

## Memorandum on Violence Against Women in Armenia

### Introduction

1. The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights (hereinafter: “the Commissioner”) carried out a visit to Armenia from 3 to 5 February 2026. Violence against women was one of the focus issues for examination.<sup>1</sup>
2. The Commissioner fosters the effective observance of human rights, assists member states in the implementation of Council of Europe human rights instruments, identifies possible shortcomings in the law and practice concerning human rights and provides advice and information regarding the protection of human rights across the region.<sup>2</sup>
3. During the visit, the Commissioner met with the Deputy Prime Minister, Tigran Khachatryan; the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ararat Mirzoyan; the Minister of Justice, Srbuhi Galyan; the Minister of Internal Affairs, Arpine Sargsyan; the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Arsen Torosyan; the Chairperson of the Court of Cassation, Lilit Tadevosyan; the Standing Committee on Human Rights Protection and Public Affairs of the National Assembly; the Armenian delegation to PACE; and the Human Rights Defender of Armenia (Ombuds), Anahit Manasyan. The Commissioner also engaged in discussions with the United Nations Resident Coordinator, Françoise Jacob, and representatives of UNHCR and UNFPA; the EU Ambassador, Vassilis Maragos; and with civil society organisations. The Commissioner visited a shelter for women survivors of domestic violence and held discussions with the shelter’s administration and survivors.
4. The Commissioner expresses appreciation to the Armenian authorities for their welcome, excellent cooperation and openness throughout the visit. He also extends his gratitude to representatives of civil society and international organisations for their constructive engagement and valuable insights.

### I. Context

5. The Commissioner observes that violence against women (VAW) is a serious issue in Armenia.<sup>3</sup> According to a nationwide survey on domestic violence against women in 2021, 14.8% of Armenian women reported physical violence, 6.6% sexual violence, and 31.8% psychological violence.<sup>4</sup> However, only 0.4% of survivors approached the police for help—a figure dramatically lower than the international average of 9%, which is low in itself.<sup>5</sup> Many do not report abuse reportedly due to stigma, fear of retaliation, lack of trust in the authorities, financial dependence, and fear of social ostracisation.<sup>6</sup>
6. In recent years, there has been a substantial increase in criminal investigations related to domestic violence. The number doubled from 960 in 2022 to 1,848 in 2023, rising further to 2,307

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<sup>1</sup> See the end-of-visit [statement](#) of 10 February 2026 for an overview of all issues addressed during the visit. As other follow up to the visit, the Commissioner published a [letter](#) of 30 March 2026 to the Prime Minister of Armenia regarding the anti-discrimination framework.

<sup>2</sup> [Resolution \(99\)50](#) on the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 7 May 1999.

<sup>3</sup> This Memorandum covers mainly violence against women and girls in the context of domestic violence in Armenia.

<sup>4</sup> [Analytical Report](#) “Survey on Domestic Violence against Women” (2021) Statistical Committee of Armenia, AM Partners Consulting Company and International Center for Human Development LLC.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> [Submission](#) to UPR of Armenia, Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women, May 2025, p. 7; UN CAT [Concluding observations](#) on the 5<sup>th</sup> periodic report of Armenia, 2025 (CAT/C/ARM/CO/5), para 30.

in 2024 and 2,398 in 2025.<sup>7</sup> According to the UN Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, the rise in reported cases is presumably due to several factors, including positive ones such as increased awareness amongst survivors about their rights and increasing trust of victims towards the institutions, and the existence of online reporting tools, but also due to an actual rise in domestic violence in connection with the latent effect from the war and displacement.<sup>8</sup> Forms of gender-based violence in Armenia include domestic violence, economic violence, bride kidnapping, child marriage, violence and harassment at work and other spaces, physical and psychological abuse, and digital and technology-facilitated violence.<sup>9</sup>

7. The Commissioner notes reports that patriarchal attitudes are still deeply embedded at the institutional, community, family and household levels. Expectations about women's roles in the family, professional choices, reproduction and caregiving remain powerful and affect women's and girls' rights across many sectors.<sup>10</sup> Several interlocutors acknowledged that in cases of domestic violence, priorities remain with "family unity" and conciliation. According to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), discrimination is reinforced through gendered socioeconomic structures: women's participation in economic and political life remains lower than men's, and economic dependence further affects women, leading to the feminisation of poverty.<sup>11</sup>
8. The armed conflicts in the region and the displacements they caused have intensified the risks of VAW. The national security and militarisation narratives reinforce patriarchal norms and increase social pressure related to gender, marriage, reproduction and caregiving.<sup>12</sup> Civil society organisations report that women facing intersecting discrimination—based on gender identity, sexual orientation, migration status, disability, or minority background—are exposed to a higher risk of violence.
9. Efforts to prevent and combat gender-based violence, including VAW, face opposition. Anti-gender movements, including some political actors, reportedly harass civil society organisations working on gender equality and oppose ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention).
10. The Commissioner welcomes the growing acknowledgment of the seriousness of VAW and the willingness of the Armenian authorities to address it.

