Building trust by delivering support, protection and justice

Estonia

First thematic evaluation report

GREVIO

Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence

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

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THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION SAVES LIVES

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Building trust by delivering support, protection and justice

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and Domestic Violence (GREVIO)

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Council of Europe
F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex
France

www.coe.int/conventionviolence

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Executive summary

This evaluation report addresses progress made in bringing support, protection and justice to victims of violence against women and domestic violence under selected provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention). It offers an assessment made by the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) an independent human rights monitoring body mandated to monitor the implementation of the convention. GREVIO's findings identify developments that have taken place since publication of its baseline evaluation report on Estonia on 17 November 2022 and are based on the information obtained during its first thematic evaluation procedure as set out in Article 68 of the convention. These include written reports (a state report submitted by the country authorities and additional information submitted by the Chancellor of Justice of the Republic of Estonia and Estonian Women's Shelters Union and the Estonian Women's Associations Roundtable); as well as a five-day evaluation visit to Estonia. A list of the bodies and entities which GREVIO had exchanges with can be found in Appendix II.

The report assesses the wide variety of measures taken by the Estonian authorities to prevent violence against women and domestic violence and to deliver protection, support and justice for victims – the theme chosen by GREVIO for its first thematic evaluation report. In identifying emerging trends in preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, GREVIO shines a light on laudable efforts made for the implementation of this convention. Moreover, it provides in-depth information on the implementation of selected provisions in the areas of prevention, protection and prosecution as building blocks for a comprehensive response to the different forms of violence against women that instils trust in victims.

In this regard, GREVIO welcomes several positive developments that have taken place in Estonia since the baseline evaluation. A commendable step in this regard is the introduction of a consent-based definition of rape in criminal law based on the "only yes means yes" model. Moreover, amendments to the Victim Support Act introduced into the legislative framework a definition of domestic violence in line with the Istanbul Convention. GREVIO also welcomes the significant efforts undertaken by the Estonian authorities to strengthen evidence-based policymaking through the commissioning of a wide range of studies and surveys examining the prevalence of violence against women and the effectiveness of existing responses.

In the area of prevention, positive developments include the revision of school curricula to better integrate mandatory sexuality education across all levels of education, although the high degree of autonomy enjoyed by schools may result in significant variations in the way topics related to gender equality and violence against women are addressed throughout the country. GREVIO further welcomes awareness-raising initiatives addressing harmful gender stereotypes and sexual violence, including the launch of the international Denim Day campaign in Estonia.

In the area of protection and support, GREVIO welcomes the additional resources provided to strengthen the capacity of women's support centres to respond to the needs of women fleeing the war in Ukraine and other women and children from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, representing an important step towards improving the accessibility of these services for women exposed to intersectional discrimination.

With regard to the criminal justice response, GREVIO welcomes the nationwide implementation of the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC system), while also noting the efforts undertaken to identify a methodological tool to strengthen risk assessment practices and improve inter-agency co-operation.

Despite the progress made in Estonia across the different areas covered by this evaluation round, GREVIO has identified several issues requiring further action by the authorities to ensure full compliance with the provisions of the Istanbul Convention.

On a general note, GREVIO's assessment revealed regional disparities and variations in practices across the country in a number of areas relevant to the implementation of the Istanbul Convention. These range from differences in the availability of specialist support services to variations in the implementation of risk assessment practices and the use of protection measures for victims of violence against women.

Within the policy landscape, Estonia continues to lack a comprehensive and co-ordinated policy framework addressing all forms of violence against women covered by the convention, based on a gender-sensitive understanding of such violence and taking into account the needs of women exposed to intersectional discrimination.

In the area of prevention, GREVIO identifies a need to more systematically carry out primary prevention efforts aimed at tackling the root causes of all forms of violence against women, including through the participation of men and boys. A persistent concern regarding prevention efforts is the absence of mandatory in-service training for many relevant professional groups on issues related to the Istanbul Convention and the gendered nature of violence against women.

In the area of protection and support, GREVIO observes challenges relating to the sustainability of funding for specialist women's organisations and the accessibility of services for certain groups of women exposed to intersectional discrimination, including women with psychosocial disabilities and women with addiction issues.

With regard to the justice sector's response to violence against women, GREVIO notes with concern that violence against women and its impact on children is not systematically taken into account in decisions concerning custody and visitation rights. Regarding criminal law, while welcoming the extension of the duration of emergency barring orders from 12 to 72 hours, GREVIO notes that this period may still be insufficient to ensure victims' safety and to allow them adequate time to access specialist support services and longer-term protective measures. Challenges to ensuring compliance with temporary restraining orders, in particular the absence of proactive monitoring mechanisms such as electronic bracelets, continue to place the responsibility on victims for reporting violations. Lastly, recent jurisprudential developments risk narrowing the understanding of domestic violence by excluding former partners from its scope, thereby disregarding the heightened risks of violence in the post-separation period.

GREVIO further observes several emerging trends that warrant increased attention. These include the growing prevalence of online and technology-facilitated violence against women and the persistence of legal gaps that hinder effective accountability for perpetrators of image-based abuse. GREVIO also notes with concern the increasing normalisation of attitudes reinforcing stereotypical gender roles among young people, particularly boys, and the role that digital environments may play in perpetuating such attitudes.

GREVIO identifies a number of additional issues that require sustained action in order to effectively build trust by delivering protection, support and justice for acts of violence against women. These relate to the need to:

- ensure sustainable funding for policies addressing violence against women and domestic violence;
- systematically collect and analyse criminal justice data on violence against women and improve data collection on the healthcare sector's response to violence against women;
- strengthen measures promoting victims' economic independence and recovery;
- improve access to specialist services for women exposed to intersectional discrimination;
- ensure the availability of specialist support, including legal counselling, for victims of all forms of violence against women, including online and technology facilitated violence;
- increase the use and effectiveness of emergency barring, restraining and protection orders and ensure effective sanctions for their breaches;
- strengthen the investigation and prosecution of all forms of violence against women through proactive evidence gathering.

Lastly, GREVIO identifies further areas in which improvements are required to comply fully with the obligations of the convention under this round's theme. These include the regular evaluation of awareness-raising and prevention initiatives, ensuring access to specialist support services for women residing in closed institutions, expanding access to long-term psychological support for victims of sexual violence and further strengthening the use of data collected by social welfare services to support evidence-based policymaking.

Introduction

The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No. 210, "the Istanbul Convention") is the most far-reaching international treaty to tackle violence against women and domestic violence.

It sets up a two-pillar monitoring mechanism to assess the level of implementation by its parties: the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), an independent expert body, and the Committee of the Parties, a political body composed of official representatives of the parties to the convention. In line with Article 68 of the convention, GREVIO has been providing country-based monitoring reports under its baseline evaluation procedure since 2017. Its baseline evaluation report on Estonia, offering a comprehensive assessment of the convention's implementation in its entirety, was published on 17 November 2022, following Estonia's ratification of the Istanbul Convention on 26 October 2017.

This report was drawn up under GREVIO's first thematic evaluation round launched in 2023 focusing on the theme of building trust by delivering support, protection and justice. To address this overarching theme, it describes emerging trends in the areas of preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence in the country. Section two aims to identify developments in key areas such as comprehensive and co-ordinated policies, funding and data collection that have ensued following the completion of the baseline evaluation procedure. Section three presents more in-depth information on the implementation of selected provisions in the areas of prevention, protection and prosecution, in respect of which baseline evaluation procedures and the Conclusions on the implementation of recommendations of the Committee of the Parties to the Istanbul Convention have revealed significant challenges and the need for further action.

In respect of Estonia, the first thematic evaluation procedure was initiated in accordance with Article 68 of the convention by letter and transmission of GREVIO's first thematic questionnaire on 16 December 2024. The Estonian authorities subsequently submitted their state report on 15 May 2025 – the deadline set by GREVIO. Following a preliminary examination of Estonia's state report, GREVIO carried out an evaluation visit to Estonia, which took place from 27 to 31 October 2025. The delegation was composed of:

- Ellen O'Malley-Dunlop, Member of GREVIO
- Päivi Maarit Hirvelä, Member of GREVIO
- Elif Sariaydin, Administrator at the Secretariat of the monitoring mechanism of the Istanbul Convention

During the evaluation visit, the delegation met with a wide range of governmental and non-governmental representatives working in the area of preventing and combating violence against women. GREVIO wishes to highlight its constructive exchanges with the Estonian authorities. A list of the national authorities, non-governmental organisations and others met is set out in Appendix II of this report. GREVIO is grateful for the valuable information provided by all of them. For the co-operation and support provided throughout the entire evaluation procedure, it wishes to extend its gratitude to Anne Kruusement who was appointed as contact person. The state report and the written contributions submitted by civil society are available on the country monitoring website of the Istanbul Convention.[1]

The present assessment was drawn up under the exclusive responsibility of GREVIO and is based on the information collected during the various steps of the evaluation procedure. In keeping with the approach adopted in its baseline evaluation reports, the findings made reflect different levels of urgency, indicated in order of priority by the following verbs: "urges", "strongly encourages", "encourages" and "invites".

1. www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/estonia.

Resulting from a process of confidential dialogue with the aim of offering country-specific proposals and suggestions for improvement within the national context of the party under review, this report describes the situation as observed by GREVIO up until 26 March 2026. Where applicable, relevant developments up until 2 July 2026 have also been taken into account.

According to the convention, national parliaments shall receive this report from the national authorities (Article 70, paragraph 2). GREVIO requests the national authorities to translate this report into their official national language(s) and to ensure that it is widely disseminated, not only to the relevant state institutions at all levels (national, regional and local), in particular to the government, the ministries and the judiciary, but also to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other civil society organisations that work in the field of violence against women.

I. Emerging trends in the areas of violence against women and domestic violence

The move towards a consent-based definition of rape

1. In the period following GREVIO's baseline evaluation of Estonia, a very important step to bring Estonia's legal framework more closely into line with the requirements of the Istanbul Convention has been the amendment of the Criminal Code in 2025 to introduce a consent-based definition of rape and other forms of sexual violence. GREVIO commends the Estonian authorities' decision to adopt the progressive "only yes means yes" model, which redefines formerly force-based offences as "sexual intercourse with a person without that person's free and expressed consent" and "an act of a sexual nature with a person without that person's free and expressed consent". The law then sets out several aggravating factors, inter alia, including situations involving a relationship of dependency or trust, the use of narcotic or psychotropic substances, taking advantage of a victim's inability to understand the situation, group or repeat perpetrators and cases resulting in serious bodily harm, death or suicide.

2. GREVIO further notes with satisfaction the inclusive approach adopted by the Estonian authorities at the preparatory stage, which involved a wide range of trauma-informed experts and civil society organisations in the consultation process, as well as an assessment of the public's readiness for such an important change through the use of surveys.[2]

Increased awareness of sexual harassment and sectoral responses

3. The period following the adoption of GREVIO's baseline evaluation saw increased awareness of sexual harassment in Estonia. This is reflected in the growing number of women victims coming forward, a trend also recognised by the Office of the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner.[3] As acknowledged by the Estonian authorities, sexual harassment entered the broader public debate in 2017 with the ratification of the Istanbul Convention and the recognition of physical sexual harassment as a misdemeanour in the Penal Code. Between 2017 and 2022, reports of this misdemeanour doubled, rising from 20 cases to 41, and different sectors have taken measures to respond to this phenomenon.[4] In this last respect, in the area of higher education, GREVIO notes with interest the adoption by the University of Tartu of its first Gender Equality Plan (2022-2025) which, *inter alia*, aims to increase awareness of equal treatment and sexual harassment among its staff and faculty members, as well as to prevent and address the latter form of violence. The implementation of the Gender Equality Plan was further supported by several measures, including training for management-level staff on sexual harassment, the introduction of improved confidential and anonymous reporting mechanisms and the allocation of funding for research aimed at assessing experiences of harassment among staff and students, with a view to strengthening the university's institutional response. Similarly, the sports sector has intensified its efforts to address the allegations of abuse and sexual harassment that have surfaced in recent years.[5] To this end, the Estonian Olympic Committee adopted a Code of Ethics for sports coaches, which includes provisions on sexual harassment. This body equally introduced mandatory training programmes for coaches and, most recently, adopted the Estonian Sports Ethics Rules, which stipulate that all participants in sport must refrain from sexual harassment.[6] In the entertainment sector, an awareness-raising campaign was launched to prevent sexual harassment in nightlife settings and to encourage witnesses to intervene and support victims.[7] GREVIO also welcomes the

2. According to a survey the Estonian population' awareness of gender-based violence and human trafficking, approximately 81% of the Estonian population believe that sexual intercourse without the consent of both parties is rape (approx. 81%). Estonian Social Insurance Board, Survey of Estonian population awareness of gender-based violence and human trafficking, 2024, p. 54, available in Estonian at: https://dspace.ut.ee/items/1965d908-ff08-4a8b-84ab-42433d4a2dc2.
3. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.
4. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.
5. See a news article on this issue at: https://news.err.ee/1609700580/estonian-sports-coaches-and-abuse-allegations-from-sexual-misconduct-to-violence.
6. See the Estonian Sports Ethics Rules in Estonian at: www.eok.ee/organisatsioon/eesti-spordieetika-reeglid.
7. See Article 12, General obligations.

information provided by the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner, indicating that an increasing number of employers are reaching out to the office of the commissioner to seek advice on how to prevent and address sexual harassment in their workplaces.[8]

The growing gender gap: the surge in harmful gender stereotypes among young people

4. Recent research in Estonia indicates a worrying trend in the normalisation of misogyny and stereotypical gender roles among young people. Indeed, this issue has also been pinpointed as a pressing challenge by the authorities and civil society.[9] In this regard, a 2024 report highlights the prominent role of media, particularly social media platforms, in shaping young people's perceptions of gender equality. Young boys are disproportionately exposed to content promoting "alpha male" ideals, framing the notion of masculinity around dominance and the devaluation of women, while girls are frequently confronted with restrictive stereotypes of femininity.[10] Studies further suggest that boys are more likely to internalise traditional views on gender roles, whereas girls increasingly embrace more progressive perspectives and the principle of gender equality.[11] These findings reveal the need for early and comprehensive interventions promoting gender equality and skills to critically engage with online content. In this context, GREVIO stresses the crucial role of education in this regard and the importance of equipping young people with the knowledge and skills necessary to engage in interpersonal relationships based on equality and mutual respect, in line with Article 14 of the Istanbul Convention.

Legal gaps in addressing the digital dimension of violence against women

5. Another trend that goes hand in hand with the rise in online misogyny is the increasing prevalence of online and technology-facilitated violence against women. Children and young people are particularly vulnerable to such harm. Research on children's internet use in Estonia indicates that by the third and fourth grade, around ages 9 to eleven many children have already encountered sexual content online, including pornographic material, requests for intimate images, peer-to-peer sexual cyberbullying and sexting.[12] Studies further show that approximately 30% of young people in Estonia report having been solicited for intimate images online at least once.[13] However, this phenomenon is not limited to children and young people. In recent years, several women have reported the non-consensual distribution of their intimate images in group chats and on Discord servers[14] with large numbers of members.[15] Despite the prevalence and severity of the problem, access to justice for victims remains severely limited. The current Estonian legal framework criminalises the non-consensual distribution of erotic images only where the victim is under the age of 14, and of pornographic images where the victim is under 18. For adult victims, image-based abuse is generally addressed as a matter of civil law, forcing victims to pursue remedies on their own initiative. Existing provisions of the Penal Code, such as offences relating to the unlawful use of another person's identity or the illegal disclosure of personal data, are largely inapplicable in practice, as perpetrators typically do not impersonate victims and reports indicate that criminal justice

8. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.
9. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.
10. Praxis Centre for Policy Studies (2024), "Alpha men and little flowers: the normalisation of misogyny and sexism in the Estonian media", pages 40-50, available in Estonian at: https://praxis.ee/tood/misoguunia-eesti-avalikus-ruumis.
11. Lott K., Murumaa-Mengel M. and Marling R. (2025), "Mainstreaming the manosphere: discourses of contemporary masculinity among Estonian manfluencers", available at: www.nature.com/articles/s41599-025-04903-y.
12. Estonian Police and Border Guard Board (2024), "Study: a trusting relationship with a parent helps protect children from potential online dangers", available in Estonian at: www.politsei.ee/et/uudised/uuring-voimalike-ohtude-eest-veebis-aitab-lapsi-kaitsta-usalduslik-suhe-lapsevanemaga-12315.
13. Estonian Research Centre OÜ and Norstat Eesti AS (2020), "A study of attitudes and experiences of sexual abuse of children and young people", p. 5, available in Estonian at: www.sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/raamatukogu/laste-ja-noorte-seksuaalse-vaarkohtlemise-hoiakute-ja-kogemuste-uuring.
14. Discord is an online communication platform that provides voice, video and text chat services to users. It allows individuals, groups and communities to create and manage dedicated spaces called "servers", where members can communicate in real time, share media and organise discussions around shared interests.
15. See the news articles at https://ekspress.delfi.ee/artikkel/120401727/kellelgi-raplakatest-midagi-tuhanded-eesti-mehed-kusivad-ja-jagavad-grupivestluses-kohalike-naiste-alastifotosid
and https://arvamus.delfi.ee/artikkel/120402849/kadi-karner-kehad-tuhandete-vooraste-pilkude-all-riigil-ei-tohi-olla-luksust-seda-vaid-pealt-vaadata/.

authorities do not regard intimate images as a category of protected personal data.[16] Thus, criminal liability of perpetrators generally arises only when image-based abuse escalates to extortion, excluding much of the everyday online sexual harassment women experience. GREVIO reiterates that the Istanbul Convention, as interpreted in GREVIO's General Recommendation No. 1 on the digital dimension of violence against women, requires parties to implement effective sanctions to hold perpetrators of online and technology-facilitated violence against women accountable. Similarly, in its judgment in *M.Ș.D. v. Romania*, the European Court of Human Rights affirmed that online violence, including the non-consensual sharing of intimate images, constitutes a form of gender-based violence that undermines the physical and psychological integrity of women and girls, necessitating effective criminal law responses.[17] This requires putting in place a robust legal framework and ensuring its effective implementation in practice. In this respect, the Council of Europe's Recommendation CM/Rec(2026)2 of the Committee of Ministers on accountability for technology-facilitated violence against women and girls calls on member states to ensure that such violence is addressed under criminal law, with the accompanying explanatory memorandum highlighting promising practices and different models of criminalisation.[18]

16. See an article describing a victim's experience with the justice system and the opinions of legal experts at: https://ekspress.delfi.ee/artikkel/120401727/kellelgi-raplakatest-midagi-tuhanded-eesti-mehed-kusivad-ja-jagavad-grupivestluses-kohalike-naiste-alastifotosid.
17. *M.Ș.D. v. Romania*, European Court of Human Rights, Application No. 28935/21, judgment of 3 December 2024.
18. Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on accountability for technology-facilitated violence against women and girls, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 4 March 2026, available at: https://search.coe.int/cm#{%22CoEIdentifier%22:[%2209125948802acd83%22],%22sort%22:[%22CoEValidationDate%20Descending%22]}.

II. Changes in definitions, comprehensive and co-ordinated policies, funding and data collection in the areas of violence against women and domestic violence

6. Chapter I of the Istanbul Convention sets out general principles that apply to all the substantive articles contained in Chapters II to VII and therefore lay the foundation for a comprehensive and adequate response that ensures the delivery of support, protection and justice for all women and girls at risk of or who have experienced gender-based violence. These include, among other things, that it is a fundamental human right for everyone, particularly women, to live a life free from violence in both the public and the private sphere, that the convention must be implemented without discrimination on any ground, and that the potential for, and effects of, multiple forms of discrimination should be borne in mind. They also spell out that a gender perspective must be integrated into the implementation of the convention and the evaluation of its impact. Chapter II of the Istanbul Convention sets out the core requirement for a holistic response to violence against women: the need for state-wide effective, comprehensive and co-ordinated policies, sustained by the necessary institutional, financial and organisational structures.

A. Definitions (Article 3)

7. Article 3 of the Istanbul Convention sets out key definitions of concepts that are fundamental to its implementation. “Violence against women” refers to “all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”, whereas the expression “domestic violence” is to be understood as referring to “all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim”. The definition of “gender-based violence against women” provided in paragraph *d* of Article 3 seeks to ensure more clarity regarding the nature of the violence covered, by explaining that this is “violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately”.

8. In its baseline evaluation report on Estonia, GREVIO had noted the absence of clear definitions of the concepts set out in Article 3 of the Istanbul Convention in the Estonian legal and policy framework. While GREVIO had acknowledged that professionals involved in preventing and combatting violence against women generally recognised the gendered dynamics of violence and that certain women-specific services were provided, it had concluded that clear gender-based definitions were required to ensure that all Estonian legislation and strategies fully reflect the understanding that violence against women constitutes a human rights violation and a form of discrimination rooted in gender inequality.

9. At the outset, GREVIO notes that the Violence Prevention Agreement for the period 2021-2025 that was in force at the time of the baseline evaluation report was still in force in the period under review. As highlighted in the baseline evaluation report, this strategic document sets out a range of measures aimed at preventing various forms of violence in society including, among other things, domestic violence, sexual violence and cyberviolence, without providing the relevant definitions, including the definition of violence against women. The Action Plan for the Prevention of Intimate Partner Violence for the period 2024-2027, developed by the Estonian authorities following the adoption of GREVIO’s baseline evaluation report, also falls short of providing a definition of domestic violence.[19]

10. At the same time, in terms of the legal framework, GREVIO notes with satisfaction that the 2023 amendments to the Victim Support Act introduced a definition of domestic violence in line with the Istanbul Convention, which reads: “acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence

19. Action Plan for the Prevention of Intimate Partner Violence for 2024-2027, available in Estonian at: www.siseministeerium.ee/vagivald-ja-riiklikud-sammud-selle-vahendamiseks.

in a family or residence or by a former or current spouse or partner, regardless of whether the perpetrator of the act of violence lives or has lived in the same place of residence as the victim". Furthermore, in the field of criminal law, although the Estonian Penal Code does not establish a specific offence of domestic violence, section 121 on physical abuse provides an aggravated form of this offence when the act is committed within a close relationship, increasing the maximum penalty from one year to up to five years' imprisonment.

