by promoting relationships based on equality and respect. Educational curricula in the formal sphere should include comprehensive programmes for all children and young people from an early age to inform them about women and girl’s rights and promote positive images of women (and men), which can prevent the formation of negative stereotypes and attitudes towards women that can contribute to an acceptance of gender-based violence. Evidence suggests that prevention through early education is particularly valued when it is age-group specific, student-centred and interactive, with visual input (for example using drama or role play). This is set out as an obligation for state parties to the Istanbul Convention in Article 14.

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31. The conference recommendations can be found in the conference report, Council of Europe (2013), op cit. (note 27)

32. See for example Council of Europe (2013), *Women and journalists first, A challenge to media professionals to realise democracy in practice, quality in journalism and an end to gender stereotyping*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe; Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma, *Tips and tools on domestic violence and sexual violence*, <http://dartcenter.org/topics>

33. “Compilation of contributions from member states on key challenges and good practices on gender equality and the media at national level”, Council of Europe (2014), available at [www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/equality/02\\_GenderEqualityProgramme/GEC/GEC\\_5/Documents/GEC\(2014\)8rev\\_Compilation\\_Media\\_bil.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/equality/02_GenderEqualityProgramme/GEC/GEC_5/Documents/GEC(2014)8rev_Compilation_Media_bil.pdf).

For young people in their teens, educational programmes should focus particularly on healthy ways of forming intimate relationships, as illustrated by example below.

## Europe

■ Youth4Youth: Empowering young people in preventing gender-based violence through peer education<sup>34</sup>

**Intervention:** Several projects funded by the European Commission's Daphne III Programme and co-ordinated by the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS) created a wealth of information on how young people think and act in relation to their identity and within relationships, forming the basis for interventions to tackle gender-based violence against women. One output of this work is the Youth4Youth programme, an awareness-raising, training and peer education programme for young people (aged 14-18 years) in both formal and non-formal educational settings. It aims to create a safe place for young people to explore issues that directly affect them and improve their knowledge of gender-based violence and its root causes. Its goal is to empower young people to become agents of change.

**Results:** Over 2 300 young people across Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Lithuania and Spain took part in a research study which sought to identify cross-national trends in youth attitudes towards gender-related stereotypes and violence. Based on these research findings, Youth4Youth awareness-raising and training sessions were designed and 350 young people from the five participating countries took part in them. Two hundred of them volunteered to become peer educators and subsequently successfully delivered training to over 1 000 of their peers in their respective schools. A detailed manual for implementing the peer educational programme has been developed as a tool for teachers and youth trainers.

**Lessons learned:** Peer education can have a longer term impact if implemented as a "whole-school" or "whole-organisation" approach to challenging gender stereotypes. Programme facilitators need to be fully prepared to deal with disclosures from participants. Sessions work best if: groups are smaller; if delivered by a male and female facilitator to build rapport (especially in mixed sex groups); they are delivered regularly, such as weekly, to maintain interest and enthusiasm.

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34. [www.youth4youth.org](http://www.youth4youth.org).

**How the approach works to prevent violence:** At societal level, the peer education programme helps young people to assess critically their understanding of gender norms, empowering them to challenge negative gender stereotypes and attitudes that justify gender-based violence against women. At institutional level, the programme helps schools and other educational organisations to foster a culture of equality and respect, and it enables educational professionals to challenge discrimination and incidences of gender-based violence within that environment. The peer approach makes use of peer influence in a positive way and is thought to induce peer effects more effectively by fostering trust and making issues relevant to young people's lives. At the individual level, this type of approach can empower a young person or educational professional to become an agent of change.

## **Addressing vulnerable groups**

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Vulnerabilities create barriers to accessing and obtaining support, and it has to be recognised that individuals may experience multiple and intersecting vulnerabilities that need to be taken into consideration. Addressing the needs of vulnerable persons entails both recognition and ensuring inclusion.

Recognition requires measures to increase knowledge and understanding of how gender-based violence affects vulnerable groups, such as women from minority ethnic groups, migrants and LGBT victims, for example through research. The evidence suggests that there are still gaps in the knowledge-base about the extent, nature and impact of gender-based violence against women in these groups across member states. Therefore measures are needed to make available more robust, reliable and disaggregated data on gender-based violence against women and in particular on how it affects the most vulnerable groups in society in order that evidence-based legislation, policy and practice can be developed to respond more effectively to the needs of these women.

