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Treaty to Combat Violence Against Women: European Union

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An estimated 12 women are killed by gender-related violence in Europe every day, with domestic violence accounting for almost a third of all murders in the region.

The 2011 Istanbul Convention had to be ratified by at least 10 Council of Europe member states to come into force a milestone met in April with the addition of tiny Andorra.

Nils Muiznieks, rights commissioner for the pan-European watchdog, said the text "could not come at a better time."

"Violence against women remains one of the most widespread human rights violations" in Europe, he said in a statement.

"Intimate partner violence is still among the major causes of non-accidental death, injury and disability for women."

Last year, domestic violence claimed the lives of 121 women in France, 134 in Italy, 37 in Portugal, 54 in Spain and 143 in the United Kingdom, according to statistics compiled by the rights watchdog.

In Azerbaijan 83 women were killed and 98 committed suicide following domestic violence, while media estimates in Turkey suggest at least 214 women were killed by men, "often despite these women having asked the authorities for protection."

Parties to the convention have an obligation to "prevent violence, protect its victims, prosecute the perpetrators, and to coordinate any such measures through comprehensive policies."

"It will contribute to ending forced marriage, female genital mutilation, and forced abortion and sterilisation," Muiznieks added.

The European Parliament estimates around half a million women and girls live with female genital mutilation in the EU, while 180,000 others are at risk each year.

Signatories also pledge to provide adequate shelter to victims of domestic violence, as austerity cutbacks threaten an already "largely insufficient" number of places according to the council.

Thirteen states to date have ratified the text including Albania, Andorra, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denmark, France, Italy, Montenegro, Portugal, Serbia, Spain, Sweden and Turkey.

The Istanbul Convention comes into force on August 1 for the first 11. France and Sweden, which ratified it this month, will apply it from November.

A further 23 countries have signed the text, but not yet ratified it.

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