11. GREVIO, however, notes with concern a development since the baseline evaluation report that is not in line with key concepts of the convention, affecting the interpretation of the definition of domestic violence. In a series of judgments issued between 2020 and 2023, the Supreme Court of Estonia interpreted the concept of a "close relationship" under section 121 of the Penal Code as being defined by substantive social and emotional connections instead of formal legal status. In this context, in its latest judgment on the matter dated 2023, the court applied a limited understanding of social and emotional ties, finding that such connections generally come to an end with the actual end of marriage or cohabitation, as the mutual reliance, trust and shared responsibility that characterise such relationships are deemed to cease upon separation.[20]

12. GREVIO notes that Article 3, paragraph *b*, of the Istanbul Convention explicitly recognises as domestic violence any violence occurring between former or current spouses or partners, irrespective of whether they share a residence. GREVIO reiterates that separation from the perpetrator is often the most dangerous period as it significantly heightens the risk of violence and death for women and their children.[21] Indeed, according to the findings of a nationwide relationship survey, 80% of women who have experienced intimate partner violence say the attacker was a former partner and 38% of these victims felt that their life was at risk. In this context, the approach adopted by the Estonian Supreme Court, which interprets the notion of a close relationship as generally ending upon the termination of cohabitation, or upon separation or divorce, appears too narrow to meet the standards set by the convention. This jurisprudential development indicates that further clarification of key concepts related to violence against women, including the definition of domestic violence, may be needed within Estonia's policy and legal framework.

13. **GREVIO urges the authorities in Estonia to:**

- **a. ensure that the definition of domestic violence and its application in practice extends to former partners and spouses, irrespective of whether the victim shares a residence with the perpetrator, in line with Article 3, paragraph *b*, of the Istanbul Convention and as acknowledged by the Victim Support Act;**
- **b. introduce a definition of violence against women that is in line with Article 3 of the Istanbul Convention, with a view to ensuring a harmonised use of this concept across all areas of the law and policy.**

B. Comprehensive and co-ordinated policies (Article 7)

14. Article 7 of the Istanbul Convention requires parties to take co-ordinated and comprehensive measures to prevent and combat all forms of violence against women. Policies must ensure effective co-operation and place the rights of victims at their centre. This includes taking into account and addressing the specific circumstances and barriers experienced by women exposed to or at risk of multiple forms of discrimination,[22] in line with Article 4, paragraph 3, of the convention. Ensuring service delivery, effective protection and justice with a comprehensive understanding of intersecting forms of discrimination is a fundamental element in building trust among all women and girls.

20. The judgment of the Estonian Supreme Court in case no. 1-21-4285, delivered on 6 December 2023, concerns violence that occurred after the parties had ended a long-term common-law relationship in which they had a child together. Available at: www.riigikohus.ee/et/lahendid?asjaNr=1-21-4285/79.
21. Third General Report on GREVIO's Activities, p. 37, available at: www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/-/3rd-general-report-on-grevio-s-activities.
22. These include, but are not limited to, women from national and/or ethnic minorities, Roma women, migrant, asylum-seeking and refugee women, women with disabilities, women without a residence permit, LBTI women, women from rural areas, women in prostitution and women with addiction issues.

15. GREVIO welcomes the extensive body of studies commissioned by the Estonian authorities since the baseline evaluation report that examine the prevalence of and responses to violence against women. These include a large-scale prevalence survey on intimate partner violence, an evaluation of the impact of the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) network model, an assessment of the attitudes of emergency dispatchers and police officers handling domestic violence cases, a survey on public awareness of domestic violence and human trafficking, reviews of the authorities' handling of domestic violence cases resulting in death and a study on the normalisation of misogyny and sexism in the Estonian media.[23] GREVIO notes that these studies represent a valuable resource for policy making. Together with the independent evaluation of previous strategies and action plans, the results of these studies and surveys could serve as valuable means for identifying gaps in the prevention of and response to violence against women, as well as for informing the development of evidence-based policies.

16. Despite the above-mentioned positive developments, GREVIO regrets that Estonia's policy framework for preventing and combating violence against women continues to remain fragmented, as also observed in the baseline evaluation report. Indeed, a comprehensive strategic framework addressing all forms of violence against women covered by the convention that gives due consideration to the gendered nature of such violence and the specific needs of women exposed to intersectional discrimination is still lacking. The Violence Prevention Agreement, which remained in force since the baseline evaluation round until the end of 2025 and constitutes the overarching framework for preventing and responding to various forms of violence in society, is limited to the prevention pillar of the Istanbul Convention. Moreover, it addresses only selected forms of violence against women, such as domestic and sexual violence and, to some extent, online and technology-facilitated violence, failing to incorporate an overarching gender-sensitive perspective.[24] When it comes to the Action Plan for the Prevention of Intimate Partner Violence for 2024-2027, adopted following the baseline evaluation report and implemented by four line ministries,[25] it contains a broader set of activities spanning the convention's four pillars, yet its scope remains limited to domestic violence. Its overarching objectives include enhancing trauma-sensitive professional practices and training, identifying children in need within the education system, developing and improving the availability of services for victims, ensuring the safety and protection of victims in high-risk situations, implementing the new Victim Support Act and expanding domestic violence victims' access to compensation schemes.

17. In light of the above, GREVIO notes that certain forms of violence against women, such as female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage and forced abortion or sterilisation are not addressed in the current policy framework. According to the authorities there is a low prevalence of these forms of violence in Estonia, with no reports having been registered in the past three years. Nevertheless, GREVIO stresses that these phenomena would benefit from being incorporated into a broader, co-ordinated strategic document. Such an approach would enhance understanding,

23. See, respectively: Statistics Estonia (2024), "Safe relationships within family, at work and outside work", results of the national relationship survey, available at: www.stat.ee/en/news/largest-and-most-comprehensive-relationship-survey-date-reveals-it-intimate-partnerships-people-estonia-experience-most-violence; Social Insurance Board (2023), "Evaluation of the impact of the MARAC networking model", available in Estonian at: www.centar.ee/en/tehtud-tood/evaluating-the-impact-of-marac-network-model; Ministry of the Interior (2023), "Knowledge and attitudes related to intimate partner violence among emergency responders and police officers", available in Estonian at: https://siseministeerium.ee/uudised/uuring-lsv-valjakutsetele-reageerijad-vajavad-susteemsemaid-teadmisi; Social Insurance Board (2024), Survey of the Estonian population's awareness of gender-based violence and human trafficking, 2024, available in Estonian at: https://sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/asutus-uudised-ja-kontakt/asutuse-info/uuringud?utm; University of Tartu (2024), "Case analysis: the authorities' handling of fatal domestic violence cases", available in Estonian at: https://siseministeerium.ee/uudised/asja-valminud-uuring-toob-valja-kitsaskohad-ametiasutuste-tegevustes-surmaga-loppenud; Praxis Centre for Policy Studies (2024), "Alpha men and little flowers: the normalisation of misogyny and sexism in the Estonian media", available in Estonian at: https://praxis.ee/tood/misoguunia-eesti-avalikus-ruumis.

24. As is described in the baseline evaluation report, it sets out 14 preventive measures targeting, *inter alia*, violence against children, trafficking in human beings, violence against older persons, cyberviolence and domestic and sexual violence. These measures highlight the need for capacity building for professionals, adopting victim-friendly procedures, improving perpetrator programmes and increasing the role of healthcare and social service providers in violence prevention.

25. The Ministry of Education and Research, the Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Social Affairs.

support the development of appropriate responses and could ultimately contribute to increased reporting of these less visible forms of violence against women. Moreover, other forms of violence that are not explicitly addressed within the current policy framework, such as stalking and sexual harassment, including their digital manifestations, affect a significant proportion of women and girls in Estonian society and are reportedly on the rise. In this regard, GREVIO notes that Article 7 of the Istanbul Convention sets out the obligations of its parties to adopt and implement co-ordinated policies addressing all forms of violence against women.

18. The current policy framework also inadequately integrates an intersectional approach, as already highlighted in the baseline evaluation report. Neither the Violence Prevention Agreement nor the Action Plan for the Prevention of Intimate Partner Violence introduces specific measures to address the needs of women exposed to intersectional discrimination, such as women with physical or psychosocial disabilities, women with addiction issues, women from minority groups, including Russian-speaking women, asylum-seeking, refugee or migrant women, and LBTI women. GREVIO notes with interest the information provided by the Estonian authorities indicating that the next action plan may place greater emphasis on the needs of women exposed to intersectional discrimination, including LBTI women and Ukrainian women who have arrived in Estonia in increasing numbers following the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine.

19. As regards the evaluation of the above-mentioned policies, GREVIO notes with interest that an evaluation of the Violence Prevention Agreement (2021-2025) was commissioned out to an independent consultancy firm immediately following the expiry of its implementation period.[26] The evaluation revealed that efforts to combat violence against women are hindered by fragmented data collection and analysis, regional disparities in the availability of services, high workloads for key professionals and the absence of harmonised interagency co-ordination and referral mechanisms. As regards prevention efforts, it equally called for more targeted awareness campaigns aimed at young people, the elderly and non-Estonian speakers, alongside increased attention on the psychological and digital manifestations of violence against women to improve understanding among both society and professionals. Although the authorities acknowledge that similar post-implementation assessments were not carried out for previous action plans on intimate partner violence, the possibility of evaluating the current plan has not been ruled out.

20. Co-ordination mechanisms for national policy documents on violence prevention in Estonia are also characterised by a degree of fragmentation. The implementation of the Violence Prevention Agreement is co-ordinated by the Violence Prevention Steering Group and, more broadly, through the Violence Prevention Network, which brings together representatives of relevant ministries. However, the agreement does not clearly define the working methods or division of responsibilities of these bodies. Meanwhile, co-ordination of the Action Plan for the Prevention of Intimate Partner Violence is ensured by the Intimate Partner Violence Expert Group, which meets monthly and operates under a rotating annual leadership among the four participating ministries. While formal arrangements do not appear to exist to organise co-operation between these mechanisms, Estonia's streamlined bureaucracy facilitates *de facto* communication and collaboration among the implementing parties. In addition, the Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs is designated as the national co-ordinating body for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention. As highlighted in the baseline evaluation, GREVIO notes that the ministry still operates with limited human resources and lacks a clear mandate to fully discharge its duties under Article 10 of the Istanbul Convention. GREVIO further notes with regret that some of the ministries participating in the Intimate Partner Violence Expert Group are not in a position to assume the rotating leadership role due to reported resource constraints. In this context, GREVIO stresses the importance of all relevant institutions stepping up to fulfil their co-ordination responsibilities, as effective implementation of policies on violence against women requires a multi-agency commitment.

26. Civitta Eesti AS, Impact Assessment of the Violence Prevention Agreement and Recommendations (2025), available in Estonian at: www.justdigi.ee/kuritegevus-ja-selle-ennetus/vagivallaennetuse-kokkulepe.

21. **Noting the findings issued in its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Estonian authorities to:**

a. **develop a long-term co-ordinated policy framework giving due importance to all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention and addressing the specific needs of all groups of victims, in particular women who are or might be exposed to intersectional discrimination, based on a gendered understanding of violence against women;**
b. **independently evaluate, on a regular basis, such policies, including the Action Plan for the Prevention of Intimate Partner Violence, with the aim of achieving the comprehensive and co-ordinated policy approach required by the Istanbul Convention. Such evaluations should be carried out on the basis of pre-defined indicators in order to assess their impact and ensure that policy making is based on reliable data;**
c. **equip the national co-ordinating body with a clear mandate and the necessary human and financial resources in order to ensure the sustainability of its work.**

C. Financial resources (Article 8)

22. Article 8 of the Istanbul Convention aims to ensure the allocation of appropriate financial and human resources for activities carried out by public authorities and by relevant non-governmental and civil society organisations.[27]

23. The funding schemes for policies addressing violence against women that were described in the baseline evaluation report have largely remained unchanged. Neither the Violence Prevention Agreement nor the Action Plan for the Prevention of Intimate Partner Violence have an allocated budget for their implementation; instead, they are funded through the general budgets of the line ministries responsible for the activities outlined in these documents, which does not allow conclusions to be drawn about the adequacy of funding for activities and services. In this regard, GREVIO stresses the added value of adopting gender budgeting at all levels of public administration in order to plan and monitor public funding devoted to preventing and combating violence against women, including the budgets of relevant ministries and public authorities earmarked for preventing and combating violence against women.

24. In its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO had assessed the financial resources allocated to core services, such as shelters, psychosocial support and counselling, as largely sufficient, noting, nevertheless, a strong reliance on donor funding for awareness-raising and advocacy activities. Since the publication of the report, while the sustainable system of five-year funding continues to be in place, GREVIO notes with regret that several challenges have emerged in the funding of specialist support services for women victims of violence in Estonia.[28] According to indications from women's rights organisations, funding for women's support centres, which are mandated in accordance with the Estonian Victim Support Act to provide services to victims of domestic violence, has not kept pace with the rising cost of living.[29] Moreover, GREVIO notes with grave concern that certain activities of civil society organisations, such as those addressing the needs of migrant women or the carrying out of advocacy work on sexual violence, have been discontinued due to a lack of funding.[30]

25. Institutional changes have also affected the stability of funding for NGOs carrying out advocacy and awareness raising on violence against women. The transfer of the Department of Equality from the Ministry of Social Affairs to the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications

27. Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, paragraph 66.
28. Organisations providing specialist support to victims of violence against women are funded by the Social Insurance Board, whereas organisations engaged in awareness raising and advocacy are funded through the budget of the Department of Equality, with both types of funding awarded through three-year contracts under public procurement procedures with the possibility of a two-year extension.
29. Written submission by the Estonian Women's Shelters Union and the Estonian Women's Associations Roundtable, p. 2.
30. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

in 2023, as part of a government restructuring, resulted in an eight-month delay in the disbursement of funds, which posed significant challenges for certain NGOs that were unable to bridge this gap financially.

26. Regarding procurement procedures, tenders issued by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications for organisations operating in the field of gender equality and violence against women, require applicants to demonstrate at least three years of experience working in this area. In this respect, GREVIO has consistently emphasised the importance of tapping into and privileging the extensive victim-centred expertise of specialist women's rights NGOs when designing procurement procedures.[31] At the same time it may be important not to exclude organisations that are capable of providing high-quality, gender sensitive and trauma informed services with appropriately trained professionals with shorter operational history.

27. Local authorities, which also provide certain services to victims of violence against women such as financial aid, counselling and support from local social workers, mediation or family support services and housing assistance, are reportedly experiencing difficulty in meeting the needs of diverse groups, while budgets for the police and prosecution services are insufficient to keep up with their increasing responsibilities. Higher education and research institutions working on issues related to violence against women are also reported to be under-resourced.[32]

28. **Referring to its findings issued in the baseline evaluation report, GREVIO strongly encourages the Estonian authorities to allocate appropriate, sufficient and sustainable funding for policies, programmes and measures on all forms of violence against women and domestic violence, both at central and at municipal levels, through separate budget and funding lines in all relevant line ministries and other state entities, based on the principle of gender budgeting and with a view to monitoring the spending for violence against women policies.**

29. **GREVIO further strongly encourages the Estonian authorities to ensure appropriate and sustainable funding for women's rights NGOs that provide specialist support services to women victims of all forms of violence and that engage in advocacy work, including smaller community-based NGOs and those catering for women who are subject to intersectional discrimination, through funding mechanisms that allow for continuous service provision, such as long-term grants.**

D. Data collection (Article 11)

30. Preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence requires evidence-based policy making. The collection of systematic and comparable data from all relevant administrative sources is crucial in this regard, as is information on the prevalence of all forms of violence against women.

1. Law-enforcement agencies and the justice sector

31. GREVIO's baseline evaluation report had praised the advanced e-File system used by law enforcement, prosecution services and the judiciary, which allows for the recording and tracking of cases across the criminal justice chain and for following cases of violence against women. Data entered into this system were disaggregated on the basis of the age and sex of the victim, the sex of the perpetrator, the age of the perpetrator in cases of homicide and rape, and the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. While recognising the efficiency of the e-File system, GREVIO had noted inconsistencies in data quality as a result of different data-registration practices adopted by the police.

31. See for instance GREVIO's baseline evaluation report on the United Kingdom, paragraph 62.
32. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

32. GREVIO welcomes the continued efforts of the Estonian authorities in the area of data collection. Indeed, the e-File system described in the baseline evaluation report remains in use by criminal justice professionals in Estonia, enabling the tracking of cases through all stages of the justice chain, including investigation, prosecution and trial. As was the case at the time of the baseline evaluation, data on reports, investigations, prosecutions and judicial proceedings in cases of violence against women are collected under the relevant offences in the Penal Code, some of which are general offences, while others relate to specific forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention. These data are subsequently analysed by the Ministry of Justice and published in various annual reports. One such analysis concerns annual crime statistics, including the number of offences against the person, such as physical abuse, threats, rape and other sexual offences, causing serious health damage, manslaughter and murder, among others.[33] In addition, GREVIO notes with interest that a separate annual analysis is conducted on domestic violence, which includes data on the number of registered cases of physical abuse committed in a close relationship, violations of restraining orders and harassing pursuit (stalking) disaggregated on the basis of sex of the both victim and the perpetrator and the relationship between them.[34]

33. Notwithstanding the above, GREVIO notes several shortcomings in these data analyses that need to be remedied to comply with the convention standards. First, the publicly available statistics on general offences do not provide information on key factors such as the sex of the perpetrator and the victim or the relationship between them, which are essential for conducting a meaningful analysis of the situation of violence against women. Nor is it clear whether the figures presented as "registered cases" refer to reported, investigated or convicted cases. In addition to the aforementioned data analysis efforts, the annual crime statistics publication provides somewhat more disaggregated data on domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment and stalking, broken down by the sex of the victim and the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim; however, the information is limited to the number of registered crimes.[35] Finally, GREVIO notes that publicly available data on criminal or other sanctions imposed on perpetrators of all forms of violence against women are equally lacking.

34. These shortcomings may be partly attributed to the limitations of the e-File system. By the authorities' own admission, the system, which is designed primarily for information sharing and case management among justice sector professionals, is not optimally suited for the generation of statistics. While it is possible to produce relevant statistics on violence against women, as the data collected include the necessary disaggregation factors, this process currently must be carried out manually because the system is not designed to automatically extract and analyse data. GREVIO, however, welcomes the information provided by the authorities that an update of the e-File system is underway, which will enable the automatic generation of statistics. The availability of such systematic data would provide critical insights into the justice sector's response to violence against women, including identifying trends in reporting various forms of violence as well monitoring attrition and conviction rates and sanctioning practices for these offences.

35. Furthermore, according to information provided by the authorities, the Supreme Court's narrow interpretation of what constitutes an intimate relationship, one that excludes former partners, also affects the accuracy of statistical data.[36] While most incidents of violence involving former partners are initially classified as domestic violence at the investigation stage, this classification is not always consistent and may also subsequently be altered by prosecutors and, later, by courts. As a result, discrepancies arise between statistics produced by the police and those generated by the Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs.[37]

33. See the annual statistics on offences against the person at: https://statistika.justdigi.ee/en/crime-statistics?date=2024#vagivallakuriteod.
34. See the annual statistics on domestic violence at: www.justdigi.ee/kuritegevus2025/perevagivald/.
35. See the annual crime statistics for 2024, in Estonian, at: www.justdigi.ee/kuritegevus2024/perev%C3%A4givald.html.
36. See Article 3, Definitions.
37. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

2. Healthcare sector

36. GREVIO notes with regret that the shortcomings identified on data-collection practices within the healthcare system in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report continue to persist in Estonia. GREVIO notes with concern that the healthcare sector remains the least engaged sector in the country's data-collection efforts. Although the Estonian National Health Information System, managed by the National Institute for Health Development, centrally stores certain patient information, including visit summaries, referrals, lab reports and treatments, it does not capture data on contact made by victims of the types of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention. One explanation provided by the authorities is that healthcare professionals are constrained by data-protection regulations and therefore cannot routinely inquire about such incidents.[38] In this respect, GREVIO reiterates that data collected by healthcare services, which are often the first point of contact for women victims of violence, complement police and judicial data, which frequently do not capture the true prevalence of violence against women because of under-reporting.[39] The systematic collection of such data will not only shed light on and highlight violence against women as a major public health issue but will also facilitate the evaluation of the effectiveness of healthcare interventions, the customisation of services to meet victims' needs and the early identification and assessment of risks.

37. In contrast, the database for the country's sexual assault centres, managed by the Sexual Health Research Centre at the University of Tartu, continues to systematically collect and disseminate up-to-date and anonymised data on the experiences of victims seeking support for sexual violence. The platform provides information on the number of victims seeking assistance by year and month, as well as victims' sex, age and referral pathways. It also provides insight into the context of the sexual violence, including the location of the incident, the use of alcohol, the presence of verbal or physical violence, the type of sexual violence and any identified injuries, along with the support and services provided by the centres.[40] The database further aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the assistance provided, enhance care models, assess the health impacts of sexual violence, facilitate the exchange of information among sexual assault centres and relevant institutions and support comparative research, particularly with Nordic countries. GREVIO commends the systematic data-collection efforts on the work of the sexual assault centres and recognises the importance of such data in strengthening trauma-informed, gender-sensitive responses for women victims of sexual violence.

