

## Case Study: Ukraine Is Advancing the Implementation of the Istanbul Convention Despite Russia's War of Aggression

In June 2022, Ukraine ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GBV), known as [the Istanbul Convention](#). Despite the pressures of Russia's war of aggression, Ukraine chose to strengthen protection against domestic and gender-based violence.

**Pre-war reforms laid an essential foundation:** Legislation adopted between 2005 and 2017 on equal rights, anti-discrimination, voluntary consent in sexual crimes, and the Law on Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence already reflected key Convention principles. The establishment of a Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration with a gender mandate, a Government Commissioner for Gender Equality Policy, and the National Social Service helped to anchor gender policy prior to the invasion. These frameworks enabled Ukraine to make progress during wartime rather than starting from scratch.

**Implementation efforts continue despite conflict:** Ukraine has maintained a broad policy framework, encompassing the 2021-2025 State Social Programme on Domestic and Gender-Based Violence and the 2022 Strategy on Equal Rights and Opportunities. Training for judges, prosecutors, police, military personnel, and social workers is ongoing and is supported by online education platforms (Prometheus, Diia, and JurFem).

**Growing risks exist and gaps remain:** Survivors of domestic and gender-based violence face barriers when reporting incidents, and there is limited forensic capacity and delays in issuing protection orders. Procedures are also insufficiently victim-centered. The absence of unified national data and the non-functional State Register of Domestic and Gender-Based Violence continue to be major obstacles to compliance with the Convention. Underfunding of shelters, psychological services, and specialised police units further undermines implementation.

**The role of civil society is central, yet not always recognised by the authorities:** Victims of domestic and gender-based violence rely heavily on services provided by civil society for legal aid, shelter, psychological support. Despite the difficulties of operating in a war zone, civil society is also essential in monitoring the situation. Furthermore, the consequences for women and families of war-related post-traumatic stress disorder of veterans widely remain taboo, but are being addressed thanks to a few initiatives (e.g. the Veteran Mental Health Centre of Excellence, started by the Federation Global Initiative on Psychiatry/ FGIP and hosted by the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv). Despite their essential role, civil society receives little to no structural state funding in an independent and transparent manner.

**Ukraine's progress is a form of democratic resilience:** Implementing the Istanbul Convention during wartime strengthens the rule of law, improves protection for survivors, and reinforces the country's European trajectory. However, full implementation of the Convention will require addressing data gaps, securing stable funding for services and improving coordination.