## Survey on violence against women

In March 2014 the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights presented the results of its survey on violence against women.<sup>35</sup> This is the first survey to record the extent and nature of violence against women in the 28 EU member states. The survey results are based on face-to-face interviews with a random sample of 42 000 women. They provide reliable and comparable data on women's experiences of various types of physical, sexual and psychological violence by current and former partners, and other perpetrators. The survey also covered women's experiences of stalking and sexual harassment – including cyber stalking and cyber harassment – and asked adult women about their childhood experiences of violence. The survey:

- ▶ provides important evidence needed by key stakeholders such as policymakers, practitioners and non-governmental organisations for the development of policies and other measures to combat violence against women;
- ▶ supplies, for the first time, EU-wide comparable data on the extent and nature of women's experiences of physical, sexual and psychological violence and harassment – including whether they report these experiences and what the response is when they do;
- ▶ contributes to the collection of data for the development of indicators that will be used to monitor violence against women and responses to it.

With respect to physical and sexual violence, the survey found that an estimated:

- ▶ 13 million women in the EU, which corresponds to 7% of women aged 18-74, have experienced physical violence in the course of the 12 months before the survey interviews;
- ▶ 3.7 million women in the EU, which corresponds to 2% of women aged 18-74 years in the EU, have experienced sexual violence in the course of the 12 months before the survey interviews.

Full survey findings are available on the dedicated website of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency: <http://fra.europa.eu/DVS/DVT/vaw.php>

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35. <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/vaw-survey-main-results>.

Efforts are also required to ensure that vulnerable groups are included at all stages of planning, designing and implementing interventions aimed at preventing gender-based violence against women.

At the societal and institutional levels, a “mainstreaming” approach is needed to ensure attention to the needs of vulnerable groups in all prevention measures. Legislation and policy should be strengthened to ensure that some of the more disadvantaged and excluded groups of women experiencing gender-based violence have access to existing services, such as social welfare, health services and criminal justice in the country within which they live, and that their equal rights are respected. At the same time, the provision of targeted, specialist services that can deal with the specific needs of such vulnerable groups also needs to be ensured.

For example, the limited existing evidence on preventing harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation or forced marriage, suggests that a comprehensive, community-based approach involving practising communities can be most effective for prevention. Approaches to genital mutilation in particular should include promoting awareness of the health risks; training health professionals as change agents; alternative rituals; community led approaches; legal measures; and public statements, such as fatwas, although further research is needed to investigate the effects of religiously founded public statements.<sup>36</sup>

Targeted and culturally-appropriate strategies to address gender-based violence have been shown as promising (see the example of “the chain approach” below). Tackling attitudes, prejudices, gender roles and stereotypes that make harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation, forced marriage and “honour-based” violence acceptable in some communities, and thereby making women from these communities vulnerable, is an integral part of the prevention requirements of the Istanbul Convention. Evidence from existing programmes to stop female genital mutilation demonstrates that culturally entrenched behaviours can be changed given time and the right strategy and that the effectiveness of programmes that aim to change gender-related norms and beliefs is promising.

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36. Johansen E. et al. (2013), “What works and what does not: A discussion of popular approaches for the abandonment of female genital mutilation”, *Obstetrics and Gynecology International*, volume 2013 (2013), available at [www.hindawi.com/journals/ogi/2013/348248/](http://www.hindawi.com/journals/ogi/2013/348248/). For more information on how the Istanbul Convention addresses female genital mutilation, see Council of Europe and Amnesty International (2014), *The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence as a tool to end female genital mutilation*, Council of Europe, Strasbourg.

Intervention should be adapted to the particular local setting, working closely with community leaders and lead agencies within that community. Preventing violence against women through community mobilisation and community capacity-building should aim to create local cultures of zero tolerance with communities taking responsibility for prevention. The Netherlands is one of the few member states of the Council of Europe undertaking prevention work specifically on female genital mutilation and uses a co-ordinated, community empowerment approach.

## The Netherlands

### ■ The chain approach (Ketenaanpak) (2006 to date)

**Intervention:** Implemented by the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (in co-operation with GGD, FSAN and Pharos), the chain approach uses existing structures to effectively deal with genital mutilation by making all key actors (youth health care, police, schools, medical professionals, midwives, maternity care, general practitioners, gynaecologists, paediatricians, child protection services and migrant organisations) work together in a co-ordinated and integrated way. This is ensured by the development and implementation of protocols, training of professionals and key persons who are anchored within the risk communities. This approach was adapted and rolled out at national level in 2011 and has continued with responsibility at municipality level. The aim is effective, multi-agency working with joint responsibility across all agencies involved, which is crucial in providing adequate prevention, protection and prosecution of this complex form of violence against women.

**Results:** The problems related to the reality of female genital mutilation in the Netherlands are now addressed in a consistent way at national level. The evaluation of the pilots suggested that the approach was effective in achieving its objectives and reaching its target groups.

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37. Information in English on the intervention is available on the website of the European Institute for Gender Equality at <http://eige.europa.eu/content/the-chain-approach-ketenaanpak-the-netherlands>.

**Limitations:** Impact in terms of outcomes is not available (evaluation was made difficult because of a lack of baseline data) and there was a lack of financial support for continuing the project. The education system and general practitioners were not sufficiently involved; collaboration was limited between the health and criminal justice chains; there was lack of cohesion between the multiple actors involved; and movement of people within the network requiring extra training.