3. Social services

38. GREVIO's baseline evaluation report had praised the Social Insurance Board's data-collection efforts through the Social Protection Information System (SKAIS), which collected disaggregated administrative data on the general victim support services provided to victims of violence against women broken down by sex, age, nationality of the beneficiary, the relationship between perpetrator and victim, geographical location and the presence of underage children, as well as comprehensive data on specialist support services run by women's NGOs. Moreover, data were collected biannually on high-risk cases discussed within Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs).

39. In the period following the baseline evaluation report, in 2025 the SKAIS system was replaced by the Social Services and Benefits Registry (STAR) case-management system, which connects local authorities and the victim support services of the Social Insurance Board and aims to provide more efficient and high-quality official statistics in the social field, as well as to improve case management in the social welfare system. According to information provided by the authorities, the STAR data registry collects data similar to those of the previous system, disaggregated by sex, age, relationship between the victim and perpetrator and type of services provided, such as counselling, mediation, restorative justice, psychosocial support and referral to shelters. Data

38. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.
39. See GREVIO's first thematic evaluation report on France, paragraph 54, available at https://rm.coe.int/first-thematic-evaluation-report-building-trust-by-delivering-support-/4880286c9c.
40. The database is available in Estonian at: https://sisu.ut.ee/suk/avaandmed/.

collected through the STAR system are published regularly in the Social Insurance Board's annual reports.[41]

40. **GREVIO strongly encourages the Estonian authorities to systematically analyse data on all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention, collected by law enforcement, prosecutors and the judiciary, and disaggregated by the sex and age of both victims and perpetrators, the type of violence, the relationship between perpetrator and victim, geographical location and other relevant factors, with a view to identifying reporting, attrition and conviction rates and sanctioning practices.**

41. **In light of the findings issued in its baseline evaluation report and in view of the persistent gaps, GREVIO urges the Estonian authorities to systematically collect data, disaggregated by type of violence, the age of the victim and the alleged perpetrator and the nature of their relationship, on the number of women and girls who seek assistance from, or come into contact with, public or private healthcare services, including perinatal services, as a result of experiences of violence against women. This includes, in particular, cases of domestic violence, female genital mutilation, forced abortion and forced sterilisation, and sexual violence.**

42. **GREVIO invites the Estonian authorities to analyse and utilise the relevant data collected by social services on the provision of services to victims of violence against women for the purpose of evidence-based policy making. GREVIO further invites the Estonian authorities to produce statistics based on such analyses and to make them publicly available.**

41. See the Social Insurance Board's 2025 Annual Report in Estonian at: www.sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/sotsiaalkindlustusameti-aastaraamat-2025/abivajav-taiskasvanu.

III. Analysis of the implementation of selected provisions in priority areas in the fields of prevention, protection and prosecution

A. Prevention

43. Chapter III of the Istanbul Convention contains a number of general and more specific obligations in the area of prevention. This section analyses the progress made since the baseline evaluation monitoring procedure on the implementation of early preventive measures. It also covers progress made towards the implementation of the more specific preventive measures provided under this chapter in the areas of education, training of all relevant professionals and perpetrator programmes. Ensuring the effective prevention of all forms of violence against women and domestic violence is an important step in rendering it unacceptable and reducing levels of perpetration.[42] In turn, effective prevention empowers women and girls to speak out about their experiences and seek support and protection.

1. General obligations (Article 12)

44. Article 12 sets out a number of general preventive measures that represent the overarching principles of the parties' duty to prevent violence against women. These include the requirement 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 based on the idea of the inferiority of women or on stereotyped roles for women and men. A positive contribution to achieving such change can be made by men and boys acting as role models and advocates for equality between women and men and mutual respect, including by speaking out against violence, engaging other men in ending violence against women or actively taking on caring responsibilities. Moreover, flowing from the premise that violence against women is a cause as much as a consequence of gender inequality, Article 12 further requires that parties adopt specific measures to empower women in order to enable them to recognise and reject discrimination, unequal power relations and, ultimately, reduce women's vulnerability to violence and achieve greater gender equality.

45. GREVIO's baseline evaluation report had acknowledged various measures taken by the Estonian authorities to challenge patriarchal attitudes and gender stereotypes, including awareness-raising campaigns that engaged men and boys as role models and advocated gender equality, while at the same time calling for more efforts to address the harmful impact of gender stereotypes in relation to violence against women.

46. GREVIO notes at the outset that the large-scale survey entitled "Safe relationships within the family, at work and outside work" (the national relationship survey), conducted by Statistics Estonia and published in 2024, provides valuable information on the prevalence of psychological, physical and sexual violence, stalking and sexual harassment in Estonian society. The survey indicates that as many as 41% of women have experienced intimate partner violence during their lifetime. More specifically, 39% of women have suffered psychological violence, 13% physical violence (including threats) and 9% sexual violence.[43] According to the survey findings, young women aged 18 to 29 emerge as the group most likely to have experienced intimate partner violence. The results further show that almost half of women with basic education or less, as well as women who report limitations in everyday activities due to health reasons, have experienced intimate partner violence, indicating a significantly higher prevalence among these groups of women. By contrast, the survey indicates that the likelihood of experiencing violence does not differ significantly depending on whether a woman lives in an urban or a rural area.[44] These findings are broadly consistent with the

42. The importance of this endeavour has been reiterated and strengthened through the Dublin Declaration on the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, adopted in Dublin, Ireland, on 30 September 2022, by 38 member states of the Council of Europe.
43. Statistics Estonia (2024), "Safe relationships within family, at work and outside work", results of the national relationship survey, available at: www.stat.ee/en/news/41-women-estonia-experience-intimate-partner-violence.
44. See a news item on the national relationship survey at: www.stat.ee/en/news/largest-and-most-comprehensive-relationship-survey-date-reveals-it-intimate-partnerships-people-estonia-experience-most-violence.

results of the European Union Gender-Based Violence Survey published in 2024, which indicate that 15.1% of Estonian women have experienced physical violence and/or threats, 18% have experienced sexual violence and 33.1% of women have experienced some form of intimate partner violence over their lifetime.[45]

47. As regards attitudes and opinions on gender stereotypes, the results of a 2024 survey on the Estonian population's awareness of domestic and sexual violence highlight both progress and ongoing challenges in societal attitudes to violence against women. For example, 80% of respondents now recognise various forms of domestic violence, including economic violence, psychological violence and coercive control, compared with 50% in a similar survey conducted in 2014.[46] Public awareness of support services is also high: 92% of respondents know at least one organisation providing assistance to victims and 99% agree that rape victims require specialised support.[47] Despite these positive trends, certain victim-blaming attitudes remain. Some 38% of respondents still think a woman can provoke rape by what she wears, 27% believe that victims of sexual violence are often partly to blame,[48] 12% believe that a victim of domestic violence may be partly to blame for staying in a violent relationship and 10% consider domestic violence a private family matter that outsiders should not intervene in.[49] GREVIO notes that such attitudes can discourage victims from reporting violence or seeking help, pointing to a need for continuous public-awareness initiatives.

48. Similarly, another issue of particular concern for GREVIO is the findings of a study on the normalisation of misogyny and sexism in Estonian media, which indicate a troubling tendency among young people to adopt increasingly conservative views regarding gender roles. The research refers, in this regard, to findings from the 2022 International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS), according to which nearly half of 15-year-old boys agree that men are better suited for political leadership positions than women and approximately 24% believe that women should avoid politics altogether.[50] The study also highlights the role of social and traditional media in reinforcing gender stereotypes that shape young people's perceptions of what is considered appropriate or desirable for men and women in society. In particular, social media platforms were found to play a significant role in spreading misogynistic narratives and stereotypes associating public roles, such as employment and political leadership, with men and domestic responsibilities with women.[51]

49. Taken together, these findings indicate a need for co-ordinated and systematic prevention activities aimed at challenging stereotyped views and prejudices regarding gender roles, which in turn contribute to the relatively high prevalence of violence against women in Estonia. In this regard, GREVIO notes certain efforts made by the Estonian authorities to raise awareness, particularly in response to the study on the normalisation of misogyny and sexism in the media. Examples include the creation of Estonian-language Wikipedia subpages explaining terms such as "manosphere" and "manfluencer". GREVIO welcomes the fact that some of the communication efforts, such as the "Why do we stay silent?" campaign,[52] which were conducted within the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence, identified and featured men in the public eye as positive role models and,

45. Eurostat, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) and European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) (2024), EU gender-based violence survey – Key results, p. 15, available at: https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2024/eu-gender-violence-survey-key-results.
46. Social Insurance Board (2024), "Survey of the Estonian population's awareness of gender-based violence and human trafficking", p. 4, available in Estonian at: https://sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/asutus-uudised-ja-kontakt/asutuse-info/uuringud?utm_.
47. Ibid., p. 109.
48. Ibid., p. 54.
49. Ibid., p. 5.
50. International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS), 2022, p. 56, available in Estonian at: www.iea.nl/publications/study-reports/national-reports-iea-studies/iccs-2022-national-report-estonia.
51. Praxis Centre for Policy Studies (2024), "Alpha men and little flowers: the normalisation of misogyny and sexism in the Estonian media", p. 6, available in Estonian at: https://praxis.ee/tood/misoguunia-eesti-avalikus-ruumis.
52. Within this campaign, 15 well-known Estonian men spoke out against intimate partner violence to raise awareness and encourage people to identify, support and intervene on behalf of victims. The campaign included a video series featuring public figures discussing often hidden aspects of intimate partner violence and highlighted the importance of men's role in preventing such abuse. More information available in Estonian at: https://kerstikaljulaid.ee/m/uudis/15-eesti-meest-astuvad-ules-lahisuhtevagivalla-ennetuse-kampaanias/.

according to information provided by the Estonian authorities, have achieved notable success.[53] Further awareness-raising activities have been implemented to improve women's participation in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) sectors as well as in leadership positions. GREVIO also notes with interest the "Notice. Intervene. Help." campaign, which aims to prevent sexual harassment in nightlife settings by providing information on identifying harassment and practical guidance on how bystanders can intervene and support victims. Another interesting prevention initiative is IKEA's "Notice violence" campaign, which was primarily implemented as a corporate social responsibility programme and involved co-operation with public institutions, such as the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Police and Border Guard Board and local women's shelters, to raise awareness and support victims of domestic violence, with outreach activities carried out in 2024. Most recently in 2026, victim support services launched the international Denim Day campaign in Estonia for the first time. In addition to addressing victim-blaming attitudes and misconceptions surrounding consent, the campaign provided information on support services available to victims of sexual violence. GREVIO welcomes this initiative as a means of supporting the implementation of the recently enacted consent-based definition of rape.[54]

50. While GREVIO welcomes these efforts, which primarily aim to improve women's participation in public life and address certain gender stereotypes that are gaining popularity in society, it notes with regret the lack of systematic awareness-raising activities addressing the different forms of violence against women. The high prevalence of domestic violence, including psychological violence, warrants greater efforts to increase societal awareness of these issues. Prevention efforts addressing other forms of violence – some less visible, such as forced marriage, FGM, forced sterilisation and forced abortion, and others that are increasingly prevalent, such as stalking and the digital dimension of violence against women – would not only raise awareness of these forms of violence in society but would also enable more victims to come forward.

51. GREVIO further notes the need to design targeted awareness-raising campaigns to address violence against women exposed to intersectional discrimination, such as women with lower levels of education and women with disabilities, as their increased exposure to gender-based violence has been identified by the national relationship survey. Similarly, while studies and surveys do not specifically focus on the situation of women from national and/or ethnic minorities, including Russian-speaking women, information provided by both state authorities and civil society representatives point to the need to examine their situation and to ensure targeted awareness-raising campaigns given an apparent high prevalence of violence experienced by such groups.[55]

52. Last, it does not appear that any regular, formal or systematic evaluation is done in respect of the existing awareness-raising measures to allow for their adjustment and the identification of any undesirable or adverse effects.

53. **GREVIO strongly encourages the Estonian authorities to conduct regular awareness-raising campaigns or programmes addressing the different manifestations of violence against women and girls covered by the Istanbul Convention, including in their digital dimension, as well as the heightened risk of gender-based violence of women and girls exposed to intersectional discrimination, for example women with lower levels of education, women with disabilities and women from national and/or ethnic minorities, including Russian-speaking women.**

54. **GREVIO further encourages the Estonian authorities to regularly carry out impact assessments of any awareness-raising campaigns and primary prevention measures and**

53. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.
54. Amendments introducing a consent-based definition of rape into the Estonian legal order have been adopted by the Estonian Parliament on 10 June 2026, with a view to entering into force on 1 January 2027. The new approach aims to redefine the formerly force-based offences as "sexual intercourse with a person without that person's free and expressed consent" and "an act of a sexual nature with a person without that person's free and expressed consent". The planned amendments set out several aggravating factors, including, *inter alia*, situations involving a relationship of dependency or trust, the use of narcotic or psychotropic substances, taking advantage of a victim's inability to understand the situation, group or repeat perpetrators and cases resulting in serious bodily harm, death or suicide.
55. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

to identify, through such impact assessments, any undesirable or adverse effects of the awareness-raising campaigns and adjust them accordingly.

2. Education (Article 14)

55. The drafters of the Istanbul Convention recognised the important role that formal and informal educational settings play in addressing the root causes of violence against women and girls. Article 14 therefore requires the design of teaching material that promotes equality between women and men, non-stereotyped gender roles, mutual respect, non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships and the right to personal integrity and informs learners of the different forms of gender-based violence against women, adapted to the age and capacity of learners and where parties deem appropriate. The obligation to promote these principles extends to informal educational facilities as well as any sports, cultural and leisure facilities. In this context, GREVIO underlines the importance of informing parents about the content and objectives of related courses, the qualifications of the persons providing the courses and to whom any questions can be directed.

56. In its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO had praised Estonia for integrating topics on gender equality, consent and the prevention of violence across all levels of education, noting that compulsory personal, social and health education in primary and secondary schools covered respect between the sexes and healthy relationship norms, while upper-secondary education also included comprehensive sexuality education. In this respect, GREVIO had noted that Estonia's sexuality education programme is recognised as a model by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). GREVIO had also welcomed the availability of training opportunities for teachers aimed at enabling them to identify victims of violence among students, including those witnessing domestic violence in their households. With regard to higher education, GREVIO had noted with interest the introduction of an elective course on gender-based violence for social science students, as well as the availability of specialised training on sexual violence and harassment in the sports sector for coaches and athletes.

57. Following the baseline evaluation report, a survey commissioned by the Ministry of Justice in 2020 among young people aged 16 to 26 revealed that the majority of respondents received information on gender stereotypes, sexual rights, sexual diversity, and sexual and intimate partner violence primarily through school. However, the survey pointed to the need to provide more information to young people on the impacts of exposure to pornography and sexual violence as well as the available means for advice and support. The results of the survey also revealed that teachers' preparedness to address issues of intimate and sexual violence in schools varied: while some of the respondents considered the support provided to be sufficient, others reported that teachers lacked the necessary skills, knowledge and willingness to address these issues. Almost half of the respondents indicated that they had never disclosed their experiences of sexual violence to anyone.[56]

58. In 2023, following the above-mentioned survey and the publication of GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, the curriculum for Estonian basic education (grades 1 to 9) and upper-secondary schools (grades 10 to 12) was updated. More specifically, sexuality education is now taught within the mandatory "Personal, social and health education" course in primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary schools, which GREVIO welcomes.[57] Moreover, GREVIO notes with satisfaction that the updated curricula for both study cycles explicitly include gender equality as a fundamental value of the learning environment and the teaching of digital competence. This education on digital competence aims to equip students with the skills to navigate online environments safely, recognise

56. Estonian Research Centre OÜ and Norstat Eesti AS (2020), "A study of attitudes and experiences of sexual abuse of children and young people", pages 3-4, available in Estonian at: www.sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/raamatukogu/laste-ja-noorte-seksuaalse-vaarkohtlemise-hoiakute-ja-kogemuste-uuring.
57. As regards sexuality education, "Relationship Smarts Plus", a relationship and sexuality education programme for adolescents aged 13 to 19, has also been adapted for use in Estonia since 2022. According to information provided by women's rights organisations, more than 50 teachers have been trained to implement this curriculum, although no information is available regarding its systematic use in practice.

and protect themselves against digital risks, safeguard their personal data and privacy, and engage responsibly and ethically in digital communication and content creation.[58] Some of the learning objectives listed in the curricula also support values relevant to preventing gender-based violence, particularly those promoting respect for diversity, social and civic responsibility, self-awareness and ethical communication.[59]

59. Notwithstanding these positive developments, experts in the field have brought to GREVIO's attention the fact that schools enjoy a high degree of autonomy in implementing the curricula and that the depth and quality of teaching on gender equality may depend to a large extent on the priorities and expertise of individual educators. .[60] Indeed, overall, there appears to be considerable variation in how topics related to violence against women and sexuality education are delivered across the country, therefore requiring greater harmonisation efforts. Such harmonisation efforts are equally needed to ensure that Russian-speaking students receive the same amount of sexuality education as their Estonian-speaking peers, an issue also raised in the baseline evaluation report. This is particularly urgent given the rising prevalence of harmful gender stereotypes among young people and the continued lack of guidance on how to express lack of consent to sex or on how to cope with trauma resulting from sexual violence.[61]

60. Furthermore, GREVIO notes that the curriculum does not appear to adequately address the dynamics of sexual relationships or the consequences of sexual violence, resulting in young people relying largely on pornography for information.[62] With this in mind, GREVIO underscores the importance of addressing the notion of rape as based on the absence of consent and the risks posed by violent pornography in the sexuality education courses. This is particularly important in light of studies revealing how the exposure of children below the age of 12 to pornography causes guilt, shame, trauma and anxiety disorders similar to post-traumatic stress disorder, including anxiety attacks, problems sleeping, nightmares and headaches.[63] The Council of Europe Steering Committee on the Rights of the Child has issued a guidance note on safeguarding children from the risks of accessing online pornography, which contains tools and recommendations on tackling this issue that may be of assistance.[64] An equally important issue is to ensure that digital literacy education is delivered in a manner that equips young people to refrain from perpetrating, to protect themselves from and to seek support with regard to online and technology-facilitated violence against women, particularly given that 30% of young people reported having been solicited for intimate images online at least once.[65]

61. As regards teachers' awareness of and capacity to address issues related to violence against women, GREVIO notes that certain efforts have been undertaken to increase their competence in this area. For instance, a teacher's toolkit entitled "Misogyny and gender roles" has been developed in response to concerns about the growing influence of misogynistic narratives on social media on young people. The toolkit aims to provide practical guidance and teaching materials to support

58. National curriculum for primary and lower-secondary schools, paragraph 4(4), and national curriculum for upper-secondary schools, paragraph 4(3).
59. Ibid.
60. Information obtained in the course of the evaluation.
61. See the findings emerging from a conference on sexuality education at: https://novaator.err.ee/1609348116/uuringud-noored-on-koolist-saadud-seksuaalopetusest-sammu-vorra-ees. Furthermore, GREVIO notes with interest a promising initiative launched in 2023 in collaboration with the civil society organisations Progressive Movement and Feministeerium, in which trained volunteers provided information on the notion of consent in intimate relationships to students in grades 7 to 12 across 10 schools. However, this remains a project-based activity and is not yet implemented as a nationwide practice.
62. See the findings emerging from a conference on sexuality education at: https://novaator.err.ee/1609348116/uuringud-noored-on-koolist-saadud-seksuaalopetusest-sammu-vorra-ees.
63. See the report submitted to the French Senate on 27 September 2022, "Porno : l'enfer du décor – Rapport d'information n. 900(2021-2022)".
64. Council of Europe Steering Committee on the Rights of the Child, Thematic guidance note on safeguarding children from the risks of accessing online pornographic content, available at: https://rm.coe.int/cdenf-2024-20-final-guidance-note-on-safeguarding-children-from-the-ri/1680b4bc32. See also Committee of Experts on the Prevention of Violence, "Study on sexual violence and harmful sexual behaviour displayed by children: nature, causes, consequences and responses", p. 33, available at: https://rm.coe.int/enf-vae-2024-05-e-harmful-sexual-behaviour-/1680b219c7.
65. Estonian Research Centre OÜ and Norstat Eesti AS (2020), "A study of attitudes and experiences of sexual abuse of children and young people", p. 5, available in Estonian at: www.sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/raamatukogu/laste-ja-noorte-seksuaalse-vaarkohtlemise-hoiakute-ja-kogemuste-uuring.

teachers to address misogyny and gender stereotypes in the classroom. GREVIO welcomes this initiative as a positive step in tackling this emerging challenge, even though, due to its very recent introduction, no feedback on its use has yet been collected. Similarly, while the toolkit has been disseminated widely, there are currently no data on how many teachers are using it or which specific topics are being taught in practice, as its use depends largely on the discretion of individual teachers.[66]

62. **GREVO strongly encourages the Estonian authorities to:**

a. **ensure that all the topics covered in Article 14, paragraph 1, of the Istanbul Convention – gender equality, non-stereotyped gender roles, mutual respect, non-violent conflict resolution, gender-based violence and the right to personal integrity – as well as the importance of freely given consent, including in sexual relations, and the harmful effects of violent pornography are effectively taught in practice across the country, supported with adequate teaching materials and delivered by teachers with appropriate training, adapted to the age and evolving capacity of learners;**
b. **monitor to what extent these subjects are taught in schools in practice.**

3. Training of professionals (Article 15)

63. Building society's trust by delivering support, protection and justice to women and girls with experiences of gender-based violence requires well-trained professionals across a wide spectrum of fields. The standard set by the Istanbul Convention in its Article 15 is that of systematic initial and in-service training of all those who deal with victims or perpetrators of all acts of violence. The training that is required must cover the prevention and detection of such violence, equality between women and men, the needs and rights of victims and the prevention of secondary victimisation.