## **II. Recent Achievements in Combating Violence against Women**

11. The Commissioner acknowledges Armenia's progress in addressing VAW. This includes, among other developments, legislative reform, the introduction of new tools to better protect women and girls such as police and court protection orders, and the establishment of victim support services across the country. The progress is also reflected by the advance in the country's gender inequality index, from 0.35 in 2010 to 0.22 in 2021, and in the global gender gap index, where Armenia moved from place 102 to place 59 between 2016 and 2025.<sup>13</sup>
12. The Commissioner notes the significant step forward with the Law on Domestic Violence (2017, as amended in 2024),<sup>14</sup> which includes an expanded definition of domestic violence and other related definitions, provisions for urgent and longer-term protection, definition of the authorities'

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<sup>7</sup> Investigative Committee of Armenia: [Statistics](#) on Crimes Related to Domestic Violence, 2025.

<sup>8</sup> UN Working Group on discrimination against women and girls: End of Mission [Statement](#) on the visit to Armenia, 16 -25 March 2026.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> UN CEDAW [Concluding Observations](#) on the Seventh Periodic Report of Armenia, 2023 (CEDAW/C/ARM/CO/7/Rev.1)

<sup>12</sup> [Submission](#) to UPR of Armenia, Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women, May 2025; Ziemer, U. (2023). [The Impact of Conflict and Militarization on the Lives of Women and LGBT Persons in Armenia](#), Caucasus Analytical Digest.

<sup>13</sup> UN Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Full title of the Law: "On Prevention of Domestic and Household Violence, Protection of Persons Subjected to Domestic and Household Violence."

responsibilities, and survivor access to shelters and support centres. The Law also addresses other important issues such as coordination, data gathering and awareness-raising.

13. The 2022 Criminal Code (as amended in 2024) addressed certain gender-based crimes that disproportionately impact women and girls, such as psychological abuse, stalking and forced marriage, and introduced violence by a partner or former partner as an aggravating circumstance in several articles of the Criminal Code. In addition, the amended Criminal Code introduced sex as a general aggravating factor in sentencing, applicable to any crime, and as a protected ground under discriminatory motive clauses that aggravate sentences for certain common offences.
14. Since 2017, Armenia has been developing a shelter and support centre network. Eleven state-funded support centres for survivors of domestic violence have opened – one in each region of the country. There are two secure shelters for overnight stay, operated by civil society with the support of private donors. State funding has recently been made available.
15. The Commissioner acknowledges that the new Gender Strategy and Action Plan 2025-2028 represent a useful roadmap to guide future efforts against VAW.

### **III. Outstanding issues in Combating Violence against Women<sup>15</sup>**

#### **1. Gaps in Law Enforcement**

16. Interlocutors including police leadership, judicial and government representatives, NGOs and survivors of VAW, informed the Commissioner that while legislative reforms represent a significant step in the fight against VAW, issues remain with putting laws into practice.

#### ***Institutional Culture and Attitudes***

17. Institutional culture and attitudes, including within law enforcement and the judiciary, reportedly prioritise family reconciliation and “restoring peace within the family” over addressing the needs of survivors. Despite legal changes removing the provisions for conciliation from the law, informal conciliation is commonly attempted by the authorities even where there are patterns of repeated violence.<sup>16</sup>
18. Interaction with the authorities is sometimes retraumatising: reports indicate that survivors are interviewed repeatedly, sometimes for hours and in the presence of the perpetrator; they are asked for unnecessary details or medical evidence; and forensic examinations are traumatic, with doctors sometimes lacking sensitivity.<sup>17</sup> Survivors can experience victim-blaming, fear of retaliation, and difficulties in navigating the protection system. Consequently, they sometimes refrain from seeking help from state authorities and turn to their parents, other relatives and friends.<sup>18</sup>

#### ***Police and Court Protection Response***

19. Armenian law enables both short-term police Emergency Intervention (Protection) Orders (EIOs) and longer-term judicial Protection Orders (POs). These orders are designed to protect survivors, including by removing the perpetrator from the home and restricting contacts with them. However, they are inconsistently issued and enforced.
20. EIOs are sometimes not issued on the spot or are delayed and may not result in the immediate removal of the perpetrator from the home. Police frequently fail to issue EIOs rapidly, even in

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<sup>15</sup> The section below provides a non-exhaustive list of issues observed by the Commissioner.

