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The Istanbul Convention

What is the "Istanbul Convention"?

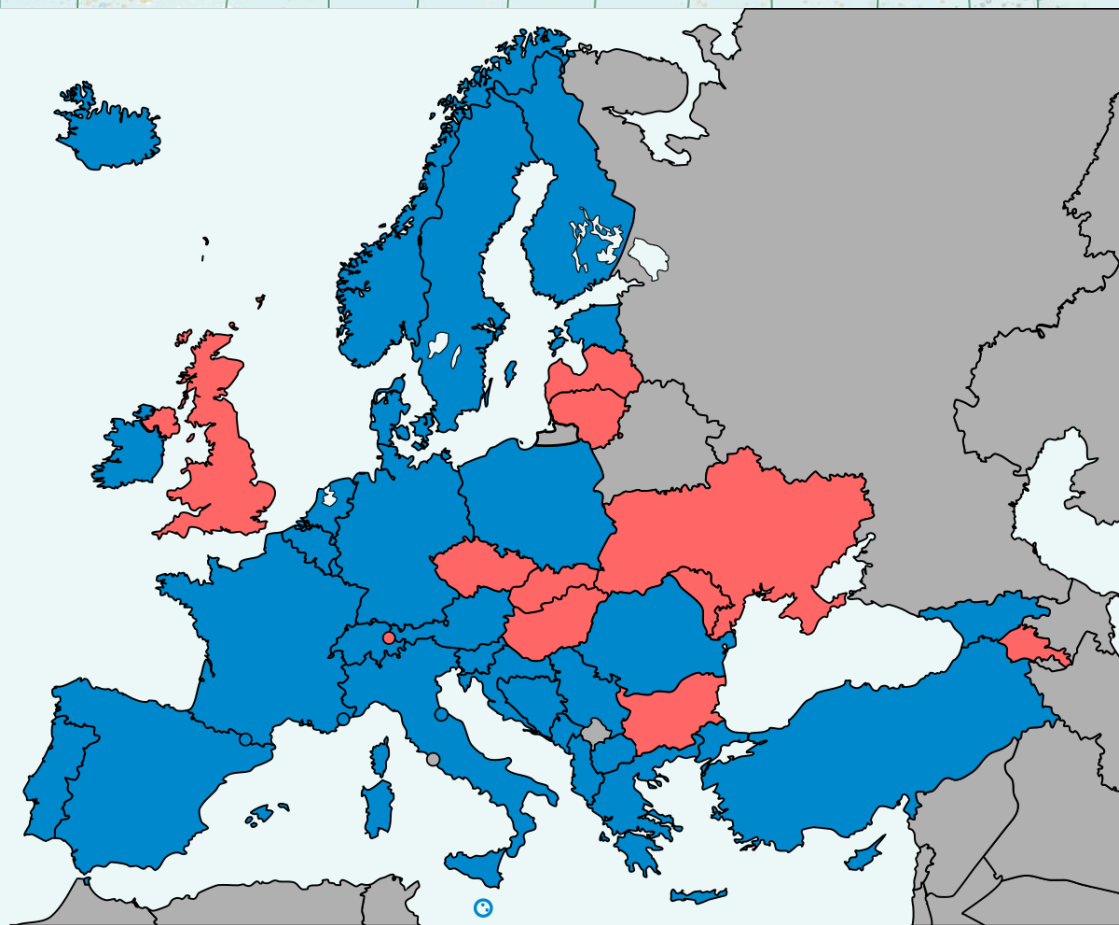
- The Istanbul Convention's full name is the **Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence**. It was developed by The Council of Europe, Europe's leading human-rights organisation
- It is the most comprehensive legal framework that exists to tackle violence against women and girls, covering domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, female genital mutilation (FGM), so-called honour-based violence, and forced marriage.
- The Istanbul Convention sets minimum standards for governments to meet when tackling violence against women. When a government ratifies the Convention, they are legally bound to follow it.
- It is the obligation of the state to fully address violence against women in all its forms and to take measures to prevent it, protect its victims and prosecute the perpetrators. Failure to do so would make it the responsibility of the state.

Why is it important/ What does it mean in practice?

- It ensures that violence against women is seen as a whole in law; it is not simply amending one issue. The Istanbul Convention recognises violence against women as more than individual issues, as a wider epidemic of violence and ensures a co-ordinated response.
- It addresses each stage of violence: the Istanbul Convention starts with the prevention of violence, moving onto protecting women and girls who are experiencing violence, through to prosecution of violence. It also ensures that vital data on violence against women is collected and responded to.
- Some of the practical responses that the Istanbul Convention ensures are an adequate number of refuges (including specialist services), sufficient funding and provision of rape crisis or sexual violence referral centres, psychological support for victims of violence, free 24/7 helplines for all forms of violence and education in schools on topics such as violence against women and girls, equality between men and women, the right to personal integrity, and healthy relationships.

Who's signed up to and ratified it?