64. In its baseline evaluation, GREVIO had observed an overall lack of mandatory and systematic training for key professional groups dealing with victims of violence against women, including judges, prosecutors, law-enforcement officials and social workers, with the exception of child-protection services. While some sector-specific training on violence against women had been found to exist, particularly in the health sector and for certain categories of social workers, these efforts remained largely voluntary and sporadic. GREVIO had also noted the absence of specialised training for mental health professionals, as well as the lack of modules in existing training programmes addressing intersectional discrimination affecting groups such as migrant women, Russian-speaking women and women with disabilities.

65. Since the publication of the baseline evaluation report, the new Victim Support Act, adopted in 2023, introduced general education and training requirements for professionals providing support services to victims of crime, including victims of violence against women. The act distinguishes between general victim support workers, employed by the Social Insurance Board, and professionals providing targeted support services, such as psychological counselling, legal counselling and crisis support, as well as specialist services delivered in women's support centres and sexual violence crisis centres. For the latter group, the act sets out the professional training requirements, the content and requirements of which are outlined in a regulation adopted pursuant to the act.[67] These training requirements generally focus on higher education qualifications and professional accreditation and do not include mandatory training on violence against women. Nevertheless, an exception is foreseen for professionals working in women's support centres and sexual violence crisis centres, as the regulation requires them to complete specialised training on violence against women or sexual violence within one year of taking up their duties, which GREVIO welcomes. The specialised training on violence against women covers, *inter alia*, violence against women as a violation of human rights and its links to gender inequality, as well as the dynamics of victim and perpetrator behaviour and

66. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.
67. Regulation on the requirements for professional training and training for persons providing victim assistance, available in Estonian at: www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/104042023013.

the impact of violence on women and children. The specialised training on sexual violence addresses the nature and forms of sexual violence, its impact on victims, available support measures and the relevant criminal law provisions on sexual offences.

66. Regarding general victim support workers, it is unclear whether the content of their basic training includes specific modules on violence against women. However, the Social Insurance Board has developed a variety of additional online courses on trauma-informed practices, psychological first aid, restorative justice and handling cases of domestic violence, which are available to all persons working with victims of crime.[68] Of these e-courses, only the course on domestic violence appears to specifically cover aspects of violence against women, while the others are of a more general nature. A positive development in this regard has been the intensified efforts in recent years to provide training for professionals facilitating criminal and civil mediation on the dynamics of domestic violence, as well as on screening and risk assessment in alternative dispute resolution processes. GREVIO however notes with regret that aside from the initial training requirements to provide general and specialist support to victims of violence against women, there are no mandatory in-service training requirements for any of the professional groups covered by the Victim Support Act.

67. Notwithstanding the above-mentioned positive developments, the professional training landscape in Estonia on violence against women is dominated by largely voluntary programmes. Although the Social Insurance Board provides a variety of online training programmes accessible to a wide range of professionals including not only victim support workers but also judges, prosecutors, police officers and local social welfare authorities, GREVIO highlights that these cannot replace systematic, mandatory, in-person training. Moreover, existing training efforts also appear to focus primarily on domestic violence and, to a certain extent, sexual violence, forced marriage, FGM, forced abortion and sterilisation with no comprehensive knowledge-building opportunities on other forms of violence against women, including stalking, psychological violence and sexual harassment.

68. As regards more specifically social welfare and child-protection professionals in local government, GREVIO notes that they are able to participate in the training organised by the Social Insurance Board on a voluntary basis. However, recent studies reveal a need for systematic efforts to improve local authorities' capacities to handle cases of violence against women through targeted training, given the important role they play in the MARAC system and their frequent role as the first point of assistance for victims.[69]

69. Specialised training on violence against women remains voluntary for newly appointed judges. GREVIO welcomes the availability of the Council of Europe's HELP online course on violence against women and domestic violence as one of the voluntary training options and notes the information provided that its uptake is generally high.[70] As regards in-service training, the annual training programme designed by the Judicial Training Department of the Supreme Court comprises a variety of voluntary training options but does not systematically include courses on violence against women. An initiative noted by GREVIO is a 2022 training course on parental alienation. The training defined parental alienation as "a form of psychological abuse in which one parent manipulates a child to reject or resist the other parent, often occurring in the context of high-conflict separations or domestic violence", and aimed to provide judges and judicial staff with knowledge on this concept.[71] GREVIO notes with concern that such references to parental alienation are made without consideration for a child's reasons to reject or fear the other parent. This rejection may have its root in that parent's use of violence against the child or against the mother, and that hence it is not suitable for use in custody or visitation proceedings after domestic violence.[72]

68. Information on these online courses is available at: www.palunabi.ee/et/e-kursused.
69. University of Tartu (2024), "Case analysis: the authorities' handling of fatal domestic violence cases", p. 23, available in Estonian at: https://siseministeerium.ee/uudised/asja-valminud-uuring-toob-valja-kitsaskohad-ametiasutuste-tegevustes-surmaga-loppenud.
70. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.
71. Supreme Court of Estonia (2023), "Report on the training programme for judges for the year 2022", pages 20-22, available in Estonian at: www.riigikohus.ee/et/kohtunike-omavalitsuskogud/koolitusnoukogu.
72. Ibid., pages 21-22.

70. Overall, while GREVIO welcomes the availability of different voluntary training options for both new and practising judges, participation in these ultimately depends on judges' personal interest. While GREVIO underscores its full respect for the independence and autonomy of the judiciary, it notes at the same time the unique and essential role the judiciary plays in applying the principles of the Istanbul Convention. By virtue of this essential role, their decisions may directly engage states' responsibility.[73] It is therefore of paramount importance that, when adjudicating cases pertaining to violence against women, such decisions are informed and based on specialist knowledge. This requires expertise on very complex phenomena, the "freeze, flop and befriend" reactions of victims of rape and the long-term consequences of exposure to domestic violence of children. Such training needs cannot be sufficiently addressed by optional courses but require mandatory and in-depth training of judges on relevant issues to ensure that they can respond to women victims of violence and their children in a manner that instils their trust in the judiciary and provides an adequate sense of justice. This is of acute relevance not only in the context of criminal proceedings but also in relation to family law cases, where judicial decisions on custody and visitation should offer consideration for the safety concerns of women and children and duly consider reports of domestic violence. GREVIO notes that in Estonia between two and five new judges take up office each year, a relatively small number that may create favourable conditions for the provision of mandatory training to those working on civil and criminal matters related to violence against women.

71. Since the baseline evaluation report, the provision of training to prosecutors has remained unchanged. Accordingly, there is no mandatory initial training for entry into the profession, even for specialised prosecutors dealing with domestic and sexual violence. Instead, the majority of their professional training is carried out on the job and through round tables organised on a needs-based approach. In recent years, such round tables have been organised, for instance, on the consent-based rape legislation as well as more regularly on trauma-informed responses. As GREVIO stressed in the baseline evaluation round, such round tables, while useful, cannot replace systematic, mandatory training on different forms of violence against women.

72. Positive steps have been taken to improve the mandatory initial training of police officers, notably through the introduction of a course on domestic violence in the curriculum of the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences. GREVIO also welcomes the information provided by the authorities indicating that the curriculum will be updated to include additional forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention, although the content of the updated curriculum is currently unknown. As regards in-service training, while mandatory in-service refresher courses are organised for specialised police officers working on domestic violence or sexual violence cases, such specialised units, particularly for domestic violence, exist only in the Northern prefecture. For police officers operating in other prefectures, while the Centre for Continuing Education of the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences periodically offers in-service training on various issues, including on a needs-based basis, there is no indication that courses on violence against women are offered, nor whether they are mandatory. Indeed, a study examining the knowledge and attitudes of first responders and police towards domestic violence highlighted the need for more systematic and continuous training for these professionals, particularly in identifying and responding to forms of violence other than physical violence, including coercive control and psychological abuse.[74]

73. Regarding training opportunities for teachers, GREVIO notes that teachers are required to participate in professional training at least once every five years. However, the selection of training courses is left to teachers and schools' management, based on identified needs.[75] In this regard, reports from civil society organisations carrying out workshops for educators indicate that many teachers still have limited knowledge of gender-based violence, often do not see gender stereotypes

73. The following are examples among many cases in the area of violence against women where the decisions of judge(s) engaged states' responsibility under the European Convention on Human Rights and led to a violation: *Vuckovic v. Croatia* (Application No. 15798/20, 12 December 2023), *J.L. v. Italy* (Application No. 5671/16, 27 May 2021) and *Carvalho Pinto de Sousa Morais v. Portugal* (Application No. 17484/15, 25 July 2017).
74. See Ministry of the Interior, Knowledge and Attitudes Related to Intimate Partner Violence among Emergency Responders and Police Officers, 2023, available in Estonian at: https://siseministeerium.ee/uudised/uuring-lsv-valjakutsetele-reageerijad-vajavad-susteemsemaid-teadmisi.
75. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

as a pressing concern and believe that existing vocational training standards for teachers provide only generic guidance on addressing such stereotypes.[76]

74. In the healthcare sector, as also welcomed in the baseline evaluation report, all gynaecology and family doctors receive training on domestic violence and sexual violence during their residency training. In recent years, several project-based training initiatives have also been undertaken to enhance the capacity of healthcare professionals to respond to violence against women. These include the OPEP-DV project, which developed an online education module for physiotherapists on identifying and assisting victims of domestic violence; the IMPACT project, which provided training for healthcare and other professionals on trauma-informed approaches; and the Advancing the Rights of Estonian Victims (AREV) project, which piloted tools and trained healthcare professionals to better identify, document and respond to violence. Moreover in 2022, the Social Insurance Board, together with the Estonian Sexual Health Association, organised training sessions on FGM.[77] However, studies indicate that many healthcare professionals continue to lack sufficient skills and knowledge to identify and address domestic violence.[78] Moreover, systematic training efforts do not appear to extend to other forms of violence against women other than domestic and sexual violence.

75. **Referring to the findings of the GREVIO baseline evaluation report and in view of persistent gaps in professional training, GREVIO urges the Estonian authorities to introduce systematic and mandatory initial and in-service trauma-informed training, supported by protocols and guidelines, on all the forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention, including their digital dimensions, for victim support workers, social welfare and child-protection professionals in local authorities, police officers, medical and healthcare providers, teachers and justice system professionals, including judges, prosecutors, lawyers and court-appointed experts.**

4. Preventive intervention and treatment programmes (Article 16)

76. Perpetrator programmes are important elements of an integrated and comprehensive approach to preventing and combating violence against women. Under Article 16 of the Istanbul Convention, parties are required to set up or support programmes that prevent perpetrators of domestic violence and of sexual violence from reoffending and support them in adopting non-violent behavioural strategies. Making the safety of, the support for and the human rights of victims a primary concern, these programmes are key elements in ensuring women's safety from known perpetrators. The convention requires their close co-ordination with specialist support services for victims.

a. Programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence

77. The baseline evaluation had noted that while programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence in prison settings were available in Estonia, no sustainable, systematically accessible voluntary perpetrator programmes were accessible nationwide. GREVIO had noted the existence of a few state-funded NGO projects providing group counselling; however, these could not be considered as programmes offering long-term behavioural change.

78. At the outset GREVIO welcomes the fact that the 2023 Victim Support Act now provides a legal basis for the provision of programmes for perpetrators of all forms of violent behaviour by victim support services. The services that are to be provided under the law include an assessment of the perpetrator's motivation and psychosocial needs, an assessment of the risk of continued violent behaviour and the provision of counselling aimed at stopping violent behaviour. This indeed constitutes a positive step towards the establishment of perpetrator programmes in line with the

76. Information obtained in the course of the evaluation.
77. See details about the training from the Estonian Gynaecologists Society at: www.ens.ee/uudised/item/1466-naiste-suguelundite-moonutamise-fgm-teemalised-koolitused?utm.
78. See the University of Tartu (2024), "Case analysis: the authorities' handling of fatal domestic violence cases", p. 14, available in Estonian at: https://siseministeerium.ee/uudised/asja-valminud-uuring-toob-valja-kitsaskohad-ametiasutuste-tegevustes-surmaga-loppenud.

requirements of Article 16 of the convention, which were previously delivered mainly online and in an unorganised manner in Estonia.

79. In practice, these perpetrator programmes are implemented by trained counsellors employed by the Social Insurance Board, with only five such professionals covering the entire territory of Estonia.[79] GREVIO notes that women's rights organisations, while acknowledging the positive impact of these programmes, maintain that the insufficient number of counsellors hinders their accessibility throughout Estonia.[80] The authorities, for their part, attribute the limited availability of counsellors to budgetary constraints. This aspect was also criticised by law-enforcement representatives. Furthermore, for a considerable period no counsellors were available to provide this service in Russian. The service caters not only for perpetrators of intimate partner violence but also to those who have committed violence against children and older persons, albeit 83% of clients are reported to be perpetrators of intimate partner violence. While no information is available on the specific methodology used by this service or the duration of the programme, it aims to achieve behavioural change through individual counselling sessions, a welcome development since, in the past, the service was initially operated through a counselling helpline. Furthermore, despite the fact that no formal quality standards have been established for the provision of this service, GREVIO welcomes the programme's co-operation with the Work with Perpetrators Network and the translation of its standards into Estonian, with the intention of promoting and disseminating them more widely.

80. As regards the referral pathway, according to the authorities, most participants are referred by prosecution services as a probationary measure, followed by the police.[81] GREVIO regrets that mandatory referrals to such programmes by courts as a means to reduce recidivism, and in addition to sentencing, remains limited. While courts may order participation in such programmes under Article 75(2) of the Penal Code, this occurs solely within the framework of suspended sentences, in which case participation is mandatory and failure to comply with this condition can lead to enforcement of the original sentence or other corrective measures. The use of these measures also does not appear to be systematic and does not yet constitute a standard judicial response to cases of domestic violence. Moreover, GREVIO notes with concern that an enforcement mechanism requiring offenders to complete such programmes is also lacking.[82] While self-referrals account for a smaller proportion of cases, the authorities have found that work with self-referred perpetrators tends to be particularly effective.

81. GREVIO notes that the formalisation of treatment programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence in the Victim Support Act and the gradual roll-out of in-person counselling constitute a positive step towards Estonia's stronger compliance with Article 16 of the Istanbul Convention. This momentum should be maintained by increasing the availability of these services, promoting referrals by other authorities as well as self-referrals, subjecting them to quality standards in line with the European Standards for Perpetrator Programmes[83] and evaluating their impact on a regular basis.

82. Another positive example is the Within My Reach programme, a civil society-led initiative supported by local authorities, currently only implemented in the city of Tallinn as a voluntary prevention programme addressing domestic violence. The programme aims to support its participants to recognise unhealthy relationship patterns, improve communication skills and prevent violent behaviour in intimate relationships. However, no information is available on the number of participants who have benefited from the programme.

79. Victim Support Services offer these programmes through the Violence Cessation Support Service.
80. Written submission by the Estonian Women's Shelters Union and the Estonian Women's Associations Roundtable, p. 3.
81. In 2024, about 80% of cases came through referrals from the police and prosecutors. "Estonia: comprehensive national review report, 2024", p. 38, available on the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) website at: https://unece.org/isu/documents/2024/09/working-documents/beijing30-national-review-report-estonia.
82. See an interview with the Police and Border Guard Board Director, 2025, at https://news.err.ee/1609889521/police-chief-estonia-lacks-specialists-for-russian-speaking-domestic-abusers.
83. Work with Perpetrators European Network, European Standards for Perpetrator Programmes, available at: www.work-with-perpetrators.eu/european-standards-for-perpetrator-programmes.

83. In prison settings, as noted in the baseline evaluation report, programmes for reducing domestic and intimate partner violence are available throughout Estonia. Participation in these programmes is guided by individual treatment plans for inmates and while participation remains voluntary, GREVIO welcomes the information provided by the authorities indicating that efforts are being made to increase both participation and completion rates.[84]

84. **While welcoming the progress made thus far, GREVIO strongly encourages the Estonian authorities to:**

- **a. increase the number and capacity of perpetrator programmes for domestic violence;**
- **b. develop common minimum standards for perpetrator programmes, in line with the principles of the Istanbul Convention and drawing on the European Standards for Perpetrator Programmes;**
- **c. ensure that perpetrator programmes are widely attended, including by incorporating them into the criminal justice system and enabling mandatory court referrals as a tool to reduce recidivism;**
- **d. ensure the external evaluation of all perpetrator programmes, in line with recognised international best practices and principles, in order to assess whether the programmes serve their intended preventive aims.**

b. Programmes for perpetrators of sexual violence

85. At the time of GREVIO's baseline evaluation, treatment programmes for perpetrators of sexual violence were available either as a probationary measure provided by facilitators accredited by the Ministry of Justice or as part of an individual treatment plan in prison settings. GREVIO welcomes the establishment since then of a low-threshold service in 2025 for individuals concerned about their own sexual behaviour, including those at risk of offending, in the form of a website where people can seek advice from trained specialists anonymously.[85] GREVIO also welcomes the plans to expand this service to provide initial counselling both online and in person.

86. **GREVIO encourages the Estonian authorities to increase the number and capacity of perpetrator programmes for sexual violence.**

B. Protection and support

87. Chapter IV of the Istanbul Convention requires a multifaceted, professional and victim-oriented support structure for any woman or girl who has experienced any of the forms of violence covered by the convention. General and specialist support services that are victim-oriented, accessible to all and adequate in numbers greatly facilitate recovery by offering support, protection and assistance to overcome the multiple consequences of such violence. As such, they play a key role in offering a comprehensive and adequate response to the different forms of violence covered by the convention.

1. General obligations (Article 18)

88. Article 18 of the Istanbul Convention sets out a number of general principles to be respected in the provision of both general and specialist protective and supportive services for women victims of violence. One of these principles is the need for services to act in a concerted and co-ordinated manner, with the involvement of all the agencies concerned. More specifically, Article 18, paragraph 2, of the convention requires parties to put in place appropriate co-ordination mechanisms that can ensure effective co-operation among, *inter alia*, the judiciary, public prosecutors,

84. See the state report, p. 19.
85. The "Where to turn?" website is available at: https://piirid.ee/avaleht/kuhu-poorduda/.

law-enforcement agencies, local and regional authorities, NGOs and other relevant entities and organisations. In this regard, women's rights NGOs and specialist women's support services play an important role in guaranteeing that the rights of victims are safeguarded in multi-agency co-operation. Other general principles established under this article include the need for measures of protection and support to be based on a gendered understanding of violence against women, and to focus on women's safety and human rights, taking into account the relationship between victims, perpetrators, children and their wider environment, and addressing their needs holistically. Specialist support services must aim at the empowerment and economic independence of women victims of violence and avoid their secondary victimisation. This provision equally stresses the importance of ensuring that access to services is not subject to the victim's willingness to press charges or testify against the perpetrator.

89. As noted in the baseline evaluation report, Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) established across Estonia continue to serve as the main platform for multi-agency co-operation in high-risk cases of domestic violence. GREVIO welcomes the fact that the new Victim Support Act provides a legal basis for MARACs, thereby formally integrating this mechanism into the statutory framework.

90. Currently, 21 MARACs are in operation, bringing together representatives of the police, Prosecutor's Office, victim support services, local authorities and women's support centres as well as professionals implementing perpetrator programmes and, when necessary, other relevant professionals. MARACs meet on a monthly basis to discuss high-risk domestic violence cases, with a view to ensuring a co-ordinated and holistic response tailored to the individual needs and risk profiles of victims. According to information provided by the Estonian authorities, victims may also attend MARAC meetings; however, many choose to opt out after initial participation.[86] A 2023 study assessing the impact of MARACs revealed that 78% of responding MARAC members and victims identified the need to include healthcare professionals in the meetings.[87] This is confirmed by further research, which reveals that in cases of domestic violence co-operation between members of the MARAC network and the medical sector remains inadequate.[88]

91. Another step towards strengthening multi-agency co-operation since the baseline evaluation report has been the establishment of joint "co-vision groups" in every police prefecture in 2024. These groups were designed to operate separately from MARACs, not with the aim of discussing individual cases but instead providing a platform for knowledge sharing among all relevant professionals. GREVIO notes with regret that the activities of the "co-vision groups" were discontinued because of budgetary constraints, despite being widely regarded as a highly successful model.[89]

92. In cases of sexual violence against adults, sexual assault centres, and in cases involving child victims of such violence, Barnahus, serve as one-stop-shop services bringing together all relevant professionals. However, GREVIO notes that other forms of violence against women do not benefit from similar formalised co-operation mechanisms, including domestic violence. This is compounded by the overall lack of dedicated protocols and guidelines for responding to other forms of violence against women in Estonia, including psychological violence, stalking, sexual harassment, forced marriage, FGM, forced abortion and sterilisation, and violence committed in the name of "honour", as covered by the Istanbul Convention.

93. **GREVIO encourages the Estonian authorities to increase their efforts to improve multi-agency co-operation in cases of violence against women, other than sexual violence and high-risk domestic violence, including by developing formal protocols detailing the co-ordination measures to be taken by all agencies, entities and organisations providing**

86. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.
87. Social Insurance Board (2023), "Evaluating the impact of MARAC networking model", p. 44, available in Estonian at: www.centar.ee/en/tehtud-tood/evaluating-the-impact-of-marac-network-model.
88. University of Tartu (2024), "Case analysis: the authorities' handling of fatal domestic violence cases", p. 14, available in Estonian at: https://siseministeerium.ee/uudised/asja-valminud-uuring-toob-valja-kitsaskohad-ametiasutuste-tegevustes-surmaga-loppenud.
89. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

support to victims of all forms of violence against women, with particular attention on the integration of the health sector, based on a gendered understanding of such violence, the empowerment of victims and the avoidance of secondary victimisation.