<sup>16</sup> Advancing the Domestic Violence Agenda in Armenia, report by Global Rights for Women, January 2025.

<sup>17</sup> [Submission](#) to UPR of Armenia, Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women, May 2025, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> [Report](#) “Survey on Domestic Violence against Women” (2021) Statistical Committee of Armenia, AM Partners Consulting Company and International Center for Human Development LLC, p. 55.

high-risk situations, and they often do not lead to consequences for abusers. Child protection is rarely addressed in EIOs.<sup>19</sup>

21. The Commissioner draws attention to the rate at which EIOs are overturned by courts when they are challenged. Ninety per cent (38 of 42) of those EIOs challenged in 2025 were cancelled following appeals by perpetrators, mostly due to procedural errors and evidentiary rules, rather than based on a reduction in risk.<sup>20</sup> These reversals, which can happen without police attending the hearing, disincentivise officers from issuing EIOs, which in some cases leaves survivors unprotected. The Commissioner notes reports that police officers, acting as first responders, sometimes poorly justify EIOs due to lack of training and time.
22. The enforcement of EIOs is weak. Contrary to the law, violations of such orders seem to rarely result in arrest or prosecution, and the consequences are often limited to administrative fines. In 2025, although 1,850 EIOs were issued, only eight criminal cases related to non-compliance with EIOs or POs were investigated and sent to court.<sup>21</sup>
23. Court-issued (long-term) POs appear to be rarely issued. The Commissioner has received information that judges tend to prioritise the perpetrator's parental or property rights over the safety of women and children due to societal attitudes that favour family reconciliation, as well as due to procedural issues.<sup>22</sup> Survivors are dissuaded from pursuing POs by lengthy and re-traumatising proceedings, lack of free legal aid and guidance from police, and the risk of further violence by the perpetrator. Enforcement of court POs also remains an issue and, in general, their violations reportedly do not lead to any consequences.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Police Warnings***

24. Recent figures reflect progress in moving away from police warnings towards an increased use of EIOs, with the numbers for 2025 showing that police issued 678 warnings – almost three times fewer than the number of EIOs for that year. In previous years, warnings had outnumbered EIOs by more than two to one. Despite this progress, the fact that these warnings are still being issued, including sometimes contrary to their legal limitation to first-time incidents, indicates that the police response is still not fully aligned with survivor protection needs.

### ***Perpetrator Accountability***

25. The Commissioner heard from civil society representatives that administrative fines are applied in many domestic violence cases. In the rare cases where a prison sentence is applied, this is mostly for serious injury or homicide (as one of the interlocutors put it: 'there is no jail unless stabbing'). UN treaty bodies have called on Armenia to ensure that perpetrators are prosecuted *ex officio* and that police officers who fail to take action or who dissuade victims from filing complaints are held accountable.<sup>24</sup>
26. The Commissioner notes reports that the current criminal law framework is insufficient. Acts of violence between partners are categorised only as generic crimes, such as physical injury or psychological harm, with aggravating circumstances under the Criminal Code.<sup>25</sup> During the visit,

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<sup>19</sup> [Submission](#) to UPR of Armenia, Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women, May 2025, pp. 6-7.

<sup>20</sup> [Communication](#) of NGOs (Rule of Law Empowerment Association; Rights Centre; Women's Support Center; Women's Resource Center; Pink Armenia) to the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers on the execution of Hasmik Khachatryan v. Armenia (no. 11829/16), 2025, p. 3. In this case, the European Court of Human Rights found a violation of Article 3 of the Convention due to Armenia's failure to adequately respond to serious acts of domestic violence inflicted on the applicant by her common-law spouse. The Court found that domestic violence was not criminalised as a separate offence, nor as a specific aggravating element of any other offence, and that the domestic legislation provided no requisite protective measures in the context of domestic violence.

<sup>21</sup> Investigative Committee of Armenia: [Statistics](#) on Crimes Related to Domestic Violence, 2025.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> [Armenia's Path to Ratification of the Istanbul Convention](#): Progress and challenges, Council of Europe, 2025, p. 53.

