



**RESISTIRÉ**

Reducing gendered inequalities  
caused by COVID-19 policies

# Reinforcing EU level action to combat Gender-Based Violence through the Istanbul Convention

Recommendations to policymakers to mitigate the gendered  
impacts of Covid-19, based on RESISTIRÉ findings.

20 December 2021

Emerging global and national data show increases in gender-based violence and increases in the reported number of cases of gender-based violence against women and LGBTQI persons during the COVID-19 pandemic. The failure to finalise the adoption of the Istanbul Convention at the EU level is a contributing factor to increasing the conditions for and occurrences of gender-based violence during the pandemic.



## › Background information

The **Istanbul Convention** (Council of Europe, 2011) is the **first legally-binding instrument at the European level for preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence**. Yet, it has **not yet been ratified by all EU member countries**, and after 10 years, the EU accession process is still not finalized. In many countries that have signed and ratified the Convention (see Figure 1), its **implementation has been slow and ineffective**, in some cases resulting in significant **backlash** (resulting in withdrawal in the case of Turkey in 2021 and preparations for withdrawal in Poland).

### THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE'S ISTANBUL CONVENTION ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

RATIFIED / IN FORCE

SIGNED, NOT RATIFIED

NOT SIGNED

WITHDRAWN

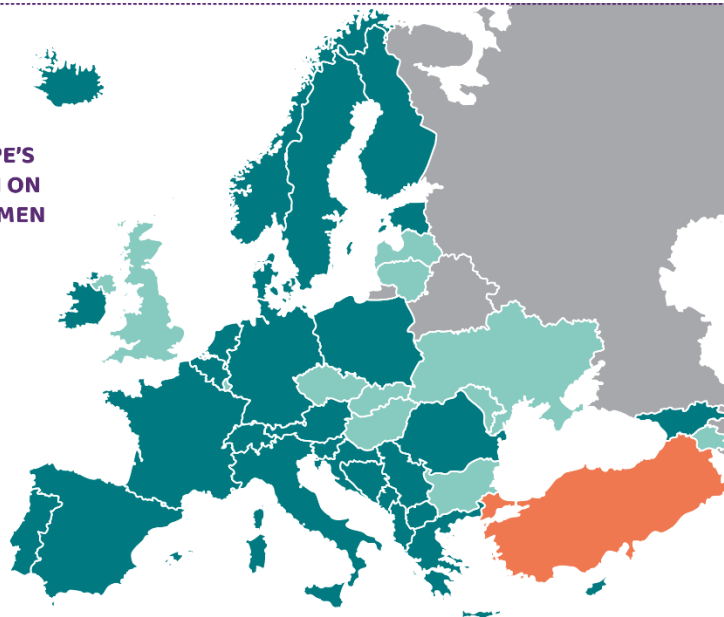


Figure 1: The situation of the Istanbul Convention in Europe. The EU as a whole signed the convention on 13/06/2017, but has not yet ratified it; source = [Council of Europe](#) (last updated 24/09/2021).

Emerging global and national data, including the results from RESISTIRÉ<sup>1</sup>, show **increases in gender-based violence** and increases in the reported number of cases of gender-based violence against **women and LGBTQI persons**. The accompanying economic crisis and increasing unemployment (experienced in many countries) have also had an **adverse effect on domestic violence and its prevention**, where economic hardship and unemployment have intensified, creating further inequalities and increasing the risk of violence. With the additional challenges of pandemic lockdown and limited mobility, the economic crisis has also made women more reluctant to leave their partners or impose restriction orders against them. Hunger and the survival of the family have become priority issues, displacing efforts to address domestic violence. These examples point to the significance of adopting an intersectional approach to gender-based violence, exploring the context-specific intersections of gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, nationality, and citizenship-status.

**The COVID-19 pandemic is not the underlying cause** of gender-based violence, **but it has provided a window of opportunity** and generated a momentum to mobilize against the imbalance of power, resources and control that are at the heart of GBV. This imbalance, in turn, stems from inequalities based on gender and sexuality, discriminatory attitudes and beliefs, gender stereotypes, social norms that tolerate and perpetuate violence and abuse, and not least, from societal structures that replicate inequality and discrimination.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://zenodo.org/record/5541035#.YadDrNDMKUK>





## › Policy mapping: main findings

The reports produced by the RESISTIRÉ's National Researchers underline how for many countries there are still major difficulties in the adoption or implementation of the Istanbul Convention. Some examples below:



CROATIA

This policy also demands investments and significant budget, otherwise it remains, as we say in Croatia, “a dead letter on paper”. Three years since the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, and no significant budget allocations to be witnessed.



HUNGARY

In the field of violence against women “a counter-measure” has been introduced during the Covid-19 restrictions: the Parliament adopted on 5 May 2020 a political declaration (Vejkey et al., 2020) against the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, both by Hungary, and by the European Union. The Hungarian parliament has rejected the ratification of a treaty to combat violence against women, backing a government declaration that the measure promotes “destructive gender ideologies” and “illegal migration”.



TURKEY

On March 20, 2021, without any discussion, Turkey withdrew from the Istanbul Convention by the decision of the President. Their main argument was that LGBTI+’s have become more visible by taking power from the Istanbul Convention. In the same way, they argued that this convention was contrary to the ‘family culture’ and they argued that the Istanbul Convention should be abolished for the protection of the family.



POLAND

In 2015, Poland ratified the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (the so-called Istanbul Convention) but it is permanently contested by ruling party and conservative circles. The Convention has never been fully implemented into the Polish law.