**Lessons learned:** Such interventions need to be embedded into the social structure and as key persons in the community are well placed to identify families at risk, sustained financing of these key actors is essential. There should be no gaps anywhere in the chain as all actors from prevention to prosecution are essential to effect change.

**How the approach works to prevent genital mutilation:** The programme aims to address the root causes of genital mutilation against women through a co-ordinated community response, directly challenging the social norms and “cultural” practices that condone or justify it at the community and institutional level from a healthcare and child protection stance. Education, awareness raising and training is targeted at all sectors/agencies (youth health service; police; schools; medical professionals; child protection and migrant organisations) and key persons from practising communities. Peer group approaches are important as when information comes from someone similar to oneself, the majority are willing to accept and adapt to the information. The programme aims to ensure that custom and tradition are not used to justify mutilation practices and aims to empower women at risk through improved access to information and resources.

Learning from programmes addressing vulnerable groups and gender-based violence suggests that:

- ▶ community engagement requires long-term investment and a comprehensive education package, including formal training for health providers with regular follow-ups;
- ▶ it is important that interventions are designed, planned and adapted to the local setting and are not designed or implemented in a discriminatory manner that runs the risk of alienating minority communities further;
- ▶ interventions need an effective monitoring process that documents each stage of the process. Evaluation of the outputs and outcomes should be designed to compare the situation before and after implementation, and



allowing for sufficient implementation time, which may vary considerably depending on the community and context;

- ▶ NGO networks provide vital points of contact and support, and national centres should be set up to co-ordinate prevention and other measures, such as focal points to promote awareness and discussion in schools, communities and educational programmes.

## **Involving men and boys**

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As many of the forms of violence against women covered by the scope of the Istanbul Convention are perpetrated primarily by men, interventions to prevent gender-based violence against women must actively engage men, alongside women, as actors and agents for change. Working with men to address gender-based violence against women is important in order to change behaviour, obtain men's assistance in strengthening community institutions that can address gender-based violence and involve men in promoting women's equality and leadership.<sup>38</sup>

### **Transforming unequal power relations between women and men**

Evidence suggests that programmes targeting men and boys are effective at tackling violence against women when they focus on transforming unequal power relations between women and men. Because of the immense influence that men have on each other prevention programmes are effective when men assume responsibility for men's violence against women and when they are approached as part of the solution rather than part of the problem. Teaching men to intervene in other men's behaviour can produce positive anti-violence values.<sup>39</sup>

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38. Irish Joint Consortium on Gender Based Violence, *Learning Brief No. 3: Engaging men to end gender based violence*, available at [www.gbv.ie/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/Brief-3-Engaging-Men-final.pdf](http://www.gbv.ie/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/Brief-3-Engaging-Men-final.pdf). See also Council of Europe publications on the role of men, available at: [www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/convention-violence/documentation\\_studies\\_publications\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/convention-violence/documentation_studies_publications_en.asp)

39. Berkowitz A. (2004), *Working with men to prevent violence against women: an overview (part one)*, Applied Research Forum, National Online Resource Centre on Violence Against Women, available at [www.vawnet.org/sexual-violence/print-document.php?doc\\_id=413&find\\_type=web\\_desc\\_AR](http://www.vawnet.org/sexual-violence/print-document.php?doc_id=413&find_type=web_desc_AR).

The involvement of men and boys in the prevention of gender-based violence against women can take on many forms including as role models, agents of change and advocates for equality between women and men and mutual respect.<sup>40</sup> By speaking out against violence, engaging other men in activities to promote gender equality and acting as role models by actively taking on a caring role and family responsibilities, men have an important contribution to make to the prevention of gender-based violence against women.

Men can act as influential agents of change at different levels, for example as:

- ▶ husbands, fathers, brothers, uncles, sons promoting more equitable relationships in the home;
- ▶ peer educators where “men talk to men” and challenge men on the acceptability of gender-based violence;
- ▶ supporters of women;
- ▶ accountable government officials;
- ▶ religious leaders with influence within the community;
- ▶ community leaders.<sup>41</sup>

Examples of measures that have worked to actively engage men on the issues of gender-based violence include initiatives to educate and train men within state institutions and other organised groups, for example using training to change perceptions of domestic violence amongst police officers and integrating reproductive health and gender issues into the military curriculum (see the Turkish example below), plus campaigns that use positive male (and female) role models to oppose violence against women.

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40. Scambor E., Wojnicka K. and Bergmann N. (eds) (2013), *The role of men in gender equality – European strategies and insights*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, available at [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/events/role-of-men/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/events/role-of-men/index_en.htm).