<sup>24</sup> UN CEDAW [Concluding Observations](#), 2023 (CEDAW /C/ARM/CO/7/Rev.1), para. 25(c); see also: UN CAT [Concluding Observations](#), 2025 (CAT/C/ARM/CO/5), para. 31.

<sup>25</sup> Investigative Committee of Armenia: [Statistics](#) on Crimes Related to Domestic Violence, 2025; Advancing the Domestic Violence Agenda in Armenia, report by Global Rights for Women, January 2025, p. 43; see also: Gap

the Commissioner's attention was drawn to the introduction of a stand-alone offence of domestic violence as a possible solution to better understand, identify and take into account the dynamics of coercion and control in domestic violence.<sup>26</sup> This has also recently been recommended by the UN Working Group on discrimination against women and girls.<sup>27</sup>

### **Compensation**

27. The Commissioner observes that Armenia lacks an effective system for compensating victims of VAW.
28. Even when courts order financial compensation to victims following a perpetrator's criminal conviction, victims often do not receive any payment if the perpetrator lacks the means. In such cases, Armenia does not operate a state scheme to ensure victims are actually compensated.<sup>28</sup>
29. Victims cannot claim non-pecuniary damage from the perpetrator through ordinary civil law proceedings.<sup>29</sup> While legislative reforms are being considered to address this issue, these initiatives remain stalled.<sup>30</sup>

## **2. Structural and Operational Gaps**

### **Shelters and Support Centres**

30. The establishment of shelters and regional support centres for survivors of VAW is a significant achievement. However, the lack of shelters offering overnight stay remains an issue, which results in inadequate shelter for survivors, especially in remote or rural communities. Additionally, while the government has provided some funding, shelters are reliant on private donors, which puts at risk the sustainability of services. The issue of lack of access also concerns the support centres. The Commissioner observes that the current number of support centres and shelters does not comply with Council of Europe standards.<sup>31</sup>
31. There is also a need to improve the inclusiveness of shelters, particularly in terms of accommodating vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities, older persons and refugees. The support and infrastructure are not always adapted to their specific needs.
32. The Commissioner visited a shelter for women survivors of domestic violence near Yerevan. During his visit, the Commissioner was made aware, inter alia, of the lack of state-provided security services and transport for survivors, which makes it necessary for the shelter administration to pay private entities to provide them; the length of stay with the shelter, generally limited to two months, and—while exceptions are possible to ensure survivors' safety—how women are sometimes unable to secure alternative housing to avoid returning to the place where the perpetrator lives. The Commissioner was also informed that state funding covers only around 10% of the shelter's financial needs.
33. The Commissioner observes that support centre staff lack legal standing in proceedings related to domestic violence. Despite their direct knowledge of individual situations and risks, their

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[analysis](#) of Armenian criminal law in light of the standards established by the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, Council of Europe, 2017, pp. 12-14.

<sup>26</sup> [Armenia's Path to Ratification of the Istanbul Convention](#): Progress and challenges, Council of Europe, 2025, p. 39.

<sup>27</sup> UN Working Group on discrimination against women and girls. Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> According to the Istanbul Convention, adequate State compensation shall be awarded to those who have sustained serious bodily injury or impairment of health, to the extent that the damage is not covered by other sources such as the perpetrator, insurance or State-funded health and social provisions (Article 30.2).

<sup>29</sup> [Communication](#) of NGOs (Rule of Law Empowerment Association; Rights Centre; Women's Support Center; Women's Resource Center; Pink Armenia) to the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers on the execution of Hasmik Khachatryan v. Armenia (no. 11829/16), 2025, pp. 5-7.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Council of Europe [standards](#) specify that safe accommodation in specialised women's shelters should be available in every province/region, with one family place per 10,000 women; one rape crisis centre per 200,000 women; and one women's counselling centre for every 50,000 women.

opinion can neither be sought nor formally considered, including for assessing risk and choosing the types of restrictions for the perpetrator when applying protection orders.

### ***Helplines and Legal Aid***

34. Armenia lacks a unified, state-supported 24/7 national helpline for survivors. Existing helplines, run by NGOs with donor support, are fragmented and their accessibility is limited. This hinders rapid support for survivors.
35. Interlocutors informed the Commissioner that many survivors are unable to afford representation. While support centres offer initial legal assistance to survivors, concerns remain about access to legal aid during criminal proceedings since support centres often cannot cover the fees of criminal lawyers and the existing free legal aid system does not meet the needs.

