

European Treaty on Violence Against Women

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The Council of Europe has said it is alarmed that Poland's rightwing government is moving to withdraw from a landmark international treaty aimed at preventing violence against women.

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The treaty is the **world's first binding instrument to prevent and tackle violence against women**, from marital rape to female genital mutilation. **The treaty was spearheaded by the Council of Europe, the continent's oldest human rights organisation**, and its secretary general condemned the Law and Justice party (PiS) government's plan to withdraw. Leaving the Istanbul convention would be highly regrettable and a major step backwards in the protection of women against violence in Europe.

The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence is **based on the understanding that violence against women is a form of gender-based violence that is committed against women because they are women**. It is the obligation of the state to fully address it in all its forms and to take measures to prevent violence against women, protect its victims and prosecute the perpetrators.

PiS and its coalition partners closely align themselves with the Catholic church and **promote a conservative social agenda**. Hostility to gay rights was one of the main issues promoted by the president during the successful re-election campaign. The Council of Europe emphasised that the Istanbul convention's sole objective is to combat violence against women and domestic violence. The treaty does not explicitly mention

same-sex marriage.

That has not stopped the backlash to it in Hungary and in Slovakia as well, where the parliament rejected the treaty, insisting, without proof, that it is at odds with the country's constitutional definition of marriage as a heterosexual union. **The Strasbourg-based Council of Europe, which is separate from the EU, has no binding powers but brings together 47 member states to make recommendations on rights and democracy.**

Features of the Convention

- Recognising that the realisation of **de jure and de facto equality between women and men is a key element** in the prevention of violence against women.
- Recognising that violence against women is a **manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men**, which have led to domination over, and discrimination against, women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women.
- Recognising the **structural nature of violence against women** as gender-based violence, and that violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men.
- Recognising, with grave concern, that women and girls are often exposed to serious forms of violence such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape, forced marriage, crimes committed in the name of so-called "honour" and genital mutilation, which constitute a serious violation of the human rights of women and girls and a **major obstacle to the achievement of equality between women and men.**