41. Irish Joint Consortium on Gender Based Violence, op. cit. (note 38)

## Turkey

■ Integrating reproductive health and gender issues into the military curriculum, 2002-present<sup>42</sup>

**Intervention:** In 2002, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) teamed up with the Turkish Ministry of Health and the Turkish Armed Forces to educate all young male soldiers on sexual and reproductive health. The training materials and pocket-sized resource guides for soldiers included a specific module on gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence against women.

**Results:** By 2009, three million men had received the training, and the project had been made permanent by a decree from the armed forces. Many of the soldiers said the training had a profound effect on them and changed their beliefs about a woman's right to make her own choices and to live free from violence. The training programme also had the effect of forcing the trainers themselves to question their own ideas about gender equality.

**Limitations:** The programme met with resistance from some soldiers and faced problems with achieving buy-in from military leaders at all levels. There was also a lack of knowledge amongst the trainers on gender equality and gender-based violence, as most were medical professionals, which had had no formal training on these issues.

**Lessons learned:** Long-term training is needed, which can be achieved through binding commitments. The use of creative, participatory and interactive methods of training works to engage men at this level. Training should not be a one-off event, but be repeated to ensure the messages conveyed are effective.

**How the approach works to prevent violence:** At the peer group/community level, targeting young men in this way attempts to transform gender stereotypes through education and training while working to challenge peer support for violence against women. It provides an opportunity to dispel myths about violence against women, not just amongst young soldiers on a wide scale, but also to change a "culture" within traditionally masculine organisations such as the military, where rigid concepts of masculinity tend to exist.

42. UNFPA (2009), *Partnering with men to end gender-based violence: Practices that work from Eastern Europe and Central Asia*, United Nations Population Fund, New York, available at [www.unfpa.org/public/home/publications/pid/4412](http://www.unfpa.org/public/home/publications/pid/4412).

## Challenging resistance

Prevention measures that engage men and boys need to overcome potential resistance in order to be effective. Experience suggests that while there is no single most effective entry point for engaging men as partners, there are several factors that maximise the effectiveness of interventions. In order to overcome the barrier of resistance from men – often based on fear, negative cultural attitudes and norms or beliefs that violence against women is a women’s issue – measures that target the way that men think and behave need to make the prevention of gender-based violence against women matter to men. This can be done by strategically opening training and education sessions piquing the interest of men and approaching the topic of gender-based violence at the end, once they have gained trust and opened communication with the trainers, and by encouraging men to take action against violence against women by making it as easy and straightforward as possible. It can also be done by creating peer environments, especially among young men, in which they feel safe to open up and find positive ways of asserting masculinity (as shown in the Western Balkans example below).

### Western Balkans: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia (until 2013), Serbia, Kosovo<sup>43</sup> and Albania (from 2013)

■ The Young Men Initiative (YMI)<sup>44</sup> – Boys and men as allies in violence prevention and gender transformation in the Western Balkans, Phase I and II (2007-13) and Phase III (2013-16)

**Intervention:** YMI is the first systematic effort in the region to work with young men and critically engage notions of masculinity that promote harmful behaviour, including violence against women and peers. While the project was developed by Care International, local youth organisations

43. All references to Kosovo, whether the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nation’s Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

44. Care International (2012), *The Young Men Initiative – A case study: Engaging young men in the Western Balkans in gender equality and violence prevention*. Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina: Care International, available at: <http://youngmeninitiative.net>

were given the role of main drivers of change.<sup>45</sup> Formative research on masculinity and violence showed that young men's ideal of masculinity entailed physical strength, sexual virility, courage, a strong will and the ability to protect one's honour and that of their family.<sup>46</sup> Alongside attitudes that may support violence in intimate relations, especially if women's behaviour was seen to "dishonour" men, YMI research and piloting also revealed high levels of homophobia among young men in the region. To challenge these notions, YMI is being carried out through social marketing campaigns called "Be a Man" and school-based workshops with young men, using a common curriculum – the M manual (from *mladići*, which means "young man"). The manual was adapted from the Programme H manual developed in Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>47</sup>

**Results:** As early as its pilot phase (2007-10), the initiative reached over 4 000 young men, ages 14-18, in school settings. An impact evaluation study conducted by the International Centre for Research on Women found that participation in the workshops positively influenced men to take up more gender-equitable attitudes related to violence. Testimonials also suggest changes in individual behaviour, in some cases. The initiative also led several young men to volunteer with local youth organisations and created opportunities to bridge ethnic divides in a region recovering from an armed conflict that was partly fought along ethnic lines. Furthermore, "national and local governments recognised YMI as a successful methodology and

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45. The initiative involved numerous youth-focused organisations in the region: Status M (Zagreb), Centre for Healthy Lifestyles E8 (Belgrade), Association for Sexual and Reproductive Health XY (Sarajevo), Perpetuum Mobile (Banja Luka), Altruist (Mostar), Peer Educators Network (Pristina), Youth Educational Club (North Mitrovica), Smart Kolektiv (Belgrade), and Counselling Line for Women and Girls and Counselling Line for Men and Boys (Tirana).