- The convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence opened for signature in 2011 in Istanbul.
- A government 'signing' is it saying it has the INTENTION of complying in the future. 'Ratifying' means a government will be LEGALLY BOUND to comply with the Istanbul Convention.
- By December 2013, the convention was signed by 39 states, followed by ratification of the minimum eight Council of Europe states: Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Italy, Montenegro, Portugal, Serbia, and Turkey.
- In 2014, it was ratified by Andorra, Denmark, France, Malta, Monaco, Spain, and Sweden. In 2015 it was ratified also by Slovenia, Finland, Poland and the Netherlands, and in 2016 by San Marino, Belgium and Romania; in 2017 by Georgia, Norway, Germany, Estonia, Cyprus and Switzerland, in 2018 by Croatia, Macedonia, Iceland, Greece and Luxembourg, and in 2019 by Republic of Ireland. On 13 June 2017, European Commissioner Věra Jourová (Gender Equality) signed the Istanbul Convention on behalf of the European Union.
- A full list of signatories can be found at:
<https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/210/signatures>



Red – Signed

Blue – Ratified

Grey – Not signed

Correct as of 15 March 2019

- The states which have signed but not yet ratified the Convention are Armenia, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lichtenstein, Lithuania, Republic of Moldova, Slovak Republic, Ukraine and the UK.
- Russia and Azerbaijan have not signed.

Monitoring and Enforcement

- An independent expert group, the [Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence](#), called GREVIO, and a political unit known as the [Committee of the Parties](#), which is composed of representatives of the parties to the Istanbul Convention, are responsible for monitoring adherence to the convention.
- Monitoring is based on information provided by the country concerned, a dialogue between GREVIO and representatives of the country, and a country visit. This leads to an evaluation report, which is made public and submitted to the national parliament.
- GREVIO's aim is that all NGOs active in preventing and combating violence against women be able to contribute to the evaluation procedure. It strongly encourages NGOs to work through coalitions, networks or platforms, given its limited resources. GREVIO is particularly keen to receive information from women's and grassroots organisations on the practical implementation of the Convention.
- In cases where action is required to prevent a serious, massive or persistent pattern of any acts of violence covered by the Convention, GREVIO may initiate a special inquiry procedure. GREVIO may also adopt, where appropriate, general recommendations on themes and concepts of the Convention.

The UK Government's position

- The UK Government signed the Istanbul Convention on 8 June 2012. It still hasn't ratified the Convention.
- The reason for the delay in ratification is that the Government says it wants to be fully compliant with the Istanbul Convention before it ratifies it. The Government has made efforts to comply with many provisions, including for example criminalising psychological violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage.
- However some of our laws still aren't in line with the Istanbul Convention, with the Government pointing to, In particular, we need domestic legislation to ensure *extra-territorial jurisdiction* provisions are in place. The Convention says that laws should apply to British citizens when they commit crimes against women abroad, as well as in the UK. This is the case for some crimes like murder, but not for things like rape. It also says it needs to make sure devolved administrations – Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – are also compliant.
- More work is also needed to ensure the essential requirement of adequate support services for women facing domestic and sexual violence. This can be costly and the current economic crisis has led to severe cuts in funding of specialist support services for women.

Campaigners

- The main campaigners are IC Change - a volunteer-led campaign calling on the UK Government to ratify the Istanbul Convention (IC)
- They have had support from a number of organisations:



- And cross-party support from parliamentarians around the UK (mostly Labour and SNP).

IC Change's position - why the UK needs to do more

- Ending violence against women and girls is not being prioritised enough. Efforts to prevent violence against women and girls are inadequate, services providing survivors with protection and support are in crisis, and our prosecution system is failing survivors.
- **Until the Government has ratified the Istanbul Convention, it doesn't have to tackle these problems because it is currently under no legal obligation to meet all of its requirements.** It can just pick and choose which parts of the Convention it wants to focus on. We can't afford to have a patchy approach to ending violence against women and girls.
- In 2016/17 the IC Change campaign supported bringing the IC Act (full-name: Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (ratification of convention) Act 2017) into law. Drawing cross-party support and widespread support across the UK, this law put the Istanbul Convention firmly back on the agenda.
- But we've still got some distance to go, unfortunately. The aim of the IC Act is to move Government back into action after 5 years of stalling. There are two main requirements: it has to report on progress towards ratification every year, and it has to produce a timetable – and stick to it.
- The Government has produced their progress reports in 2017 and 2018. However, the reports falls short by not providing clear actions and a timeframe to make sure this can move forward. Particularly how compliance can be assured in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and what steps the UK government is taking to work with devolved nations to see the convention written into domestic law.
- We call for the UK Government and the devolved governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to create a comprehensive timetable of actions for ratification of the Istanbul Convention.

Sources/ Useful links

- <https://icchange.co.uk/>
- <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/home>
- <https://www.womensaidni.org/istanbul-convention-why-we-need-it-now/>
- <https://rm.coe.int/168046e1f1>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Convention_on_preventing_and_combating_violence_against_women_and_domestic_violence
- <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/uk/culture/culture-news/news/a40310/what-is-the-istanbul-convention/>