94. **GREVIO further encourages the Estonian authorities to set up, where possible, one-stop shops for the provision of services to victims of violence against women, including domestic violence.**

2. General support services (Article 20)

95. General support services, such as social services, health services and housing or employment services must be equipped to offer support and protection to women victims of gender-based violence of all ages and backgrounds. Article 20 of the Istanbul Convention requires states parties to ensure that these services are adequately resourced and that the staff are adequately trained on the different forms of violence against women and able to respond to victims in a supportive manner, in particular those that women and girls turn to first (often health and social services).[90] Their interventions are often decisive for victims' onward journey towards a life free from violence and thus a core element of a trust-based system of protection and support.

a. Social services

96. Since the baseline evaluation report, general victim support services have continued to provide counselling and trauma support to all victims of violence, including victims of violence against women. Nevertheless, under the new Victim Support Act, victim support services can now be accessed without the prerequisite of the victim having initiated criminal proceedings, a requirement that was stipulated under the previous version of the law. GREVIO notes with satisfaction that, in this way, this reform expands the protection offered to a greater number of victims, regardless of their willingness to initiate criminal proceedings, thereby enhancing their trust in the system.[91]

97. As was the case in the baseline evaluation report, local authorities offer a range of assistance for persons with socio-economic needs, including family counselling, legal counselling, one-time or regular financial aid and social housing. GREVIO notes, however, that these services are provided to all residents in need, based on a needs assessment carried out by local social welfare departments, but do not specifically prioritise victims of violence against women. Moreover, as also noted in the baseline evaluation report, GREVIO has concerns that the availability, variety and duration of these services vary between municipalities.[92] While larger cities generally have more substantial resources, victims in rural areas face challenges in accessing certain services, such as legal counselling or access to employment.[93] Similarly, while initiatives such as the Employers Against Domestic Abuse programme, established in 2024, aim to raise awareness among employers and provide guidance on supporting staff experiencing domestic violence, Estonia does not have a dedicated national programme offering labour-market integration, vocational training or other measures to support the economic empowerment of victims of violence against women. One area of particular concern for GREVIO is the limited availability of victim support services for women who speak languages other than Estonian, English or Russian, and, to some extent, Ukrainian, following the large-scale arrival of refugees from Ukraine since 2022. According to a study conducted by the UNHCR, information about services for victims of violence against women is not always available in the languages spoken by victims while existing materials tend to be text-heavy, with minimal use of visual content. Furthermore, asylum-seeking and refugee women are entitled to interpretation and translation services for administrative matters, free of charge only for a two-year period, a period which is insufficient for such women to acquire the level of Estonian needed to communicate effectively. GREVIO further notes with regret that no similar free interpretation or translation services

90. Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, paragraph 127.
91. These services are provided based on a needs assessment conducted by victim support workers and delivered by licensed psychologists or psychotherapists, either independently or through contracts with victim support services.
92. For instance, while in the city of Tallinn social housing is provided for up to three years, in Tartu the standard duration is one year, with the possibility of extension.
93. Written submission by the Estonian Women's Shelters Union and the Estonian Women's Associations EV, p. 4.

appear to be available to other migrant women who do not have international protection. The study also revealed a lack of sufficient awareness, knowledge and expertise among providers of victim support services on how to work effectively with individuals from diverse cultural and social backgrounds.[94]

98. **Referring to the findings issued in its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Estonian authorities to set up dedicated programmes that cater for the specific needs of victims of all the forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention in the areas of employment, housing and professional training, while ensuring consistent availability and quality of such services across the territory, thereby contributing to victims' recovery, economic independence and empowerment as well as to the well-being of their children.**

99. **GREVIO further strongly encourages the Estonian authorities to take measures to ensure the provision of support tailored to the specific needs of migrant, asylum-seeking and refugee women by overcoming language barriers and strengthening cultural sensitivity, while also raising awareness among relevant victim support and social welfare professionals of the various forms of violence against women.**

b. Healthcare services

100. GREVIO's baseline evaluation report had revealed that despite often being the first point of contact for victims, the Estonian healthcare system had yet to assume an active role in preventing and combating violence against women. In this regard, GREVIO had noted a lack of knowledge among healthcare professionals about the different forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention, resulting in shortcomings in the detection and treatment of victims, as well as in their referral to specialist support services. These issues were further exacerbated by the absence of standardised care pathways and formalised co-operation structures with other relevant institutions, with the exception of holistic services provided by sexual assault centres, as well as by the lack of protocols and guidelines to identify victims of all forms of violence against women and provide appropriate care.

101. GREVIO notes that certain promising initiatives have been undertaken in the period following the baseline evaluation report. For example, in 2022 the Social Insurance Board published guidelines for assisting patients who have experienced FGM.[95] In 2024, the Estonian Society of Gynaecologists also issued guidelines on the termination of pregnancy, which warn against situations in which a woman may be forced to undergo such procedures against her will.[96] Within the framework of the AREV project (2021-2024), a body map tool was piloted in Ida-Viru Central Hospital, Narva Hospital and Rakvere Hospital to assist healthcare professionals in mapping, describing and documenting physical injuries, recording the patient's account, assessing their psychological state and referring them to relevant services in suspected cases of domestic violence. The IMPACT project, launched in 2024, aims to build on the results of AREV by updating the previously piloted body map tool to a digital injury documentation tool. This tool is designed for the secure capture and storage of photographic evidence of violence and is intended to strengthen a trauma-informed approach in healthcare settings, which GREVIO welcomes. Despite these positive steps, research indicates that many medical professionals still lack adequate knowledge and training to identify and address

94. UNHCR Northern Europe (2025), "Study on the assessment of the existing referral pathways for forcibly displaced and stateless people who have experienced gender-based violence (GBV), including sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) in Estonia" p. 33, available at: www.unhcr.org/nordic-and-baltic/news/new-study-accessibility-gender-based-violence-support-services-forcibly.
95. Social Insurance Board (2022), "Assisting patients who have experienced female genital mutilation (FGM). Guidance material for healthcare professionals", available in Estonian at: www.etis.ee/Portal/Publications/Display/32a46240-c31c-4c13-a06a-6d3593f9b482.
96. Laanpere M. et al. (2024), "Raseduse katkestamine: Eesti Naistearstide Seltsi ravijuhend" (Termination of pregnancy: clinical guideline of the Estonian Society of Gynaecologists).

domestic violence and other forms of violence against women, suggesting the need for more targeted efforts.[97]

102. **While welcoming the efforts of the Estonian authorities to improve the healthcare system's response to different forms of violence against women, GREVIO strongly encourages the Estonian authorities to develop and implement guidelines and standardised care pathways in the public and private healthcare sectors to ensure a gender-sensitive, trauma-informed and non-judgmental approach to enable the detection, diagnosis and treatment of victims of all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence, while also documenting the violence suffered (including photographic evidence), addressing resulting health issues and facilitating referrals to appropriate specialist support services.**

3. Specialist support services (Article 22)

103. Specialist support services ensure the complex task of empowering victims through optimal support and assistance tailored to their specific needs and are an equally important cornerstone of a trust-based system of protection and support. Much of this is best ensured by women's organisations and by support services provided, for example, by local authorities with specialist and experienced staff with in-depth knowledge of gender-based violence against women. They need to be able to address the different types of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention and to provide support to all groups of victims, including hard-to-reach groups.

104. While recognising the wide range of services provided by women's support centres in Estonia, including counselling, psychosocial assistance, advocacy and guidance on available criminal and civil law remedies and social protection schemes, GREVIO's baseline evaluation report had identified certain shortcomings. In particular, it had observed barriers to accessing such services for women exposed to intersecting forms of discrimination, such as women with disabilities, elderly women and women with addiction issues. GREVIO had also noted the absence of specialist support for forms of violence beyond sexual and domestic violence, leaving victims without access to tailored counselling, long-term psychological support or trauma care.

105. As was the case in the baseline evaluation round, women's support centres continue to be the main providers of specialist services for victims of violence against women. GREVIO welcomes the fact that the 2023 Victim Support Act now provides a legal basis for and expands the services that women's support centres must provide. These now encompass the provision of psychological support or psychotherapy and legal counselling, in addition to needs assessment, primary and long-term psychosocial counselling, case management and safe temporary accommodation for women and their children.

106. GREVIO notes that following these legislative changes, the roles of women's support centres and general victim support services regarding the provision of psychosocial support now somewhat overlap.[98] While women's support centres previously played a more central role in this regard, as access to psychosocial support through the victim support services was linked to initiating criminal proceedings, the amended legal framework now allows victims to access both types of services. In practice, support is streamlined through regular co-ordination between women's support centres and victim support to identify the type of assistance that best meets the needs of each victim. GREVIO notes with interest that the authorities are planning to conduct a survey on victims' experiences within the support system, with a view to clarifying pathways, improving co-ordination between services and ensuring that support is tailored to victims' individual needs.[99]

97. University of Tartu (2024), "Case analysis: the authorities' handling of fatal domestic violence cases", p. 14, available in Estonian at: https://siseministeerium.ee/uudised/asja-valminud-uuring-toob-valja-kitsaskohad-ametiasutuste-tegevustes-surmaga-loppenud.
98. Article 15 of the Victim Support Act provides the general legal basis for psychosocial support as part of victim support services overall, whereas Article 21 then lists psychosocial support as a component that women's support centres must provide.
99. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

107. Under the new Victim Support Act, legal counselling is also explicitly listed as a mandatory component of women's support centre services. This includes providing information on victims' rights, assistance with legal proceedings and referrals to specialist lawyers for legal representation. GREVIO welcomes this change as an important step towards enabling victims of violence against women to access justice and strengthening their trust in the system. However, information provided by representatives of women's support centres indicates that, due to resource constraints, their legal services are overburdened. Moreover, as these services do not include full legal representation, women often must pay for a lawyer themselves unless they meet the financial criteria for state-funded legal aid, while many available lawyers lack specialised knowledge of violence against women.[100]

108. With regard to shelter services, GREVIO notes that there are currently 17 women's support centres providing temporary safe accommodation to victims of violence against women and their children in Estonia, with a total of 94 beds, marking an improvement from the 75 beds recorded in the baseline evaluation round, which GREVIO welcomes.[101] While GREVIO notes that the available shelter places still fall below the recommended one family place per 10 000 inhabitants, it also notes that because of the small and well-connected nature of the country women and their children can, if needed, be accommodated in nearby regions or through co-operation with local governments to use social housing facilities.[102] Information provided by the Estonian authorities also indicates that demand for shelter services has been decreasing, with the majority of victims seeking day services such as legal and psychosocial counselling.[103] Arrangements can also be made for women with physical disabilities if the nearest women's support centre has accessibility issues, by finding suitable accommodation through local governments.

109. Nevertheless, access to shelter spaces for certain groups of women, such as women with addiction issues and women with psychosocial disabilities, remains somewhat limited, as also noted in the baseline evaluation report. While such women are usually placed in separate accommodation, often in social housing, and are able to access counselling or other day services provided by women's support centres, GREVIO noted a tendency among professionals to view such women as primarily in need of medical support or addiction rehabilitation. GREVIO also notes with concern the findings of a UNHCR report indicating that some women's support centres do not accommodate women with a migration background because of a lack of resources.[104] GREVIO welcomes the fact that initial steps were taken in 2025 to address some of these shortcomings through additional funding provided by the Social Insurance Board to women's support centres to strengthen their capacity to respond to the needs of women fleeing the war in Ukraine as well as other women and children from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

110. While under the Victim Support Act women's support centres are designated as specialist service providers for victims of all forms of violence against women, GREVIO notes that in practice their expertise and functions continue to remain largely focused on domestic violence. This is further exacerbated by the lack of training programmes on other forms of violence, such as stalking, violence related to "honour", forced marriage, FGM and forced sterilisation and abortion, as well as the digital dimension of violence against women.

111. With regard to measures for identifying and providing protection to women victims of gender-based violence in residential care institutions for persons with disabilities and the elderly, GREVIO notes that there do not appear to be dedicated protocols for detecting and supporting victims of violence in such settings. Similarly, women residing in these facilities can, in theory, request access to women's support centres if they are aware of such services; however, there are no formal institutional referral pathways in place. In this respect, a widely reported case, involving

100. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.
101. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.
102. See the Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, paragraph 135.
103. According to information provided by the Estonian authorities, the use of shelter services has decreased from 10% to approximately 6% of all service users in the past few years.
104. UNHCR Northern Europe (2025), "Study on the assessment of the existing referral pathways for forcibly displaced and stateless people who have experienced gender-based violence (GBV), including sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) in Estonia", p. 29.

sexual violence against elderly women in a care facility, exposed gaps in the detection of and protection against violence in closed institutions and sparked public debate about the need for stronger measures to address these shortcomings.[105]

112. **While acknowledging the efforts of the Estonian authorities to improve specialist services for victims of violence against women, including through legislative changes, GREVIO strongly encourages the Estonian authorities to:**

- **a. improve access to specialist support and shelter services for all victims of violence against women, including women with disabilities, women with addictions issues and migrant, asylum-seeking and refugee women;**
- **b. ensure that specialist support services, including specialist legal counselling, are available to victims of all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention, including violence in its digital dimension.**

113. **GREVIO further encourages the Estonian authorities to ensure that residents of closed institutions have access to specialist support services and to an effective protection mechanism in all cases of violence against women, including by adopting protocols and referral pathways.**

4. Support for victims of sexual violence (Article 25)

114. Under Article 25 of the Istanbul Convention, parties are required to provide a set of holistic services to victims of sexual violence, including immediate medical care and trauma support, combined with forensic examinations, as well as short- and long-term psychological counselling and therapy to ensure the victim's recovery. Such services should be provided by trained and specialised staff in an appropriate manner to respond to the victims' needs, preferably within rape crisis or sexual violence referral centres established in sufficient number throughout the country to ensure their easy access. The recommendation is to set up one of the above-mentioned centres per every 200 000 inhabitants.[106]

115. In its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO had commended Estonia's establishment of sexual assault centres, which the authorities directly attributed to the signature of the Istanbul Convention. These centres provide standardised and holistic services to victims of sexual violence across four regions, including medical care, psychological support, forensic evidence collection and preservation for six months, emergency contraception, STI and HIV prevention and follow-up care.

116. Since the baseline evaluation report, GREVIO commends the opening of the fifth sexual assault crisis centre on Saaremaa, the country's largest island. While Estonia's small geographical size generally allows for relatively short travel times to services, this development represents a further positive step towards enhancing accessibility to these essential services for more victims of sexual violence, which GREVIO welcomes and encourages to be sustained in the future. Another positive development is the extension of the period during which sexual assault centres can preserve collected evidence, from six months to 15 years. In its baseline evaluation, GREVIO had noted that, in practice, sexual assault centres had been making every effort to retain evidence beyond six months, although this was often limited by the availability of storage space. With this new provision, more victims will have sufficient time to process their trauma and decide whether to pursue criminal proceedings without undue pressure, thereby strengthening their trust in the system. The update in 2025 of the sexual violence victim examination protocol represents a further welcome development. More specifically, the protocol was updated to incorporate more trauma-focused questions, with a view to identifying and addressing victims' psychological reactions, including fear, dissociation and loss of consciousness, as well as the impacts of trauma, such as anxiety, emotional detachment, flashbacks and sleep disturbances. GREVIO welcomes these changes as an important

105. See a news article on the case at: https://news.err.ee/1609848006/court-sentences-former-pihlakodu-caregiver-to-11-ye.
106. Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, paragraph 142.

tool for documenting the trauma responses of victims of sexual violence, which are of critical importance in light of the new consent-based rape legislation.

117. GREVIO notes that the provision of psychological support is one area where services for victims of sexual violence could be further enhanced. After immediate and short-term psychological counselling at the sexual assault centre, victims requiring longer-term care are referred to psychologists and counsellors contracted by victim support services. Information obtained by GREVIO indicates that these professionals often lack the specialised training needed to adequately support victims of sexual violence. On a positive note, GREVIO notes with interest that, under the Victim Support Act, close family members of sexual violence victims who have been psychologically affected by the offence can also access psychological counselling.

118. **GREVIO encourages the Estonian authorities to ensure that victims of sexual violence have access to long-term psychological support by qualified professionals.**

C. Substantive law

119. Chapter V of the Istanbul Convention covers a range of provisions related to substantive law, in the area of both civil and criminal law, which aim to create the necessary legislative framework to prevent the further victimisation of women and girls and to ensure robust intervention and prosecution by law-enforcement agencies. This section focuses on progress made with respect to selected provisions of the convention in the area of substantive law, notably Article 31 on custody, visitation rights and safety, and Article 48 on the prohibition of mandatory alternative dispute resolution processes or sentencing in cases of violence against women.

1. Custody, visitation rights and safety (Article 31)

120. Custody and visitation decisions in relation to families with a history of abuse require a careful balancing of the different interests at stake. Article 31 of the Istanbul Convention seeks to ensure that incidents of violence covered by the convention, in particular domestic violence, are taken into account in decisions on custody and visitation rights, to ensure that the exercise of these rights does not harm the rights and safety of the victim or children. This provision contributes directly to their trust in the authorities because it offers essential protection from post-separation abuse.[107]

121. GREVIO's baseline evaluation report on Estonia had expressed concern about the courts' tendency to prioritise the perpetrator's contact rights over the safety of women victims of gender-based violence and their children. The report had further found that the application of parental alienation in custody and visitation cases created risks for the safety of victims and children, and in this regard GREVIO had highlighted the need for targeted training of judges and child-welfare professionals on this issue.

122. GREVIO notes that in the period following the adoption of the baseline evaluation report, training initiatives have been organised for judges that address parental alienation as a legitimate concern affecting the child's relationship with one parent. GREVIO notes with concern that it is not clear whether such training efforts address the misuse of applying parental alienation in custody or visitation proceedings involving domestic violence.[108] While women's rights organisations have highlighted increased awareness, particularly among younger professionals, of the unsuitability of

107. It is noteworthy that in the case of *Bîzdîga v. the Republic of Moldova* (Application No. 15646/18, 17 October 2023), the European Court of Human Rights held that in proceedings concerning the custody and visitation rights regarding children in a domestic violence context, the primary focus must be on the best interests of the child, and an assessment of any risks of violence or other forms of ill-treatment therefore has to form an integral part of such proceedings. For this reason, it found that an alleged history of domestic violence was a relevant and even mandatory factor to be weighed in the assessment of domestic authorities when deciding on contact rights (§ 62). In the recent case of *Luca v. the Republic of Moldova* (Application No. 55351/17, 17 October 2023), the Court found a violation of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights on account of the failure of the Moldovan authorities to take into account incidents of domestic violence in the determination of child contact rights.
108. See Article 15, Training of professionals.

such concepts in contexts of domestic violence, some justice professionals still regard parental alienation as relevant in such contexts.[109] In this respect, as GREVIO has had occasion to note in several of its evaluation reports, the positioning of mothers as alienating, hostile or unco-operative contributes to a masking of the extent of the violence experienced by both the abused mother and the children exposed to such abuse, with a detrimental impact on their ability to obtain safe custody and visitation decisions.[110]

123. In Estonia, both the Victim Support Act and the Child Protection Act recognise children who are exposed to domestic violence as victims in their own right. This notwithstanding, the Family Law Act does not explicitly list domestic violence as a factor to be considered in custody and visitation proceedings, even though legal amendments were proposed to that effect in 2020 but were ultimately not enacted. This legal gap is reflected in court practice, as studies demonstrate that domestic violence is not systematically taken into account by courts in custody and visitation decisions.[111] Moreover, under Estonian law, custody and visitation rights may be suspended where there is a risk of harm to the child, including psychological harm.[112] In practice, however, there are relatively few examples of such suspensions being ordered on these grounds and shared custody continues to be imposed by courts as the prevailing norm.[113] While courts and social welfare authorities do not formally endorse forcing children to maintain contact with abusive fathers against their wishes, women's rights organisations have brought to GREVIO's attention that coercive penalty payments are nevertheless sometimes imposed on women for failure to comply with custody and visitation schedules.

124. In light of the many findings made during its baseline evaluation round, GREVIO considers that it is essential, in order to ensure a more effective implementation of Article 31 of the Istanbul Convention, to explicitly include in legislation, as criteria to be taken into account when determining custody and visitation rights, incidents of violence against women, including those witnessed by children.[114] This should be supported by proactive screening and risk-assessment mechanisms by courts to identify the presence of domestic violence in parental separation cases. GREVIO also reiterates that joint parenting in these circumstances allows perpetrators to maintain their control and dominance over the mother and children. For this reason, judges should specifically lay out the reasons in their decisions to maintain custody and visitation rights in the presence of such incidents. An additional area of concern to GREVIO is the insufficient consultation and co-ordination between courts and other relevant bodies and/or professionals, including, but not limited to, criminal courts, law-enforcement agencies, health-sector professionals, including paediatricians, and specialist women's support services when taking decisions on custody and visitation and with a view to duly investigating any report of violence, Finally, GREVIO stresses the importance of having mechanisms in place for safe supervised visits as well as adequate support from social services.

125. In this regard, supervised visitations constitute a commonly used measure in parental separation cases involving domestic violence and they are facilitated by child-protection officers or other professionals employed in the child-protection departments of local governments. However, GREVIO notes that, as a result of the limited resources of local authorities, alternative arrangements sometimes need to be made, such as supervision by another neutral person, for example a trusted family friend. Moreover, the availability of supervised visitation services provided by local authorities is often restricted, particularly during weekends, when a significant share of visitations take place. In such cases, child-protection officers may be required to use their own time outside of working hours to ensure that visits can proceed.

109. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.
110. See for example GREVIO's first thematic evaluation reports on Denmark, paragraph 116, and on Serbia, paragraph 140.
111. University of Tartu (2024), "Case analysis: the authorities' handling of fatal domestic violence cases", p. 15, available in Estonian at: https://siseministeerium.ee/uudised/asja-valminud-uuring-toob-valja-kitsaskohad-ametiasutuste-tegevustes-surmaga-loppenud.
112. Under Article 134 of the Estonian Family Law Act, courts may restrict or suspend parental custody or visitation rights if a child's safety or well-being is at risk, including from physical, psychological or emotional harm. Article 140 further provides that custody may be suspended or restored depending on whether the grounds for restriction continue to exist.
113. Written submission by the Estonian Women's Shelters Union and the Estonian Women's Associations Roundtable, p. 3, supported by information obtained during the evaluation visit.
114. Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, paragraph 144.

126. **In light of the findings issued in its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Estonian authorities to take the following priority action in the area of custody and visitation rights with a view to ensuring the safety of victims and their children:**

- **a. ensure that the negative impact that violence against women has on children is reflected in legislation and that incidents of violence against women are a mandatory legal criterion to be taken into account when deciding on custody and visitation rights;**
- **b. introduce a mechanism for screening all custody and visitation cases to determine whether domestic violence has occurred in the relationship;**
- **c. effectively investigate any reports of domestic violence by improving co-operation with criminal courts and other relevant bodies, including law enforcement, health and education authorities and women's support services;**
- **d. ensure that only professionals, especially child psychologists and psychiatrists, who are trained in issues of violence against women and the requirements of the Istanbul Convention, are appointed by courts to advise on custody and visitation in cases involving domestic violence;**
- **e. adopt safeguards, such as separate appointments for the parties and separate waiting areas in courts, to account for power imbalances between victims and perpetrators and prevent re-victimisation;**
- **f. ensure that the legal provisions allowing for the reduction, suspension or application of safeguards to a perpetrator's custody and visitation rights when violence is confirmed are actually used in practice;**
- **g. raise awareness about the misuse of concepts such as parental alienation or similar notions that label women as "unco-operative" or "manipulative" when they have legitimate concerns for their own or their child's safety when handing over their children to an abusive former partner.**

2. Prohibition of mandatory alternative dispute resolution processes or sentencing (Article 48)

127. Article 48, paragraph 1, of the Istanbul Convention requires parties to prohibit the mandatory participation in any alternative dispute resolution processes, including mediation and conciliation, in relation to cases of all forms of violence against women covered by the convention. This provision stems from the principle that violence against women is a manifestation of unequal power relations and that victims of such violence can never enter the alternative dispute resolution processes on an equal footing with the perpetrator. To avoid the re-privatisation of such violence and to enable the victim to seek justice, it is the responsibility of the state to provide access to adversarial court proceedings on the basis of robust criminal and civil law provisions.

128. In its baseline evaluation, GREVIO had noted the safeguards incorporated into the mediation procedure in criminal proceedings, such as the requirement of the injured party's consent and its application being limited to minor offences committed by first-time offenders. At the same time, it had highlighted the risks associated with such alternative dispute resolution mechanisms in cases of domestic violence, including intimidation and unequal power dynamics and had, therefore, welcomed plans by the Social Insurance Board to develop guidelines for victim support specialists on conducting mediation procedures in cases of domestic violence and violence against women and to provide training in this regard. In terms of civil proceedings concerning custody and visitation, GREVIO had noted with concern that despite being voluntary, mediation continued to be encouraged even in cases involving domestic violence, and that it was unclear whether victims had systematically received the specialised support needed to negotiate safely and on equal terms in such proceedings.

129. As regards the use of mediation in criminal proceedings related to cases of domestic violence, GREVIO notes that the situation has remained unchanged since the baseline evaluation report. Mediation is implemented as a restorative justice mechanism for second-degree criminal offences, aiming to repair the harm caused to the victim and based on the consent of both the victim

and the perpetrator. Encouragingly, women's rights organisations were not aware of any cases in which victims of violence against women were pressured into criminal mediation.[115] Nevertheless, GREVIO regrets that the planned guidelines for victim support specialists on conducting mediation/restorative justice procedures in cases of domestic violence and violence against women have yet to be developed. GREVIO underscores the importance of issuing such guidelines, accompanied by training of relevant professionals, to ensure that safeguards are effectively incorporated into the mediation procedure. As regards more broadly restorative justice processes, while GREVIO recognises that these may bring closure to some victims of violence against women, such processes must be proposed and/or approved with caution and safeguards should be carefully applied. These include the careful verification that victims give their free and informed consent, the provision of full information on the effects of restorative justice on criminal proceedings, conducting a risk assessment on the suitability of such processes and the presence of a lawyer and support services.

130. With regard to civil proceedings, under the Code of Civil Procedure, undergoing mediation is not a prerequisite for initiating parental separation proceedings but courts may, at their discretion, refer the parties to such a process, which is handled by the Social Insurance Board. In this context, the Act on State-Funded Family Mediation Services empowers the Social Insurance Board to assess the presence of domestic violence and to refuse mediation in cases where the nature of the dispute makes such services unsuitable, including instances involving domestic violence. One or both parties may also refuse to take part in this procedure. Accordingly, in practice, courts carry out an initial assessment of whether a case should be referred to family mediation, including by verifying the presence of domestic violence. GREVIO notes with concern, however, that this assessment does not appear to be proactive and seems to depend largely on the disclosure of the parties. If the file is referred to the Social Insurance Board, a proactive screening should be carried out, including separate interviews with the parties, obtaining information from the victim support system regarding any prior contact and consulting the opinion of women's support centres. Notwithstanding these procedures and safeguards, women's rights organisations have drawn GREVIO's attention to the experiences of victims of domestic violence who reported feeling pressured to participate in family mediation in civil cases, particularly by child-protection authorities. Situations have also been reported in which courts referred cases to family mediation despite the presence of domestic violence that had not been disclosed, leading some women to feel re-victimised.[116]

131. **GREVIO encourages the Estonian authorities to ensure that safeguards are effectively incorporated and applied in cases of mediation and or restorative justice processes in criminal proceedings related to domestic violence, including by issuing relevant guidelines. Such safeguards should include:**

- **a. carrying out a risk assessment of the suitability of such an approach in cases pertaining to violence against women;**
- **b. duly taking into account the power imbalances that are typical in cases of domestic violence;**
- **c. providing full information on the nature, aims, consequences and non-mandatory nature of restorative justice;**
- **d. verifying and assessing that the victim has given her free and informed consent;**
- **e. the provision of legal representation and dedicated support;**
- **f. training on violence against women for the relevant mediators.**

132. **With reference to the findings issued in its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO strongly encourages the Estonian authorities to ensure that family mediation in parental separation proceedings is initiated and conducted with prior, proactive screening for any history of domestic violence, as well as a thorough understanding of power imbalances in such cases and the frequent use of family law proceedings as a means of post-separation abuse.**

115. Written submission by the Estonian Women's Shelters Union and the Estonian Women's Associations Roundtable, p. 4, supported by information obtained during the evaluation visit.
116. Ibid.

D. Investigation, prosecution, procedural law and protective measures

133. Full accountability for all acts of violence against women requires an adequate response from law-enforcement agencies and the criminal justice sector. Chapter VI of the Istanbul Convention establishes a set of measures to ensure criminal investigations, prosecutions and convictions in a manner that validates women's and girls' experiences of violence, that avoids their secondary victimisation and that offers protection throughout the different stages of proceedings. The provisions covered in this section are fundamental to the delivery of protection and justice for all women and girls at risk of or who have experienced gender-based violence.

1. General obligations (Article 49) and Immediate response, prevention and protection (Article 50)

134. A key principle of an adequate response to violence against women is that of swift and effective investigations and judicial proceedings that are based on a gendered understanding of these types of offences and that take into consideration the rights of the victim during all stages. Law enforcement or judicial professionals often do not prioritise incidents of violence against women and domestic violence, thereby contributing to the impunity of perpetrators and reinforcing the misconception that this type of violence is "acceptable" in society.[117] A consequence of assigning low priority to incidents of violence against women and domestic violence are delays in initiating investigations and judicial processes, which in turn may lead to the loss of vital evidence and to an increased risk for the victim of repeated violence. For these reasons, Article 49 of the convention requires parties to ensure that investigations and judicial proceedings are conducted without undue delay, while at the same time respecting the rights of victims during each stage of these processes. Article 50 further reinforces these obligations by requiring that law-enforcement agencies react promptly and appropriately in cases of violence against women, including by offering victims immediate protection, and by engaging in the prevention of violence. GREVIO reports focus on the application of Article 50 at key stages of the criminal justice process, notably reporting, investigation, prosecution and conviction, all of which are key contributors to victims' sense of support, protection and justice.

a. Reporting to, immediate response and investigations by law-enforcement agencies

135. GREVIO's baseline evaluation report had acknowledged several positive aspects of the Estonian police response to violence against women, notably the presence of specialist units for domestic violence in certain regions and the gender balance within the police force, allowing victims to be interviewed by a female officer upon request. At the same time, the report had identified the absence of specialisation on domestic violence in smaller police stations and disparities in the police response across the country due to differences in the level of training, including prejudices and discriminatory attitudes among some police officers.

136. GREVIO welcomes the fact that, since the baseline evaluation report, victims or witnesses have been able to report violence against women in person, by phone, via the Police and Border Guard Board website or by e-mail, and the proportion of female police officers is sufficient to allow each victim to be interviewed by an officer of the same sex if they so wish. Another positive practice is the placement of a victim support worker in every police station, which appears to be effective in empowering victims to pursue their cases.[118] Moreover, GREVIO notes with satisfaction that victims who do not understand Estonian or are hard of hearing are entitled to interpretation and translation services throughout criminal proceedings, including during police interviews, as well as access to essential documents such as police reports, decisions on initiating or terminating proceedings and indictments or judgments.[119]

117. Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, paragraph 255.
118. See the state report p. 38.
119. Estonian Code of Criminal Procedure, Article 10(2) and Article 161.

137. As regards the specialisation of police units in relation to violence against women, this has remained largely unchanged since the baseline evaluation report: while all four police prefectures in Estonia have specialist units for sexual violence, specialist units for domestic violence operate only in the Northern prefecture. Moreover, as noted in the baseline evaluation report, there continue to be serious shortcomings with regard to the police's immediate response to violence against women. More specifically, a study conducted in 2023 examining the knowledge and attitudes of emergency dispatchers and police officers in relation to domestic violence cases reveals several concerning findings. According to the study, some professionals, particularly non-specialised police officers, tended to regard domestic violence as a form of mutual conflict, or attributed the root causes of violence not to gendered power dynamics but to biological differences or alcohol consumption. The study further identified gaps in the awareness of the dynamics of violence and trauma-related victim responses and highlights difficulties among both emergency dispatchers and police officers in terms of recognising psychological violence and other non-physical forms of domestic violence.[120] Different practices were also observed among these professionals regarding when violence by former partners qualifies as domestic violence, leading to inconsistent responses in such cases.[121] These shortcomings were compounded by emotional fatigue among professionals and uneven access to specialist training, negatively impacting the quality of responses to domestic violence cases and consequently eroding victims' trust in the system. This is reflected in the results of the nationwide relationship survey: despite a high prevalence of domestic violence (41%) in Estonia, only 22.8% of female victims reported the violence to the authorities, most often because the incident was perceived as "not serious enough" or regarded as a "family matter".[122] Similarly, while GREVIO welcomes the findings of a 2014 study on pretrial investigation of rape, which indicated significant improvements in the attitudes and approaches of professionals over time, practices still vary across Estonia largely due to regional differences in specialisation on sexual violence cases.[123] This results in an inconsistent application of a victim-centred approach and in misconceptions about victims' behaviour, such as the belief that the victim put herself at risk through her own actions or did not behave like a "proper victim" after the violent incident.[124]

138. **With reference to the findings issued in its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Estonian authorities to ensure gender-sensitive, trauma-informed responses to all forms of violence against women, including their digital dimensions, in a manner that avoids re-victimisation, by:**

- **a. expanding the specialist units for the investigation of domestic and sexual violence to all regions;**
- **b. raising the awareness of all law-enforcement professionals, including emergency dispatchers, patrol officers and police investigators, of the need to address stereotypical views on the dynamics of violence against women, including through targeted training initiatives.**

120. Ministry of the Interior (2023), "Knowledge and attitudes related to intimate partner violence among emergency responders and police officers), pp. 6-8, available in Estonian at: https://siseministeerium.ee/uudised/uuring-lsv-valjakutsetele-reageerijad-vajavad-susteemsemaid-teadmisi.
121. Ibid., p. 38.
122. See the dedicated page on Statistics Estonia's website: https://andmed.stat.ee/en/stat/sotsiaalelu__eigus-ja-turvalisus/JSS05.
123. Praxis (2024), "Pretrial investigation of sexual violence", p. 40, available in Estonian at: https://sisu.ut.ee/suk/praxise-uuring-seksuaalvagivalla-kohtueelsest-uurimisest.
124. Ibid., p. 59.

b. Effective investigation and prosecution

139. GREVIO's baseline evaluation report had identified the lack of guidelines or protocols for police on certain forms of violence against women as an important shortcoming as well as the gaps in the systematic collection of evidence, which impeded the effective investigation of such cases. Moreover, GREVIO noted with concern that cases of violence against women were rarely brought before the courts and were instead often directed to criminal mediation under prosecutorial discretion, thereby undermining the accountability of perpetrators.

140. GREVIO notes with satisfaction that the police response to domestic violence is now informed by an internal guideline from the Police and Border Guard Board, which is disseminated to all officers, including non-specialist ones. Although the content of the guideline is not publicly available, it aims to enhance the protection of victims by standardising the steps to be taken when responding at the scene, conducting risk assessment and management, collecting and storing evidence, co-operating with other agencies and handling procedural aspects of criminal proceedings. Procedurally, GREVIO welcomes the fact that domestic and sexual violence cases fall within the highest priority category among criminal cases, in accordance with the instruction from the Prosecutor General issued in 2025.[125] At the law-enforcement stage, such cases are to be processed within 30 days, while the prosecution phase is expected to be completed within four months. Unfortunately, GREVIO notes with regret that there appear to be no protocols providing guidance for investigations into forms of violence against women other than domestic violence, including sexual violence.

141. Regarding evidence collection in domestic violence cases, GREVIO welcomes the fact that police representatives demonstrate a high level of awareness regarding the need to gather all relevant evidence beyond victim testimonies. In this respect, GREVIO also notes that police investigators consider it important for patrol officers to record as much information as possible during the first contact with victims, even under significant time and resource constraints, as victims are most co-operative at this stage and may later withdraw or limit their statements.[126] The systematic use of bodycams also facilitates the documenting of initial testimonies, the crime scene and injuries, which, if the persons are warned about being recorded, can be used as evidence in criminal proceedings, and if not warned, as supporting evidence. As regards the collection of evidence for rape cases, an analysis of pretrial investigations reveals that under the current force-based legislation investigators prioritise certain types of evidence such as injuries, DNA, camera footage, social media messages or witness statements. However, GREVIO highlights that most rape cases lack these forms of evidence, making it essential to have a solid understanding of trauma reactions that are crucial for case building.

142. In terms of the prosecution services, GREVIO notes that some degree of specialisation is also ensured. Specialist units for domestic and sexual violence have been established in the Northern prefecture, whereas in other regions, while there are no formally structured units, *de facto* specialisation is achieved by assigning prosecutors with expertise in certain forms of violence against women to the relevant cases. In this respect, while GREVIO understands that the establishment and maintenance of fully specialist units may be challenging, recent studies point to the need for a more specialist prosecutorial approach across Estonia.[127] Moreover, prosecutors' work is supported by the Common Practice Agreement of Prosecutors Specialising in Intimate Partner Violence issued in 2020, a document that aims to establish common procedural principles for the handling of domestic violence cases. The agreement highlights the importance of early risk identification, the appropriate use of protective measures, co-operation with MARACs and victim support services, and improved information sharing and interagency co-ordination in general. While GREVIO recognises the added value of this agreement for harmonising prosecutorial practices, it is unclear whether it is

125. Prosecutor General's Guide to Procedural Priorities, available in Estonian at: www.prokuratuur.ee/prokuratuurist/prokuratuur/prioriteedid.
126. Ministry of the Interior (2023), "Knowledge and attitudes related to intimate partner violence among emergency responders and police officers", p. 71, available in Estonian at: https://siseministeerium.ee/uudised/uuring-lsv-valjakutsetele-reageerijad-vajavad-susteemsemaid-teadmisi.
127. Praxis (2024), "Pretrial investigation of sexual violence", p. 42, available in Estonian at: https://sisu.ut.ee/suk/praxise-uuring-seksuaalvagivalla-kohtueelsest-uurimisest.

binding and whether it has been distributed to non-specialist prosecutors. GREVIO further notes with concern that similar guidelines do not appear to be available for other forms of violence against women, which may contribute to the secondary victimisation of the victim during the investigation stage. For example, in rape cases, victim interviews reportedly last three to four hours and are very intense. While more experienced or specialist investigators generally limit questioning to a single session, others may require victims to provide statements multiple times, often because they do not capture all relevant details because of their insufficient training or experience.[128] GREVIO stresses that specialisation in handling sexual violence is all the more important at present, as the newly adopted "only yes means yes" consent-based model require a comprehensive trauma-informed approach by investigative authorities, ensuring that victims can trust the system and report the violence they suffered without the risk of re-traumatisation or secondary victimisation.

143. While the data provided by the Estonian authorities on different forms of violence against women show an increase during the period under review in the number of cases of rape and stalking referred to court by the prosecution service, which GREVIO welcomes, it nevertheless also shows a consistent gap between the number of cases reported to the authorities and the number of cases referred to court by the Prosecutor's Office, indicating attrition at the prosecution stage. While no data were provided by the authorities on the number of instances in which the prosecutor referred the victim and perpetrator to pretrial mediation procedures, GREVIO notes with concern that diversion from the criminal justice system may continue to be a contributing factor to attrition rates.[129] No cases of forced marriage, FGM, forced abortion or forced sterilisation have been reported or prosecuted in recent years. GREVIO notes with regret that the data provided by the authorities do not allow for an analysis of reporting or prosecution trends regarding psychological violence, as this form of violence is not recorded as a separate offence category.

144. **GREVIO strongly encourages the Estonian authorities to:**

- **a. develop binding guidelines for the police covering all forms of violence against women beyond domestic violence, supported by targeted training efforts;**
- **b. strengthen investigative and prosecutorial case building in accordance with rigorous professional standards for all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention, including sexual violence and rape;**
- **c. implement measures, including the adoption of prosecutorial guidelines and protocols, to ensure a victim-centred, gender-sensitive and trauma-informed approach to handling cases of violence against women and preventing secondary victimisation. In this respect, creating specialist prosecutorial units on domestic and sexual violence may be considered;**
- **d. identify and address factors contributing to case attrition in all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention;**
- **e. put in place adequate safeguards to ensure that criminal mediation is proposed with the utmost caution in cases of violence against women at the prosecution level, so as to prevent undue attrition.**

c. Conviction rates

145. GREVIO's baseline evaluation report on Estonia had identified serious concerns regarding the handling of domestic and sexual violence cases by the courts, namely the frequent reliance on probation, mediation and suspended sentences that risked undermining the accountability of

128. Ibid., p. 12.
129. For domestic physical violence, 2 678 cases were reported in 2022, 2 592 in 2023 and 2 531 in 2024, showing a small but gradual decrease in reports. Prosecution rates, on the other hand, remained similar over the three years, with 1 130 cases referred to court in 2022, 1 046 in 2023 and 1 039 in 2024. For rape, GREVIO observes that reporting fluctuated over the three-year period, increasing from 161 cases in 2022 to 203 cases in 2023, before decreasing to 149 cases in 2024. In contrast, the number of cases referred to court incrementally increased each year, which GREVIO welcomes, rising from 60 cases in 2022 to 64 cases in 2023 and 68 cases in 2024. A similar pattern can be observed for harassing pursuit (stalking). Reported cases rose from 161 in 2022 to 203 in 2023, before falling to 149 in 2024. Prosecution numbers increased steadily across all three years, from 60 cases in 2022 to 64 cases in 2023 and 68 cases in 2024.

perpetrators. Evidentiary practices that placed excessive weight on victims' testimony and lack of gender sensitivity among some judges had been found to further weaken the effectiveness of the criminal justice response.

146. According to information provided by the authorities, an analysis based on data from 2023 revealed that 72% of domestic cases were resolved through plea agreements, 9% through the abridged procedure, 15% via the general procedure and 4% through the fast-track procedure.[130] While there is no similar analysis for other forms of violence against women, information provided by the authorities reveal that similar figures may apply for sexual violence cases. GREVIO notes that the procedures that constitute the majority of violence against women and domestic violence cases in Estonia, namely abridged and fast-track procedures and plea agreements, generally do not require an oral hearing. While these procedures may help avoid re-traumatisation of the victim, by preventing the repeating of their testimony in court, and lead to a faster judicial process, they may also come at the cost of weaker judicial review. As regards in particular plea agreements in domestic violence cases, their frequent use has been examined by academic research, which indicates that more than half of the offenders are repeat offenders and that repeated violence occurs often in cases resolved through plea agreements; that such procedures are used even in cases of serious abuse, including, in one instance, death; and that there is a high rate of child witnesses in these cases.[131] As further outlined below, even when the victim's consent is obtained, plea-agreement practices may hinder the effective participation of victims in the proceedings and prevent the full establishment of the facts by judicial authorities.

147. Regarding attrition rates before the courts, GREVIO notes with concern that these continue to be high. With reference to domestic violence cases referred to courts by prosecutors, indicatively in the period under review, each year roughly two thirds or more of the cases were dismissed by the courts. The situation is relatively better for rape cases in which around one third of the cases were dismissed. Similarly, as regards cases of stalking, there was an attrition rate of about one third.[132] The authorities did not provide reasons for the high rate of dismissals, but as observed in the baseline evaluation report, evidentiary limitations appear to play a significant role in this regard.