### ***Coordination and Data Gathering***

36. It is commendable that Armenia has designated the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs as a coordination body in the area of domestic violence. However, coordination between law enforcement, justice, social services, and the health sector is reported to still be insufficient. A 2025 study involving survivors, lawyers and police officers examines “the absence of a coordinated approach centred on survivor protection and offender accountability.”<sup>32</sup>
37. Notwithstanding the establishment of a national database on domestic violence, there is still a lack of properly disaggregated data, including on the wider phenomenon of VAW. This makes it difficult to monitor the situation, assess the individual risks presented by perpetrators, diagnose root problems, and develop effective policies to prevent repeat and secondary victimisation.<sup>33</sup>

## **IV. Ratification of the Istanbul Convention**

38. Armenia signed the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention) in 2018 but has not yet ratified it. Nevertheless, the authorities have already aligned some laws and policies with Convention standards.<sup>34</sup>
39. The Commissioner encourages ratification of the Convention to ensure comprehensive protection against VAW. He notes however that the reservations considered by Armenia at the time of signature<sup>35</sup> would limit the Convention’s effect, including regarding state-funded compensation – one of the outstanding issues for survivors of VAW in Armenia (see para. 28).
40. The Commissioner notes how ratification of the Istanbul Convention would subject Armenia to the oversight of the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) which offers robust and ongoing evaluation and could support the authorities in their fight against VAW.
41. The Commissioner observes that ratification has been delayed, in part, due to political considerations and anti-gender campaigns mobilising myths about the Convention. Misinformation, such as false claims about threats to family and national values, has gone largely unchallenged by official actors. The Commissioner points to the need for government-led communication and education efforts to clarify the actual aims of the Convention and to build public trust.

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<sup>32</sup> Advancing the Domestic Violence Agenda in Armenia, report by Global Rights for Women, January 2025, p. 56.

<sup>33</sup> “Repeat victimisation” means a situation in which the same person is a victim of more than one criminal offence over a specific period of time and includes, in particular, situations in which the person is a victim of criminal offences committed by the same offender and situations in which the person is a victim of criminal offences of a similar nature committed by different offenders; “secondary victimisation” is victimisation that occurs not as a direct result of the criminal offence but as a result of the response of public or private institutions and other individuals to the victim (Council of Europe’s Recommendation on rights, services and support for victims of crime ([CM/Rec\(2023\)2](#)), Article 1).

<sup>34</sup> [Armenia’s Path to Ratification of the Istanbul Convention](#): Progress and challenges, Council of Europe, 2025.

<sup>35</sup> [Reservation](#) of 18 January 2018.

42. The Commissioner appreciates the clear commitment of Armenia's officials to ratifying the Istanbul Convention, as conveyed to him in his meetings with the authorities.

## **V. Recommendations**

The Commissioner recommends that the Armenian authorities take the following steps:

1. Ratify the Istanbul Convention without any further delay and without reservations.
2. Carry out public awareness and information campaigns to clarify the aims of the Istanbul Convention and foster zero tolerance for VAW.
3. Further reform police and judicial procedures to ensure effective protection orders, including sanctions for violations of these orders; further limit the use of police warnings in response to domestic violence.
4. Regularly review and adapt survivor protection protocols to minimise trauma and guarantee support for all survivors, including children, older persons, minorities, displaced people, people with disabilities, LGBTI people, and other vulnerable groups.
5. Institutionalise mandatory, VAW survivor-centred, and trauma-informed training for police, judges, prosecutors, and investigators, as well as for those working in social health care and other domains where staff deal with survivors.
6. Ensure the effective investigation and prosecution of VAW; consider introducing a stand-alone crime of domestic violence.
7. Ensure timely access to legal aid for survivors of VAW at every stage of proceedings, including to state-funded representation for those who cannot afford their own.
8. Grant regional support centres legal standing in proceedings related to domestic violence so that they can contribute to the protection of survivors.
9. Expand the number of shelters and regional support centres in line with the Council of Europe standards and increase their funding as needed; ensure access to them for all vulnerable groups such as women with disabilities, children, older women, and women belonging to minorities; provide shelters with state-supported security and transport.
10. Establish a unified, state-supported 24/7 national helpline for survivors of VAW.
11. Continue developing the national database on domestic violence to enable proper individual risk assessment, analysis, and evidence-based policymaking.
12. Introduce a reliable compensation mechanism for survivors of VAW; establish a state-funded compensation scheme for cases where perpetrators lack the means to pay.