46. Eckman et al. (2007), *Exploring dimensions of masculinity and violence*. ICRW and Care International, available at: [www.care.org/sites/default/files/documents/Exploring-Dimensions-of-Masculinity-and-Violence.pdf](http://www.care.org/sites/default/files/documents/Exploring-Dimensions-of-Masculinity-and-Violence.pdf)

47. The extensive M manual contains over 40 activities for young men to explore a wide range of issues from a gender perspective, including sexual and reproductive health, communication and negotiation, drug and alcohol use, anger management and violence prevention. It is available at: <http://youngmeninitiative.net/en/?page=35> The Programme H manual has been developed by the organisation Promundo, which has offices in Brazil, Portugal and the United States, and be accessed at: [www.promundo.org.br/en/publications-for-youth](http://www.promundo.org.br/en/publications-for-youth).

exemplar model of civil society-government collaboration<sup>48</sup> Efforts are underway to scale-up the initiative in co-operation with ministries of education and of youth and sport. One of the co-ordinators of the YMI became a member of the UN Secretary General's Network of Men Leaders<sup>49</sup>

**Lessons learned:** Methodologies had to be adapted to tackle homophobic attitudes more strongly, as the initial curriculum did not yield changes. In terms of the effectiveness of the intervention, success depended on allowing adequate time for capacity-building of local youth organisations, on flexibility in applying the standard curriculum, on using existing and tested resources, as well as on the incorporation of social marketing strategies to brand "Be a Man" as "cool", and with which young men would want to identify.

**How the approach works to prevent violence:** At the individual and peer group/community levels, targeting young men in this way attempts to transform their received notions of masculinity and violence by engaging them in a critical and personal reflection on gender, masculinities and health, with a strong focus on violence prevention. This approach has been termed "gender-conscious practice". It aims to disrupt pathways to perpetration of violence against women and peers, which is rooted in an approval of violence as a way to assert oneself as a "real man" who knows how to defend his honour; in trauma (including, in this case, war trauma); sexual socialisation that is oriented towards power and control; and stimulus abuse. At the same time, the technique motivates young men to challenge social structures of inequality.

A key principle for supporting work with men and boys is ensuring the centrality of women's safety and rights within any programme. Therefore programmes must be developed in co-operation with women's organisations to guard against them becoming male-dominated.<sup>50</sup>

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48. Care (2012), op. cit. p. 27. (note 43).

49. <http://endviolence.un.org/SasaOstojic.shtml>.

50. DFID (2012), *Guidance Note 2: A practical guide on community programming on violence against women and girls*, Chase Guidance Note Series, Department for International Development, UK, available at [www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-note-violence-against-women-and-girls-chase-guidance-note-series](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-note-violence-against-women-and-girls-chase-guidance-note-series).

## Empowering women

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Completing the list of general preventive measures, Article 12, paragraph 6 of the Istanbul Convention calls for the promotion of specific programmes and activities for the empowerment of women. This refers to empowerment in all aspects of life, including political and economic empowerment.

### The centrality of women's empowerment for preventing violence against women

Empowering women is vital for achieving change towards gender equality. Women still earn less than men;<sup>51</sup> represent only 16.6%, or one in six, of board members in Europe's largest public companies<sup>52</sup> and hold just 27% of seats in the national parliaments of 34 European countries.<sup>53</sup>

At the societal and institutional level, legislation and policy must work to increase women's participation in formal education, the labour market and the political sphere. Policies and action plans that address gender inequality must be implemented across all sectors. As a guiding principle, all preventive interventions to change the existing idea of the inferiority of women and the persistent stereotypical attitudes and social norms that can lead to an acceptance of gender-based violence, must place women's rights and empowerment at their core.

Political and economic empowerment of women are essential for their capacity to affirm their agency, thus decreasing women's vulnerability to violence overall. Women's empowerment through participation in decision making at all levels or through social movement activism to transform the contexts for those decisions is considered the effective long-term strategy for preventing

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51. Eurostat (2013), *Gender pay gap statistics* (data from March 2013), available at [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics\\_explained/index.php/Gender\\_pay\\_gap\\_statistics](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Gender_pay_gap_statistics).

52. European Commission (2013), *Women and men in leadership positions in the European Union*, 2013, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, available at [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/gender\\_balance\\_decision\\_making/131011\\_women\\_men\\_leadership\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/gender_balance_decision_making/131011_women_men_leadership_en.pdf).