## › Narratives: main findings

Narratives collected by the RESISTIRÉ project<sup>2</sup> showed several ways in which the pandemic had a strong influence on issues related to gender-based violence. Below an example from Turkey:



**TURKEY**

*“After Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, I have been attacked on the streets several times. Even I could not count it. I used to go out with my make-up and clothes on the nights that I was performing, I was exposed to a glance and a skirmish at most. It was like this for years. But now, people's eyes have become demonic. Their way of behaving, talking ...Taxis! Most people were also experiencing physical attacks before the pandemic. I guess I was lucky in that regard. I did not encounter much harassment and violence before the pandemic. But right now, I'm really worried*

*about my life. When I go out to work, I am afraid to dress, I remove my make-up and change on the way home. Because I've seen what can happen in that case. I don't go out without a madi şugariyet (Lubunca - tools that are carried for self-defense) with me. For example, I have a small whip. At least, it scares people a little.”*

*“Before the pandemic, I never worried about my life when I was working outside. These attacks occur at night when it is not too late, and people are still on the street. As per the ban (in the scope of pandemic measures), music must be shut at 12:00 / midnight.”*

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<sup>2</sup> <https://zenodo.org/record/5595815#.YaZHN9DMKUK>



## > Better Stories

Within RESISTIRE, we identify “Better Stories”, a term taken from Dina Georgis for promising practices that identify how a given societal situation can be ameliorated to improve existing practices.



AUSTRIA

### **A new package of measures against violence was adopted by the City of Vienna in June 2021.**

Already being implemented is the construction of a 5th women's shelter, which is to be built by 2022. In addition, a women's shelter is being converted into a women's shelter with a focus on girls and young women. Vienna thus meets the requirements of the Istanbul Convention and even exceeds them with the construction of the 5th women's shelter. This will increase the available shelter places to 225.



LUXEMBOURG

### **Domestic violence is considered to be the main form of violence in Luxembourg.**

Other forms, such as physical, sexual, female genital mutilation, or forced marriage have been more recently addressed (due to implementation of the Istanbul Convention). The focus is still on domestic violence.



## › Recommendations

### 1. Strengthen the EU legal framework

- It is crucial that the EC finalises the accession of the EU to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, known as the Istanbul Convention (see Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025).
- EU institutions should encourage ratification to the Convention, for instance, by making it a requirement to receive funds.
- Given the prevalence and grave consequences of gender-based violence, there is a dire need for the EU to adopt its own legal framework on combating this phenomenon, establishing binding minimum standards for all EU Member States, through the adoption of a horizontal directive to address new challenges posed by the pandemic (e.g. how to respond in lockdown conditions) and the socio-economic changes that it has resulted in (e.g. redressing the effects the pandemic had on vulnerable groups such as victims of GBV).
- All EU-level legal and administrative actions regarding gender-based violence should pay utmost attention to intersectionality and inclusion from a gender+ perspective.
- Make sure that the views and recommendations proposed by CSOs (in particular, organizations working with victims and survivors of gender-based violence) are effectively taken into account when developing EU-level policies on GBV.
- The EU should develop directives and regulations specifically pointing out the judicial cooperation in criminal matters under the legal framework of GBV (especially as regard to crime prevention and the rights of victims of crime), instead of under gender equality and asylum policy.

### 2. Collect data and good practices

- Funding and other resources should be allocated to ensure data collection and monitoring at the national and the EU level for GBV in cooperation with CSOs, universities and social workers
- Measures such as home confinement have created a particular set of challenges to the provision of services for victims/survivors of gender-based violence and reinforced the need to develop flexible and resilient systems of response and support. The EU should create a transnational platform for the exchange of challenges and inspiring practices to ensure access for all victims and survivors of violence to essential services.

### 3. Foster prevention programs and awareness campaigns

- Education and training are key actions to prevent GBV. The Gender Equality Strategy addresses these points and must be urgently put into action.
- There is a dire need for concerted EU-level actions for developing, funding and encouraging awareness raising campaigns and prevention mechanisms that target (potential) perpetrators of gender-based violence.

### 4. Make sure nobody is left behind (intersectionality)

- To ensure the accessibility of protection and support mechanism for all victims and survivors of gender-based violence, it is crucial to adopt a gender+ intersectional approach (addressing among other categories of vulnerability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, race, citizenship status, language, literacy, education level, digital literacy, dis-abilities, employment status, urban-rural divide, homelessness, etc.) in developing protection and support programs that incorporate all needs (from shelters to legal and psychological) support.





## › About RESISTIRÉ

This factsheet is based on data collected within RESISTIRÉ's first research cycle which ran from 15 May to 30 June 2021. 31 national researchers worked with the consortium to map policies and societal responses, together with qualitative and quantitative indicators, related to the pandemic in the EU27 countries along with Iceland, the UK, Serbia, and Turkey.<sup>4</sup> This research activity was completed with workshops and interviews with gender equality experts whose input informed the main findings from expert consultations.<sup>5</sup>

RESISTIRÉ is an EU-funded Horizon 2020 project the aim of which is to 1) understand the impact of COVID-19 policy responses on behavioural, social and economic inequalities in the EU27, Serbia, Turkey, Iceland, and the UK on the basis of a conceptual gender+ framework, and 2) design, devise and pilot policy solutions and social innovations to be deployed by policymakers, stakeholders and actors in different policy domains.

Find out more about the project at <https://resistire-project.eu>.



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## › Acknowledgement and Disclaimer



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement no. 101015990.

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