148. With regard to sanctions in cases of domestic violence, rape and stalking, imprisonment remains the most frequently applied sanction, although a substantial number of these sentences are eventually suspended. Fines are imposed only rarely in domestic violence and stalking cases. Nevertheless, GREVIO notes the continued reliance on suspended fines in a significant proportion of such convictions as well, which may limit the dissuasive effect of criminal sanctions.[133] GREVIO notes with grave concern, in particular, the high rate of suspended sentences in cases of domestic violence. The use of plea agreements, which the Estonian authorities acknowledge as being the most commonly used procedures in such cases, are a particular factor contributing to the imposition

130. Different legal procedures exist within the criminal law system for processing cases of violence against women. These include the abridged procedure, which is used in less complex cases and is often conducted in writing, allowing for faster processing times. General procedures are applied in cases requiring more detailed fact-finding and entail a full adversarial process, oral hearings and longer statutory timelines. The fast-track procedure requires that a motion be filed within 48 hours after the suspect has been interviewed or arrested. Finally, plea agreements that are concluded with the victim's consent involve a negotiated resolution between the prosecutor and the perpetrator regarding the admission of guilt and sanctions to be involved, subject to the review of the courts.

131. Kaugia S. and Narits R. (2025), "On practice of applying plea agreement procedure in domestic violence cases in light of analysis of decisions of Estonian courts of first instance", available at: www.researchgate.net/publication/399045617_On_Practice_of_Applying_Plea_Agreement_Procedure_in_Domestic_Violence_Cases_in_Light_of_Analysis_of_Decisions_of_Estonian_Courts_of_First_Instance.

132. The total number of domestic violence cases referred to courts by public prosecutors was 1 130 in 2022, 1 046 in 2023 and 1 039 in 2024. Of these, 465 cases in 2022, 425 in 2023 and 340 in 2024 resulted in convictions. The situation is relatively better for rape cases: out of 60 cases in 2022, 64 in 2023 and 68 in 2024, 44, 42 and 48 respectively led to convictions. Similarly, during the same period, the Prosecutor's Office referred 60, 64 and 68 stalking cases to court, with 44, 42 and 48 resulting in convictions.

133. In domestic violence cases, prison sentences were ordered in 186 cases in 2022, 188 in 2023 and 151 in 2024; suspended prison sentences or probation were applied in 183, 170 and 125 cases, respectively. Fines were imposed in 12 cases in 2022 and 2023 and in four cases in 2024, of which five, five and three respectively were suspended. In rape cases, imprisonment was imposed in 76 cases in 2022, 87 in 2023 and 46 in 2024; 20, 16 and three of these respectively resulted in suspended sentences or probation. No fines were imposed for rape. In stalking cases, imprisonment was ordered in 32 cases in 2022, 26 in 2023 and 35 in 2024; suspended sentences were applied in five, seven and three of these cases respectively, while fines were imposed in two cases in 2022 and six in 2024.

of suspended sentences. For instance, out of 139 domestic violence cases resolved through plea agreements from 2022 to 2024, 105 resulted in suspended sentences. Imprisonment was imposed in 19 cases, mixed sentences combining probation and imprisonment in four cases, social work in seven cases and financial penalties in four cases. While GREVIO acknowledges that the victim's consent is required for a case to proceed through this procedure, it notes that such proceedings effectively shift the administration of justice from the courts to the prosecution. Additionally, victims are unable to provide testimony during these proceedings, which may be linked to the mild sanctions imposed on perpetrators. In this regard, a particularly concerning example is the imposition of a suspended sentence of one year and six months' imprisonment, suspended for a period of two years, in a case involving the gender-related killing of a woman.[134]

149. Regarding the conduct of proceedings, according to the findings of a study examining the processing of rape cases within the justice system, courts tend to give preference to certain types of evidence, such as emergency call recordings, camera recordings or witness statements, or set the evidentiary threshold very high.[135] GREVIO notes with particular concern that the expertise of professionals working in sexual assault centres, who have extensive knowledge of victims' trauma reactions in rape cases, is often not taken into account as evidence by the courts.[136] GREVIO stresses that the trauma-informed expertise of sexual assault centres is even more important now with the entry into force of the consent-based rape legislation and must therefore be fully utilised.

150. **GREVIO urges the Estonian authorities to:**

- **a. put in place safeguards to ensure that expedited and simplified judicial proceedings and plea-bargaining procedures are applied with the utmost caution, so as not to compromise the proper administration of justice in the interest of efficiency and speed, with particular attention on cases involving repeated violence, repeat perpetrators or violence causing severe harm. These safeguards should ensure the thorough collection and examination of evidence and allow for the victim's voice to be heard, while also including measures to prevent re-traumatisation and secondary victimisation of victims during adversarial proceedings;**
- **b. examine and address factors that contribute to the high number of dismissals in criminal justice proceedings in relation to all cases of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention;**
- **c. raise awareness within the justice sector about the importance of utilising the trauma-informed expertise and knowledge of sexual assault centres as evidence in rape cases to establish the presence or absence of consent;**
- **d. ensure that sentences and measures imposed for the offences covered by the Istanbul Convention are effective, proportionate and dissuasive.**

2. Risk assessment and risk management (Article 51)

151. Many perpetrators of domestic violence, rape, stalking, sexual harassment, forced marriage and other forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention threaten their victims with serious violence, including death, and have subjected their victims to serious violence in the past, including non-fatal strangulation. The growing digital dimension to such violence further exacerbates women's and girls' sense of fear. Article 51 thus places concern for their safety at the heart of any intervention in such cases by requiring the establishment of a multi-agency network of professionals to protect high-risk victims without aggravating the harm experienced. It sets out the obligation to ensure that all relevant authorities, not just law-enforcement authorities, effectively assess and devise a plan to

134. Kaugia S. and Narits R. (2025), "On practice of applying plea agreement procedure in domestic violence cases in light of analysis of decisions of Estonian courts of first instance", available at: www.researchgate.net/publication/399045617_On_Practice_of_Applying_Plea_Agreement_Procedure_in_Domestic_Violence_Cases_in_Light_of_Analysis_of_Decisions_of_Estonian_Courts_of_First_Instance.
135. Praxis (2024), "Pretrial investigation of sexual violence", p. 22, available in Estonian at: https://sisu.ut.ee/suk/praxise-uuring-seksuaalvagivalla-kohtueelsest-uurimisest.
136. Ibid., p. 89. Also supported by information obtained during the evaluation visit.

manage the safety risks a victim faces, on a case-by-case basis, according to standardised procedures and in co-operation with each other.

152. GREVIO's baseline evaluation report had praised the systematic application of the MARAC risk-assessment and management model throughout Estonia. The MARAC model, based on the internationally recognised DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment) questionnaire, remains the principal risk-assessment and management mechanism in Estonia in domestic violence cases and, as welcomed by the Committee of the Parties to the Istanbul Convention in its recommendations adopted in respect of Estonia, is applied systematically.[137] While, in theory, the risk assessment may be carried out by representatives of victim support services, women's support centres and the police, in practice, in the majority of cases, it is implemented by victim support services and women's support centres. Others involved in the MARAC network generally refer victims to one of these institutions for the purposes of the risk assessment.[138] Certain cases may also be brought before a MARAC even where the initial DASH score falls below the required threshold, if the assessment of the relevant professional indicates that the victim may benefit from a MARAC response. In addition to the DASH questionnaire linked to the MARAC system, police officers also complete a risk assessment and mitigation sheet, which is mandatory when responding to every domestic violence case. While the exact content of this form is unavailable, the questions are reported to largely overlap with those of DASH.

153. An evaluation of the MARAC system in 2023 provided some evidence of its effectiveness. Accordingly, DASH is widely used and valued by practitioners as a structured tool for identifying high-risk cases requiring referral to MARACs. At the time of the study, when a high-risk domestic violence case did not come before a MARAC, this was found to be mainly due to the victim not giving consent for her case to be discussed within the MARAC framework, despite the efforts of the professionals involved to encourage her participation.[139] The new Victim Support Act permits the referral of victims of intimate partner violence in high-risk situations to a MARAC in order to provide support, even in the absence of the victim's consent. GREVIO notes with satisfaction that, in cases where both initial and follow-up assessments were available, average risk scores declined substantially over the course of the MARAC intervention and many cases fell below the high-risk threshold, indicating the added value of a multi-agency response. At the same time, the evaluation identified certain limitations, including inconsistent administration of DASH and concerns that this questionnaire may not adequately capture risk in certain situations, such as intergenerational violence or cases involving older perpetrators.

154. A study conducted in 2024 on the authorities' handling of fatal domestic violence cases revealed the need to further strengthen the risk-assessment system. According to the study, in 25 domestic violence cases that resulted in the death of the victim between 2019 and 2023, several victims had prior contact with the police, victim support services or local social welfare authorities, and perpetrators had prior convictions.[140] Inconsistencies were identified in MARAC operations across Estonia, particularly regarding the participation of local authorities and the workload of victim support workers, who take the lead in MARAC formations. These inconsistencies have led to insufficient recognition of risk factors in some cases. In addition, less visible forms of violence, such as coercive control and psychological abuse, were found to be frequently underestimated despite their link with the escalation of violence.

155. GREVIO notes that while generally efficient the existing risk-assessment mechanism could benefit from supplementary or adapted tools to address all aspects of domestic violence against women. An analysis examining the suitability of different domestic violence risk assessment tools for the Estonian context, commissioned by the Social Insurance Board in 2026, also supported these

137. Recommendation on the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence by Estonia, IC-CP/Inf(2022)9, adopted on 6 December 2022.
138. Social Insurance Board (2023), "Evaluation of the impact of the MARAC networking model", pp. 54-55, available in Estonian at: www.centar.ee/en/tehtud-tood/evaluating-the-impact-of-marac-network-model.
139. Ibid., p. 60.
140. Some 35% of perpetrators had previous convictions; about 50% had previous contact with the police; 27% had previous contact with victim support services before the incident; 18% had contact with victim support services after the incident; and about 50% of families had previous contact with the local government.

findings, concluding that existing practices rely mainly on professional judgement and recommending the introduction of structured, evidence-based instruments.[141] At the same time, as confirmed by studies assessing the MARAC system, more parties should be included in the risk assessment, especially healthcare providers, including family doctors and gynaecologists, while local governments need to strengthen their role.[142]

156. As regards mechanisms to systematically review and analyse gender-related killings of women, GREVIO regrets that Estonia does not have a permanent mechanism in place and reiterates the importance of establishing one. This is also reflected in the Common Practice Agreement of Prosecutors Specialising in Intimate Partner Violence, which emphasises the need for a systematic review of serious and fatal incidents in order to strengthen prevention and professional practice.

157. **GREVIO encourages the Estonian authorities to improve the risk-assessment system by adopting tools that effectively capture different aspects of violence against women, such as coercive control, psychological violence and intergenerational violence; improving communication and co-operation among different parties within the MARAC network; harmonising risk-assessment practices across different MARACs in the country through systematic training; ensuring the participation of essential professionals, such as those in the healthcare sector, in the risk-assessment mechanisms; and strengthening the role of local authorities.**

158. **GREVIO further encourages the Estonian authorities to ensure the systematic follow-up of the initial risk assessment carried out in all cases of violence against women, including moderate- and low-risk cases, and to put in place effective risk-management mechanisms for such cases. Victim participation in risk management should be encouraged by the professionals conducting the risk assessment, with due regard for her informed consent. Furthermore, risk management must take place in a safe environment that allows participation without secondary victimisation, in order to identify any potential escalation of violence and strengthen preventive interventions. In this context, integrated approaches (such as one-stop-shop models) can play an important role in ensuring victim-centred risk management and co-ordinated responses.**

3. Emergency barring orders (Article 52)

159. Under Article 52 of the Istanbul Convention, in situations of immediate danger, the authorities are granted the power to issue an emergency barring order, ordering the perpetrator to leave the residence of the victim or person at risk for a specific period of time, and to prohibit the perpetrator from entering the residence or contacting the victim or person at risk. Emergency barring orders are tools intended to prevent a crime and to put safety first.[143] They should therefore be time-bound and incident-based, with the possibility of renewal in the case of continued danger. Longer-term protection should, however, be granted by a court by means of a protection order, upon application by the victim. An emergency barring order should in principle extend to children in need of protection and should have immediate effect.

160. GREVIO's baseline evaluation of Estonia had identified several serious shortcomings in the application of emergency barring orders, referred to as "bans on stay" in the national framework. The report had expressed particular concern over the lack of enforcement mechanisms for these measures and the absence of sanctions for breaches, as well as the insufficient maximum duration of 12 hours, which fell short of providing victims with adequate time to report violence, access support services or seek longer-term protection.

141. Social Insurance Board, Comparative Analysis of Domestic Violence Risk Assessment Tools, 2026, available in Estonian at: https://sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/sites/default/files/documents/2026-02/Perevagivalla-riskihindamisvahendite-vordlev-analuus_lopparuanne_12022026.pdf.
142. University of Tartu (2024), "Case analysis: the authorities' handling of fatal domestic violence cases", p. 66, available in Estonian at: https://siseministeerium.ee/uudised/asja-valminud-uuring-toob-valja-kitsaskohad-ametiasutuste-tegevustes-surmaga-loppenud.
143. See GREVIO's baseline evaluation report on Denmark, paragraph 207, and Malta, paragraph 218.

161. GREVIO notes with regret that the shortcomings in the ban-on-stay measures, currently applied under Article 44 of the Law Enforcement Act, persist. These measures are applied for the short duration of up to 12 hours by the police, often verbally, in situations of immediate risk of harm in cases of domestic violence. As also recognised in national studies, this duration is too short to allow victims sufficient time to secure their safety, particularly considering that longer-term restraining orders can only be issued once criminal proceedings have been initiated, preventing a seamless transition from emergency measures to lasting protection.[144] While GREVIO welcomes the amendment the relevant legislation in 2026 to extend the duration of bans on stay to up to 72 hours, it considers that this duration is still not sufficient to provide effective protection for victims. While the drafters of the Istanbul Convention left it to the discretion of the parties to determine the duration of an emergency barring order, GREVIO notes that both its baseline and first thematic evaluation reports, as well as the publication "Mid-term Horizontal Review of GREVIO Baseline Evaluation Reports", may serve as inspiration for Estonian authorities to identify good practices from other parties to the convention regarding effective emergency barring orders.

162. GREVIO also notes that these measures do not appear to be systematically issued. For the years 2022, 2023 and 2024, bans on stay in domestic violence cases were issued 392, 508 and 491 times, respectively. Comparing these numbers with the total number of reported cases of domestic violence for the same years (2 678, 2 592 and 2 531) suggests that the measure was applied in only approximately 15-20% of cases. Finally, GREVIO notes with concern that compliance with these measures continues to be unmonitored, with no sanctions foreseen in case of violation, thereby placing the onus on victims to report any breaches, which significantly limits their effectiveness in providing protection and thereby erodes the trust of the victims in the system.

163. **Referring to the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report and in light of the persistent shortcomings in the system regulating emergency barring orders, GREVIO urges the Estonian authorities to take measures to bring the Estonian legal framework and practice in line with Article 52 of the Istanbul Convention, notably by ensuring that:**

- **a. "bans on stay" are issued for a sufficient period of time, with the possibility of securing longer-term protection;**
- **b. "bans on stay" are enforced effectively and that proportionate and dissuasive sanctions are imposed when they are violated;**
- **c. progress in this area is monitored and periodically analysed based on regularly collected data on the number of orders issued, the number of violations of such orders and the number of sanctions imposed as a result.**

4. Restraining or protection orders (Article 53)

164. Restraining and protection orders are conceived to prolong the protection afforded to the victim and her children by emergency barring orders and may be considered complementary to the protection offered by emergency barring orders. Under Article 53 of the Istanbul Convention, victims of all forms of violence against women should be able to obtain a protection order for immediate protection – without an undue financial or administrative burden placed on the victim and irrespective of whether or not they choose to set in motion any other legal proceedings.

165. The Estonian Code of Civil Procedure provides for civil protection orders, which can prohibit the abuser from contacting or approaching the victim in situations where a person's safety, privacy or dignity is threatened or violated, including in cases of violence against women. These orders can last for up to three years and may be renewed if necessary. A breach of such orders is enforceable. GREVIO notes with concern that because the granting of such orders requires a separate court

144. University of Tartu (2024), "Case analysis: the authorities' handling of fatal domestic violence cases", p. 23, available in Estonian at: https://siseministeerium.ee/uudised/asja-valminud-uuring-toob-valja-kitsaskohad-ametiasutuste-tegevustes-surmaga-loppenud .

application and decision, the short duration of police-issued "bans on stay" does not provide victims with sufficient time to obtain such orders, thereby creating potential gaps in protection.

166. As was the case at the time of the baseline evaluation report, protection orders may equally be issued in the context of criminal proceedings. Notably, under Article 141¹ of the Estonian Code of Criminal Procedure, a temporary restraining order can be issued to protect victims of crimes against the person.[145] The measures may include a ban on approaching specified places or persons or contacting them. It is usually issued by a pretrial investigation judge or court on the request of the Prosecutor's Office, and in urgent situations can be imposed directly by the prosecutor. This measure differs from the "ban on stay" under the Law Enforcement Act, as it is linked to ongoing criminal proceedings and can remain in place for the duration of the case. Moreover, violating such orders is punishable under criminal law. In addition, under Article 310¹ of the Code of Criminal Procedure, courts can impose a restraining order on the perpetrator for up to three years at the request of the victim as part of the perpetrator's sentence. These post-conviction restraining orders aim to provide victims with longer-term protection after the criminal case has concluded and violations of the orders are also subject to sanctions.

167. GREVIO notes with regret that the lack of data on the use of civil protection orders and post-conviction restraining orders makes it impossible to assess the overall availability of longer-term protection measures for victims of violence against women. The data provided by the Estonian authorities concern only temporary restraining orders issued under Article 141¹ of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which indicate a low use of these measures.[146] GREVIO welcomes the fact that a significant proportion of these orders were imposed in urgent situations without the victim's consent, reflecting a proactive approach on the part of prosecutors to use them as a measure of urgent protection.

168. GREVIO observes persistent challenges to ensuring compliance with temporary restraining orders, in particular the absence of proactive monitoring mechanisms such as electronic bracelets, which leaves victims responsible for reporting violations. The lack of data on sanctions imposed for breaches further hinders the assessment of whether effective and dissuasive measures are taken to ensure compliance with these orders. However, the mere fact that criminal liability for breaching restraining orders arises only where the violation poses a danger to life, health or property of the victim, or when the violation is repeated, demonstrates that the sanctions in place are insufficient to ensure effective protection for victims.[147] GREVIO also notes with concern that even when imposed these orders do not always provide the required level of safety, as it seems difficult to remove the perpetrator from his shared residence with the victim due to the courts' tendency to limit the constitutional right to property only in exceptional cases.[148]

169. Neither civil protection orders nor the restraining orders issued in the context of criminal proceedings automatically cover victims' children, requiring separate restraining orders to broaden the scope of protection. GREVIO does not have information on the number of restraining orders ordered in respect of children in cases of domestic violence and is therefore unable to assess whether they systematically benefit from this protection.

145. In the Estonian Penal Code, crimes against the person include offences such as homicide, bodily injury, physical abuse, torture and threats of such acts, covering behaviours that directly endanger a person's life, health, physical integrity or personal security.
146. Between 2022 and 2024, the number of such orders remained rather low: in 2022, 48 orders were issued, with 27 confirmed breaches; in 2023, the number fell to 33 orders, with 28 confirmed breaches; and in 2024, 46 orders were issued, with 19 confirmed breaches.
147. Article 331² of the Penal Code, which governs the offence of "violation of restraining order" provides that: "Violation of a restriction order or other measure of protection of personality right imposed by a court decision, if this poses a danger to the life, health or property of persons, or repeated violation of a restriction order or other measure of protection of personality right, is punishable by a pecuniary punishment or up to one year of imprisonment".
148. Kaugia S. and Narits R. (2025), "On practice of applying plea agreement procedure in domestic violence cases in light of analysis of decisions of Estonian courts of first instance", p. 87, available at: www.researchgate.net/publication/399045617_On_Practice_of_Applying_Plea_Agreement_Procedure_in_Domestic_Violence_Cases_in_Light_of_Analysis_of_Decisions_of_Estonian_Courts_of_First_Instance.

170. A positive development observed by GREVIO is the expansion of the scope of restraining orders to include stalking. As the offence of stalking is not classified as a crime against the person in the Estonian Penal Code, a strict interpretation of the wording of the provisions governing restraining orders initially led courts to exclude stalking from their scope, resulting in the dismissal of early applications. This interpretation was subsequently corrected by the Supreme Court, which GREVIO welcomes as an important step in strengthening protection for victims of different forms of violence against women. However, it is unclear whether such orders are applicable in cases of sexual harassment, which, like stalking, is classified among offences against political and civil rights in the Penal Code.

171. **Referring to the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report and in light of the persistent shortcomings in the implementation of the legal framework governing restraining and protection orders, GREVIO urges the Estonian authorities to:**

- **a. ensure that no gap in the protection of the victim arises between the expiry of a "ban on stay" and the imposition of a civil restraining order;**
- **b. analyse and address the reasons for the low use of temporary restraining orders, and assess, through robust data collection, whether post-conviction restraining orders and civil protection orders are applied systematically to victims of violence against women;**
- **c. ensure that these orders are systematically issued by the competent authorities for all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention, including through the drawing up of protocols and guidelines and by raising awareness among all relevant professionals of the importance of these measures in ensuring victims' safety;**
- **d. proactively monitor compliance with these orders by making use of all available measures, such as electronic monitoring;**
- **e. ensure that effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions are applied in cases of breaches of these orders.**

5. Measures of protection (Article 56)

172. Article 56 of the Istanbul Convention is a key provision for building trust at the level of judicial proceedings for women and their children who have experienced or who are witness to any of the forms of violence covered by the convention. It sets forth a non-exhaustive list of procedures designed to protect victims of violence from intimidation, retaliation and secondary victimisation at all stages of proceedings, during investigations and at trial. The drafters intended this list to be indicative, and parties may adopt additional protection measures that are more favourable than those provided for in the convention. Moreover, intimidation and secondary victimisation can occur not only at the hands of perpetrators but also when investigations and judicial proceedings are not based on a gendered understanding of violence against women, which is why the practical application of measures of protection should be firmly anchored in such an understanding.