53. Women and men in decision making – Database established by the European Commission (Politics/National parliaments) available at [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-decision-making/database/politics/national-parliaments/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-decision-making/database/politics/national-parliaments/index_en.htm).

violence against women. Research has found that as gender equality improves, the prevalence of violence against women is lower.<sup>54</sup>

## How women's empowerment works to prevent violence against women

Women's participation is essential to transforming the contexts that are conducive to violence at societal, institutional, interpersonal and individual levels. Higher levels of women's involvement in decision making can contribute to positive changes in law, policies, services, institutions and, over time, in social norms, thereby leading to a transformation at societal level. At institutional level, women's participation can result in policies, programmes and laws that are quite different from those that would have emerged without it. In particular, female representation increases the prominence of issues more relevant to women's lives, such as violence against women.<sup>55</sup> Research suggests that the existence of strong and autonomous women's organisations has a significant impact on bringing transformative policy change in the realm of violence against women around the world<sup>56</sup>.

The Council of Europe's Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017 calls for a dual-track approach to achieving gender equality, which includes:

- ▶ specific policies and actions, including positive action when appropriate, in critical areas for the advancement of women and for gender equality, and the promotion, monitoring, co-ordination;
- ▶ evaluation of the process of gender mainstreaming in all policies and programmes.<sup>57</sup>

Specific measures for promoting women's empowerment are recommended by a number of Council of Europe instruments, in particular CM/Rec(2007)17 "on gender equality standards and mechanisms", which recalls the importance of

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54. Walby, S. (2009). *Globalization and inequalities: Complexity and contested modernities*. Sage; UN Women (2012) Handbook for national action plans on violence against women, New York, available at: [www.unwomen.org/ru/digital-library/publications/2012/7/handbook-for-national-action-plans-on-violence-against-women](http://www.unwomen.org/ru/digital-library/publications/2012/7/handbook-for-national-action-plans-on-violence-against-women).

55. World Development Report 2012: *Gender equality and development* (September 2011), The World Bank, Washington, DC. See especially Ch. 4: Promoting women's agency, pp. 150-90.

56. Htun M. and Weldon S.L. (2012), "The civic origins of progressive policy change: combating violence against women in global perspective, 1975-2005", *American Political Science Review* vol. 106, issue 03, pp. 548-69.

57. The Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017 was approved by the Committee of Ministers on 6 November 2013. It is available at [www.coe.int/equality](http://www.coe.int/equality).



adopting methodologies for the implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy, including gender budgeting, gender-based analysis and gender impact assessment. In addition, Recommendation Rec(2003) “on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making” provides clear guidance on how to achieve this and calls on member states to ensure that representation of both women and men in political or public life does not fall below 40 per cent. Lastly, Recommendation Rec(2002)5 “on the protection of women against violence”, the precursor to the Istanbul Convention, sets out important measures to prevent violence against women through their empowerment.

Measures that can work towards women’s empowerment include:

- ▶ developing legislation and policies that address wider socioeconomic inequalities and thus improve the status of women in society (mainstreaming gender equality into all policymaking), for example,
  - welfare to work policies to help women back into the labour market
  - policies that improve maternity, paternity and parental leave
  - tax credits for working families and single women parents
  - improved access to social security/welfare benefits for economically disadvantaged women
  - measures to protect part-time workers
  - efforts to improve the balance between family and work life;
- ▶ encouraging employers, including those in the private sector, to promote women’s participation in the labour force and to adopt policies acknowledging that violence is an obstacle to women’s employment.

A good example of working towards the economic empowerment of women as a way to prevent violence against them is Spain’s 2008 awareness-raising initiative – “Companies for a society free of gender-based violence” (*Empresas por una sociedad libre de violencia de género*). This initiative invited the private sector to collaborate with the government in two areas: the insertion of the victims to the labour market and the awareness of the public in general.<sup>58</sup> Under Spain’s Gender Equality Act (2007), companies in Spain are also under an obligation to promote working conditions that prevent sexual harassment and stalking. Companies with more than 250 employees are obliged to develop equality plans that include measures to prevent stalking and sexual harassment, but

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58. Information in English is available at [http://sgdatabse.unwomen.org/searchDetail.action?request\\_locale=en](http://sgdatabse.unwomen.org/searchDetail.action?request_locale=en).

smaller-sized companies are encouraged to do so as well. Trade unions have long been involved in preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence in countries such as the United Kingdom and Ireland.

Effective ways of linking women's political empowerment with the prevention of violence against women are to elaborate specific platforms that articulate women's interests and that highlight ending violence. Articulations of women's interests can be part of women's manifestos, which express women's voices as a political constituency. Women's manifestos can be elaborated by civil society organisations and grassroots groups ahead of major elections. One example of the use of women's manifestos comes from Albania, where women mobilised to formulate demands to all political parties ahead of the 2009 national elections and developed the national Albanian Women Manifesto, which included specific objectives related to the protection of women against violence. Women can come together also as elected representatives and elaborate specific women's platforms across party lines. In some countries, women's caucuses in national parliament have contributed to introducing legislative proposals to prevent and combat violence against women and in having them passed. Another example of a women's platform that actively lobbies for social change is the Congress of Women in Poland.<sup>59</sup> Established in 2009, it is a social movement that brings together Polish women from all walks of life. It advocates for the inclusion of women's issues on the political agenda and has achieved a number of important changes in legislation and political life.

