

Document Title: **WPA Position Statement on the Ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women**

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## **Background**

Violence against women is a worldwide phenomenon. One-fifth to one-quarter of all women have experienced physical violence at least once during their adult lives and more than one-tenth have suffered sexual violence involving the use of force. The majority of such violent acts are carried out by men in their immediate social environment, most often by partners and ex-partners.<sup>1</sup>

Violence against women is widely recognized as a violation of human rights and a public health problem. Domestic violence and abuse disproportionately affect women and are forms of gender-based violence.<sup>2</sup> In addition, women represent over half of more than 20 million victims of human trafficking worldwide<sup>3</sup>, and women who have been victims of trafficking often experience physical and sexual violence. Similar data apply to refugee and migrant women<sup>4</sup>.

Experiencing different types of violence and abuse increases the risk of developing mental disorders and people with mental health problems are more likely to be victims of domestic or sexual violence. A systematic review and meta-analysis<sup>5</sup> reported that the likelihood of depressive disorders, of anxiety disorder, and of post-traumatic stress disorder was much higher for women who have experienced domestic violence and abuse. Associations between partner violence and symptoms of psychosis, substance misuse, and eating disorders have also been reported.<sup>5-7</sup> Domestic violence may have a negative impact on children's development too; there is strong evidence that when children are exposed to family violence, they at much higher risk of a wide range of negative physical and psychological health outcomes.<sup>8,9</sup>

On 11 May 2011, in Istanbul, Turkey, the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women (also known as the Istanbul Convention) was opened for signature. It aims to create a legal framework to protect women against all forms of violence,

and prevent, prosecute, and eliminate violence against women and domestic violence. It conveys a strong message that domestic violence is not a private or family matter, as it represents a severe violation of human rights and an issue for the whole society. On 12 March 2012, Turkey became the first country to ratify the convention, followed by 33 European countries.

In May 2020, the Hungarian National Assembly adopted a political declaration in which it called on the government not to go any further in acceding to the convention and to lobby the European Union to do the same. In July 2020, Polish Justice Minister Zbigniew Ziobro declared he would begin preparing the formal process to withdraw from the treaty. On 20 March 2021, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, President of Turkey, announced Turkey's withdrawal from the treaty with a presidential decree.

### **The WPA Statement**

Knowing that violence and discrimination lead to massive suffering and mental disorders, in the face of the retrogressive tendencies that are being expressed in several countries, the World Psychiatric Association strongly reaffirms that the Istanbul Convention constitutes an essential legal basis for the protection of women against violence and an important tool to prevent mental disorders.

Objections to the ratification and implementation of this vital treaty, as well as actions to withdraw ratification, are worrying signs of hostility to women's rights. These actions constitute a threat to the rights and well-being of women, and a threat to public mental and physical health.

The WPA expresses its willingness to stand by the principles of the Istanbul Convention and to support all actions that its Member Societies take to promote the ratification of the Convention and the implementation of its principles.

### **References**

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<sup>2</sup> Council of Europe. Council of Europe convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2011

<sup>3</sup>International Labour Office. ILO global estimate of forced labour: results and methodology. Geneva: International Labour Office, 2012.

<sup>4</sup>Oram S, Khalifeh H, Howard LM. Violence against women and mental health. *Lancet Psychiatry* 2017; 4:159-170

<sup>5</sup>Trevillion K, Oram S, Feder G, Howard LM. Experiences of domestic violence and mental disorders: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *PLoS One* 2012; 7(12): e51740.

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<sup>8</sup>Gil-González D, Vives-Cases C, Ruiz MT, Carrasco-Portiño M, Alvarez-Dardet C. Childhood experiences of violence in perpetrators as a risk factor of intimate partner violence: a systematic review. *J Public Health*. 2008; 30:14-22.

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