173. As GREVIO had noted with satisfaction in its baseline evaluation report, the Estonian legal framework provides a range of measures to protect victims of violence against women during court proceedings. Under the Code of Criminal Procedure, justice authorities are required to assess each victim's specific protection needs, including access to support services, legal aid and the use of specific premises or trained specialists for interviews. Victims have the right to be notified if the perpetrator is taken into custody, escapes or is released early, where this may present a threat to their safety, and to participate in proceedings accompanied by a support person. Measures to protect victims' privacy and identity, including anonymisation and restricted access to sensitive information, are in place and victims may give testimony remotely or via voice-altering technology where necessary. Special measures are also available for victims with particular needs, including persons with disabilities. In addition, Article 558 of the Estonian Code of Civil Procedure provides that when arranging the hearing of parents in civil proceedings, the court must take into consideration whether one parent has used violence towards the child or the other parent, ensuring that such factors inform procedural decisions.

174. At the level of implementation, GREVIO welcomes the apparent adoption by the justice authorities of a flexible approach to responding to the needs of victims of violence against women during court proceedings. The extensive use of expedited procedures in Estonia limits victims' courtroom presence to general hearings. GREVIO also notes that prosecutors play an active role in identifying victims' protection needs and notify courts accordingly to safeguard their testimony. For child victims, special interview rooms are available; however, it is not clear whether adult victims of violence against women can also benefit from such premises. Separate entrances and partitions in courtrooms are also frequently used to protect victims.

175. In addition to these measures, victims of violence against women may give their testimony via videoconferencing technologies or by telephone, although the latter requires the defendant's consent.[149] Moreover, GREVIO was alerted to instances in which rape victims were asked to testify across the room from the perpetrator.[150] Studies recognise this as a common tactic used by the defence to attract attention to the victim's appearance and behaviour and, ultimately, to challenge the credibility of their testimony.[151] GREVIO stresses that such practices not only cause the secondary victimisation and re-traumatisation of the victim, thereby undermining the victims' trust in the justice system, but also negatively affect the integrity of their testimony.

176. **GREVIO encourages the Estonian authorities to make more effective use of existing victim-protection measures provided by the legal framework in cases of all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention, including by reconsidering the requirement to obtain the perpetrator's consent before using telecommunication technologies to hear a victim's testimony.**

149. Article 69(2) of the Code of Criminal Procedure allows for a remote interview or examination to be conducted either (i) via a technical solution that allows for live audiovisual interaction and questioning; or (ii) by telephone, which allows for live audio interaction and questioning. According to information on the European e-Justice Portal, testimony by telephone is subject to the consent of the accused. See: https://e-justice.europa.eu/topics/court-procedures/digitalisation-regulation-member-state-notifications/ee_en.
150. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.
151. Praxis (2024), "Pretrial investigation of sexual violence", p. 61, available in Estonian at: https://sisu.ut.ee/suk/praxise-uuring-seksuaalvagivalla-kohtueelsest-uurimisest.

Appendix I
List of proposals and suggestions by GREVIO

II. Changes in definitions, comprehensive and co-ordinated policies, funding and data collection in the areas of violence against women and domestic violence

A. Definitions (Article 3)

1. GREVIO urges the authorities in Estonia to:

   a. ensure that the definition of domestic violence and its application in practice extends to former partners and spouses, irrespective of whether the victim shares a residence with the perpetrator, in line with Article 3, paragraph b, of the Istanbul Convention and as acknowledged by the Victim Support Act;
   b. introduce a definition of violence against women that is in line with Article 3 of the Istanbul Convention, with a view to ensuring a harmonised use of this concept across all areas of the law and policy. (paragraph 13)

B. Comprehensive and co-ordinated policies (Article 7)

2. Noting the findings issued in its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Estonian authorities to:

   a. develop a long-term co-ordinated policy framework giving due importance to all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention and addressing the specific needs of all groups of victims, in particular women who are or might be exposed to intersectional discrimination, based on a gendered understanding of violence against women;
   b. independently evaluate, on a regular basis, such policies, including the Action Plan for the Prevention of Intimate Partner Violence, with the aim of achieving the comprehensive and co-ordinated policy approach required by the Istanbul Convention. Such evaluations should be carried out on the basis of pre-defined indicators in order to assess their impact and ensure that policy making is based on reliable data;
   c. equip the national co-ordinating body with a clear mandate and the necessary human and financial resources in order to ensure the sustainability of its work. (paragraph 21)

C. Financial resources (Article 8)

3. Referring to its findings issued in the baseline evaluation report, GREVIO strongly encourages the Estonian authorities to allocate appropriate, sufficient and sustainable funding for policies, programmes and measures on all forms of violence against women and domestic violence, both at central and at municipal levels, through separate budget and funding lines in all relevant line ministries and other state entities, based on the principle of gender budgeting and with a view to monitoring the spending for violence against women policies. (paragraph 28)

4. GREVIO further strongly encourages the Estonian authorities to ensure appropriate and sustainable funding for women's rights NGOs that provide specialist support services to women victims of all forms of violence and that engage in advocacy work, including smaller community-based NGOs and those catering for women who are subject to intersectional discrimination, through funding mechanisms that allow for continuous service provision, such as long-term grants. (paragraph 29)

D. Data collection (Article 11)

3. Social services

5. GREVIO strongly encourages the Estonian authorities to systematically analyse data on all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention, collected by law enforcement, prosecutors and the judiciary, and disaggregated by the sex and age of both victims and perpetrators, the type of violence, the relationship between perpetrator and victim, geographical location and other relevant factors, with a view to identifying reporting, attrition and conviction rates and sanctioning practices. (paragraph 40)

6. In light of the findings issued in its baseline evaluation report and in view of the persistent gaps, GREVIO urges the Estonian authorities to systematically collect data, disaggregated by type of violence, the age of the victim and the alleged perpetrator and the nature of their relationship, on the number of women and girls who seek assistance from, or come into contact with, public or private healthcare services, including perinatal services, as a result of experiences of violence against women. This includes, in particular, cases of domestic violence, female genital mutilation, forced abortion and forced sterilisation, and sexual violence. (paragraph 41)

7. GREVIO invites the Estonian authorities to analyse and utilise the relevant data collected by social services on the provision of services to victims of violence against women for the purpose of evidence-based policy making. GREVIO further invites the Estonian authorities to produce statistics based on such analyses and to make them publicly available. (paragraph 42)

III. Analysis of the implementation of selected provisions in priority areas in the fields of prevention, protection and prosecution

A. Prevention

1. General obligations (Article 12)

8. GREVIO strongly encourages the Estonian authorities to conduct regular awareness raising campaigns or programmes addressing the different manifestations of violence against women and girls covered by the Istanbul Convention, including in their digital dimension, as well as the heightened risk of gender-based violence of women and girls exposed to intersectional discrimination, for example women with lower levels of education, women with disabilities and women from national and/or ethnic minorities, including Russian-speaking women. (paragraph 53)

9. GREVIO further encourages the Estonian authorities to regularly carry out impact assessments of any awareness-raising campaigns and primary prevention measures and to identify, through such impact assessments, any undesirable or adverse effects of the awareness-raising campaigns and adjust them accordingly. (paragraph 54)

2. Education (Article 14)

10. GREVO strongly encourages the Estonian authorities to:

a. ensure that all the topics covered in Article 14, paragraph 1, of the Istanbul Convention – gender equality, non-stereotyped gender roles, mutual respect, non-violent conflict resolution, gender-based violence and the right to personal integrity – as well as the importance of freely given consent, including in sexual relations, and the harmful effects of violent pornography are effectively taught in practice across the country, supported with adequate teaching materials and delivered by teachers with appropriate training, adapted to the age and evolving capacity of learners;
b. monitor to what extent these subjects are taught in schools in practice. (paragraph 62)

3. Training of professionals (Article 15)

11. Referring to the findings of the GREVIO baseline evaluation report and in view of persistent gaps in professional training, GREVIO urges the Estonian authorities to introduce systematic and mandatory initial and in-service trauma-informed training, supported by protocols and guidelines, on all the forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention, including their digital dimensions, for victim support workers, social welfare and child-protection professionals in local authorities, police officers, medical and healthcare providers, teachers and justice system professionals, including judges, prosecutors, lawyers and court-appointed experts. (paragraph 75)

4. Preventive intervention and treatment programmes (Article 16)

a. Programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence

12. While welcoming the progress made thus far, GREVIO strongly encourages the Estonian authorities to:

a. increase the number and capacity of perpetrator programmes for domestic violence;
b. develop common minimum standards for perpetrator programmes, in line with the principles of the Istanbul Convention and drawing on the European Standards for Perpetrator Programmes;
c. ensure that perpetrator programmes are widely attended, including by incorporating them into the criminal justice system and enabling mandatory court referrals as a tool to reduce recidivism;
d. ensure the external evaluation of all perpetrator programmes, in line with recognised international best practices and principles, in order to assess whether the programmes serve their intended preventive aims. (paragraph 84)

b. Programmes for perpetrators of sexual violence

13. GREVIO encourages the Estonian authorities to increase the number and capacity of perpetrator programmes for sexual violence. (paragraph 86)

B. Protection and support

1. General obligations (Article 18)

14. GREVIO encourages the Estonian authorities to increase their efforts to improve multi agency co-operation in cases of violence against women, other than sexual violence and high-risk domestic violence, including by developing formal protocols detailing the co-ordination measures to be taken by all agencies, entities and organisations providing support to victims of all forms of violence against women, with particular attention on the integration of the health sector, based on a gendered understanding of such violence, the empowerment of victims and the avoidance of secondary victimisation. (paragraph 93)

15. GREVIO further encourages the Estonian authorities to set up, where possible, one stop shops for the provision of services to victims of violence against women, including domestic violence. (paragraph 94)

2. General support services (Article 20)

a. Social services

16. Referring to the findings issued in its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Estonian authorities to set up dedicated programmes that cater for the specific needs of victims of all the forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention in the areas of employment, housing and professional training, while ensuring consistent availability and quality of such services across

the territory, thereby contributing to victims' recovery, economic independence and empowerment as well as to the well-being of their children. (paragraph 98)

17. GREVIO further strongly encourages the Estonian authorities to take measures to ensure the provision of support tailored to the specific needs of migrant, asylum-seeking and refugee women by overcoming language barriers and strengthening cultural sensitivity, while also raising awareness among relevant victim support and social welfare professionals of the various forms of violence against women. (paragraph 99)

b. Healthcare services

18. While welcoming the efforts of the Estonian authorities to improve the healthcare system's response to different forms of violence against women, GREVIO strongly encourages the Estonian authorities to develop and implement guidelines and standardised care pathways in the public and private healthcare sectors to ensure a gender-sensitive, trauma-informed and non-judgmental approach to enable the detection, diagnosis and treatment of victims of all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence, while also documenting the violence suffered (including photographic evidence), addressing resulting health issues and facilitating referrals to appropriate specialist support services. (paragraph 102)

3. Specialist support services (Article 22)

19. While acknowledging the efforts of the Estonian authorities to improve specialist services for victims of violence against women, including through legislative changes, GREVIO strongly encourages the Estonian authorities to:

a. improve access to specialist support and shelter services for all victims of violence against women, including women with disabilities, women with addictions issues and migrant, asylum-seeking and refugee women;
b. ensure that specialist support services, including specialist legal counselling, are available to victims of all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention, including violence in its digital dimension. (paragraph 112)

20. GREVIO further encourages the Estonian authorities to ensure that residents of closed institutions have access to specialist support services and to an effective protection mechanism in all cases of violence against women, including by adopting protocols and referral pathways. (paragraph 113)

4. Support for victims of sexual violence (Article 25)

21. GREVIO encourages the Estonian authorities to ensure that victims of sexual violence have access to long-term psychological support by qualified professionals. (paragraph 118)

C. Substantive law

1. Custody, visitation rights and safety (Article 31)

22. In light of the findings issued in its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Estonian authorities to take the following priority action in the area of custody and visitation rights with a view to ensuring the safety of victims and their children:

a. ensure that the negative impact that violence against women has on children is reflected in legislation and that incidents of violence against women are a mandatory legal criterion to be taken into account when deciding on custody and visitation rights;
b. introduce a mechanism for screening all custody and visitation cases to determine whether domestic violence has occurred in the relationship;

c. effectively investigate any reports of domestic violence by improving co-operation with criminal courts and other relevant bodies, including law enforcement, health and education authorities and women's support services;
d. ensure that only professionals, especially child psychologists and psychiatrists, who are trained in issues of violence against women and the requirements of the Istanbul Convention, are appointed by courts to advise on custody and visitation in cases involving domestic violence;
e. adopt safeguards, such as separate appointments for the parties and separate waiting areas in courts, to account for power imbalances between victims and perpetrators and prevent re-victimisation;
f. ensure that the legal provisions allowing for the reduction, suspension or application of safeguards to a perpetrator's custody and visitation rights when violence is confirmed are actually used in practice;
g. raise awareness about the misuse of concepts such as parental alienation or similar notions that label women as "unco-operative" or "manipulative" when they have legitimate concerns for their own or their child's safety when handing over their children to an abusive former partner. (paragraph 126)

2. Prohibition of mandatory alternative dispute resolution processes or sentencing (Article 48)

23. GREVIO encourages the Estonian authorities to ensure that safeguards are effectively incorporated and applied in cases of mediation and or restorative justice processes in criminal proceedings related to domestic violence, including by issuing relevant guidelines. Such safeguards should include:

a. carrying out a risk assessment of the suitability of such an approach in cases pertaining to violence against women;
b. duly taking into account the power imbalances that are typical in cases of domestic violence;
c. providing full information on the nature, aims, consequences and non-mandatory nature of restorative justice;
d. verifying and assessing that the victim has given her free and informed consent;
e. the provision of legal representation and dedicated support;
f. training on violence against women for the relevant mediators. (paragraph 131)

24. With reference to the findings issued in its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO strongly encourages the Estonian authorities to ensure that family mediation in parental separation proceedings is initiated and conducted with prior, proactive screening for any history of domestic violence, as well as a thorough understanding of power imbalances in such cases and the frequent use of family law proceedings as a means of post-separation abuse. (paragraph 132)

D. Investigation, prosecution, procedural law and protective measures

1. General obligations (Article 49) and Immediate response, prevention and protection (Article 50)

a. Reporting to, immediate response and investigations by law-enforcement agencies

25. With reference to the findings issued in its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Estonian authorities to ensure gender-sensitive, trauma-informed responses to all forms of violence against women, including their digital dimensions, in a manner that avoids re victimisation, by:

a. expanding the specialist units for the investigation of domestic and sexual violence to all regions;

b. raising the awareness of all law-enforcement professionals, including emergency dispatchers, patrol officers and police investigators, of the need to address stereotypical views on the dynamics of violence against women, including through targeted training initiatives. (paragraph 138)

b. Effective investigation and prosecution

26. GREVIO strongly encourages the Estonian authorities to:

a. develop binding guidelines for the police covering all forms of violence against women beyond domestic violence, supported by targeted training efforts;
b. strengthen investigative and prosecutorial case building in accordance with rigorous professional standards for all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention, including sexual violence and rape;
c. implement measures, including the adoption of prosecutorial guidelines and protocols, to ensure a victim-centred, gender-sensitive and trauma-informed approach to handling cases of violence against women and preventing secondary victimisation. In this respect, creating specialist prosecutorial units on domestic and sexual violence may be considered;
d. identify and address factors contributing to case attrition in all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention;
e. put in place adequate safeguards to ensure that criminal mediation is proposed with the utmost caution in cases of violence against women at the prosecution level, so as to prevent undue attrition. (paragraph 144)

c. Conviction rates

27. GREVIO urges the Estonian authorities to:

a. put in place safeguards to ensure that expedited and simplified judicial proceedings and plea-bargaining procedures are applied with the utmost caution, so as not to compromise the proper administration of justice in the interest of efficiency and speed, with particular attention on cases involving repeated violence, repeat perpetrators or violence causing severe harm. These safeguards should ensure the thorough collection and examination of evidence and allow for the victim's voice to be heard, while also including measures to prevent re-traumatisation and secondary victimisation of victims during adversarial proceedings;
b. examine and address factors that contribute to the high number of dismissals in criminal justice proceedings in relation to all cases of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention;
c. raise awareness within the justice sector about the importance of utilising the trauma-informed expertise and knowledge of sexual assault centres as evidence in rape cases to establish the presence or absence of consent;
d. ensure that sentences and measures imposed for the offences covered by the Istanbul Convention are effective, proportionate and dissuasive. (paragraph 150)

2. Risk assessment and risk management (Article 51)

28. GREVIO encourages the Estonian authorities to improve the risk-assessment system by adopting tools that effectively capture different aspects of violence against women, such as coercive control, psychological violence and intergenerational violence; improving communication and co-operation among different parties within the MARAC network; harmonising risk-assessment practices across different MARACs in the country through systematic training; ensuring the participation of essential professionals, such as those in the healthcare sector, in the risk-assessment mechanisms; and strengthening the role of local authorities. (paragraph 157)

29. GREVIO further encourages the Estonian authorities to ensure the systematic follow-up of the initial risk assessment carried out in all cases of violence against women, including moderate-

and low-risk cases, and to put in place effective risk-management mechanisms for such cases. Victim participation in risk management should be encouraged by the professionals conducting the risk assessment, with due regard for her informed consent. Furthermore, risk management must take place in a safe environment that allows participation without secondary victimisation, in order to identify any potential escalation of violence and strengthen preventive interventions. In this context, integrated approaches (such as one-stop-shop models) can play an important role in ensuring victim-centred risk management and co-ordinated responses. (paragraph 158)

3. Emergency barring orders (Article 52)

30. Referring to the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report and in light of the persistent shortcomings in the system regulating emergency barring orders, GREVIO urges the Estonian authorities to take measures to bring the Estonian legal framework and practice in line with Article 52 of the Istanbul Convention, notably by ensuring that:

a. "bans on stay" are issued for a sufficient period of time, with the possibility of securing longer-term protection;
b. "bans on stay" are enforced effectively and that proportionate and dissuasive sanctions are imposed when they are violated;
c. progress in this area is monitored and periodically analysed based on regularly collected data on the number of orders issued, the number of violations of such orders and the number of sanctions imposed as a result. (paragraph 163)

4. Restraining or protection orders (Article 53)

31. Referring to the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report and in light of the persistent shortcomings in the implementation of the legal framework governing restraining and protection orders, GREVIO urges the Estonian authorities to:

a. ensure that no gap in the protection of the victim arises between the expiry of a "ban on stay" and the imposition of a civil restraining order;
b. analyse and address the reasons for the low use of temporary restraining orders, and assess, through robust data collection, whether post-conviction restraining orders and civil protection orders are applied systematically to victims of violence against women;
c. ensure that these orders are systematically issued by the competent authorities for all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention, including through the drawing up of protocols and guidelines and by raising awareness among all relevant professionals of the importance of these measures in ensuring victims' safety;
d. proactively monitor compliance with these orders by making use of all available measures, such as electronic monitoring;
e. ensure that effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions are applied in cases of breaches of these orders. (paragraph 171)

5. Measures of protection (Article 56)

32. GREVIO encourages the Estonian authorities to make more effective use of existing victim-protection measures provided by the legal framework in cases of all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention, including by reconsidering the requirement to obtain the perpetrator's consent before using telecommunication technologies to hear a victim's testimony. (paragraph 176)

Appendix II
List of the national authorities, other public bodies, non-governmental organisations and civil society organisations with which GREVIO held consultations

National authorities

Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs
Ministry of Social Affairs
Ministry of the Interior
Ministry of Education and Research
Ministry of Culture
Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications
Social Insurance Board
Health Board
Police and Border Guard Board
Statistics Estonia
Judicial Training Council
Tallinn Parent and Child Shelter
Tartu Municipality Department of Social Welfare and Health Care
Tartu Social Insurance Board
Tartu Police Station
Tartu Sexual Violence Crisis Centre

Independent human rights bodies

Chancellor of Justice
Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner

Non-governmental organisations

Tartu Women Support and Information Centre
Parnu Women Support Centre
Estonian Women's Shelters Union
Feministeerium - Gender equality advocacy NGO
International Women's Network in Estonia (IWNE) - Civil society organisation promoting the empowerment, social inclusion and integration of migrant women
Erilised - Civil society organisation promoting the rights, social inclusion and equal participation of persons with disabilities
Helpific - Civil society organisation promoting the rights, social inclusion and equal participation of persons with disabilities

Academics

Anna Markina, Professor of Criminology, University of Tartu

International Organisations

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

GREVIO, the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, is an independent human rights monitoring body mandated to monitor the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) by the parties.

Following the comprehensive stocktaking exercise set out in its baseline evaluation reports, GREVIO's first thematic evaluation round identifies progress made in building trust among women and girls by delivering support, protection and justice for any of the forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention. This report contains an analysis of developments in law and policy in respect of provisions of the convention relating to victim support and protection, criminal investigation and prosecution of acts of violence. It also covers developments in the determination of child custody and visitation rights in cases with a history of violence and wider preventive measures.

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