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59. [www.kongreskobiet.pl](http://www.kongreskobiet.pl).

# Conclusion

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**T**he Istanbul Convention aims to prevent all forms of violence against women, including violence against girls, from happening, and frames preventive measures as part of a comprehensive approach that also requires the protection of victims, the prosecution of perpetrators and the development of integrated policies. It is only by introducing a comprehensive and integrated set of policies that a holistic response to violence against women can be ensured.

To this end, the Istanbul Convention offers a detailed list of provisions, grouped under its prevention chapter (articles 12-17), which are based on state-of-the-art knowledge of what works to prevent violence against women based on existing research on its causes and consequences, as well as proven approaches tested through practice in Council of Europe member states and beyond. As such, the Istanbul Convention can be used as a blueprint for preventive interventions. By making it optional to apply its provisions to all forms of domestic violence, including domestic violence against children and elderly abuse, states parties may expand their preventive measures to cover these forms of violence on the basis of the Istanbul Convention. From the many practical examples of what works in prevention covered in this paper, it emerges that, despite their limited evaluation, it is worth engaging and investing in preventive measures to significantly reduce violence against women and domestic violence.

# Checklist

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**P**revention measures work best when they are not taken in isolation, but integrated into a wider, holistic response to violence against women. The Istanbul Convention asks states parties to develop “integrated policies”, which are “State-wide effective, comprehensive and co-ordinated policies encompassing all relevant measures to prevent and combat all forms of violence”. It is important to ensure that prevention of violence against women and domestic violence is indeed an integral part of the national policy in the field, whether that is laid out in a national action plan, a national strategy or several interrelated policy documents.

The following checklist can be of help in ensuring that the various requirements of the Istanbul Convention in the area of prevention are reflected in a set of comprehensive, integrated policies on violence against women and domestic violence.

- ❑ Are preventive measures tailored to all levels, including the societal, institutional, community and individual levels, to ensure the disruption of the different paths that may lead to violence, using an ecological model such as the Hagemann-White model, 2010?
- ❑ Do preventive measures challenge gender stereotypes, for example, through
  - reviewing and amending legislation that reinforces, perpetuates or otherwise incorporates gender stereotypes?
  - campaigns that are designed to challenge social norms based on gender stereotypes, challenge victim-blaming attitudes, and promote positive change in behaviour – targeting all levels of society?
  - collaboration with all media organisations to promote a culture of gender equality and awareness of gender-based violence against women and its root causes?

- o early intervention measures by educating children and young people, both in the formal curriculum and through non-formal peer education programmes to: promote women's rights; prevent the formation of gender stereotypes and attitudes that can contribute to an acceptance of gender-based violence; and to improve understanding of the root causes of gender-based violence and what constitutes a respectful and healthy relationship?
- Are measures foreseen to involve men and boys as agents of positive change, by engaging them at different points of intervention, through the use of creative, participatory and interactive methods of inclusion, and challenge resistance while ensuring that intervention is developed in co-operation with women centred organisations?
- Do preventive measures increase the leadership and agency of women in both the economic and political spheres to counter the effects of negative gender stereotypes and inequality, by taking a dual approach, that is, mainstreaming gender within legislation, policy and practice, while at the same time ensuring that targeted, specialist intervention addresses the specific needs of women, including those who form part of vulnerable groups?
- Are measures envisaged to make available reliable, detailed (disaggregated) data on gender equality and gender-based violence against women that identifies all, but especially the most vulnerable, groups to ensure that the effectiveness of all prevention measures can be ascertained?

# Key Council of Europe resources

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European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms

The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention)

Recommendation Rec(2002)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the protection of women against violence<sup>60</sup>

Recommendation Rec(2007)17 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on gender equality standards and mechanisms<sup>61</sup>

Final Activity Report<sup>62</sup> of the Council of Europe Campaign “Stop Domestic Violence against Women”, 2006-2008

## Challenging gender stereotypes

Report of the 1st Conference of the Council of Europe Network of National Focal Points on Gender Equality on *Media and the Image of Women*, 4-5 July 2013, Amsterdam<sup>63</sup>

Compilation of contributions from member states on key challenges and good practices on gender equality and the media at national level, Council of Europe, 2014<sup>64</sup>

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60. <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=280915>

61. <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1215219&Site=CM>

62. [www.coe.int/t/dg2/equality/domesticviolencecampaign/Source/final\\_Activity\\_report.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg2/equality/domesticviolencecampaign/Source/final_Activity_report.pdf)

63. [www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/equality/05conferences/2013amsterdam/Report\\_MediaImageWomen\\_Amsterdam\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/equality/05conferences/2013amsterdam/Report_MediaImageWomen_Amsterdam_en.pdf)

64. GEC(2014)8rev, Council of Europe Gender Equality Commission, Compilation of contributions from member states on key challenges and good practices on gender equality and the media at national level, Strasbourg, 13 May 2014.

Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)13 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on gender mainstreaming in education<sup>65</sup>

### **Addressing the needs of persons made vulnerable by particular circumstances**

Recommendation Rec(2006)19 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on policy to support positive parenting<sup>66</sup>

Recommendation No. R (94) 14 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on coherent and integrated family policies<sup>67</sup>

Recommendation No. R (90) 2 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on social measures concerning violence within the family<sup>68</sup>

2011 Guidelines on child-friendly health care<sup>69</sup>

2010 Guidelines on child-friendly justice<sup>70</sup> (available in at least 22 languages of Council of Europe member states)

Guidelines on integrated national strategies for the protection of children from violence<sup>71</sup>

Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on strengthening the integration of children of migrants and of immigrant background<sup>72</sup>

Database on policies and good practices to protect the rights of Roma<sup>73</sup>

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65. <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1194631&Site=CM&BackColorInternet=9999CC&BackColorIntranet=FFBB55&BackColorLogged=FFAC75>

66. <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1073507&Site=CM&BackColorInternet=9999CC&BackColorIntranet=FFBB55&BackColorLogged=FFAC75>

67. <https://wcd.coe.int/com.intranet.InstraServlet?command=com.intranet.CmdBlobGet&IntranetImage=534811&SecMode=1&DocId=515750&Usage=2>

68. <https://wcd.coe.int/com.intranet.InstraServlet?command=com.intranet.CmdBlobGet&IntranetImage=569827&SecMode=1&DocId=589942&Usage=2>

69. <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1836421&Site=COE>

70. [www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/childjustice/Source/GuidelinesChildFriendlyJustice\\_EN.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/childjustice/Source/GuidelinesChildFriendlyJustice_EN.pdf)

71. [www.coe.int/t/dg3/children/News/Guidelines/Recommendation%20CM%20A4%20protection%20of%20children%20\\_ENG\\_BD.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/children/News/Guidelines/Recommendation%20CM%20A4%20protection%20of%20children%20_ENG_BD.pdf)

72. <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1253467&Site=CM>

73. <http://goodpracticeroma.ppa.coe.int/en>

## Involving men and boys

Council of Europe publications on the role of men, including working with perpetrators of domestic violence<sup>74</sup>

## Empowering women

Council of Europe Recommendation Rec(2003)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making<sup>75</sup>

Positive action in Council of Europe member states in the field of equality between women and men, Final Report of Activities of the Group of Specialists on Positive Action in the field of Equality between Women and Men (EG-S-PA), 2000<sup>76</sup>

## Case law of the European Court of Human Rights

Selected case law of the European Court of Human Rights in the field of preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence is available on the dedicated website of the Istanbul Convention.<sup>77</sup>

The Press Unit of the European Court of Human Rights regularly issues a factsheet on violence against women.<sup>78</sup>

*Note: All Conventions may be accessed via the Council of Europe Treaty Office at [www.conventions.coe.int](http://www.conventions.coe.int); Recommendations may be accessed from the Council of Europe homepage ([www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int), then Committee of Ministers/ adopted texts).*

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74. [www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/convention-violence/documentation\\_studies\\_publications\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/convention-violence/documentation_studies_publications_en.asp)

75. [https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=Rec\(2003\)3&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=CM&BackColorInternet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=EDB021&BackColorLogged=F5D383](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=Rec(2003)3&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=CM&BackColorInternet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=EDB021&BackColorLogged=F5D383)

76. [www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/equality/03themes/women-decisionmaking/EG-S-PA\(2000\)7\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/equality/03themes/women-decisionmaking/EG-S-PA(2000)7_en.pdf).

77. [www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/convention-violence/caselaw\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/convention-violence/caselaw_en.asp)

78. [www.echr.coe.int/Documents/FS\\_Violence\\_Woman\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/FS_Violence_Woman_ENG.pdf)



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## Article 12 – General obligations

1. Parties shall take the necessary measures to promote changes in the social and cultural patterns of behaviour of women and men with a view to eradicating prejudices, customs, traditions and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority of women or on stereotyped roles for women and men.

2. Parties shall take the necessary legislative and other measures to prevent all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention by any natural or legal person.

3. Any measures taken pursuant to this chapter shall take into account and address the specific needs of persons made vulnerable by particular circumstances and shall place the human rights of all victims at their centre.

4. Parties shall take the necessary measures to encourage all members of society, especially men and boys, to contribute actively to preventing all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention.

5. Parties shall ensure that culture, custom, religion, tradition or so-called “honour” shall not be considered as justification for any acts of violence covered by the scope of this Convention.

6. Parties shall take the necessary measures to promote programmes and activities for the empowerment of women.

[www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int)

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, 28 of which are members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

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