



WOMEN AGAINST VIOLENCE EUROPE
WAVE Network and European Info Centre against Violence

WAVE Network Statement on Latvia's Proposed Withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention

The parliamentary vote during the week of October 27, proposed by the opposition party *Latvia First*, supported by the *Greens* and the *Farmers Union*, will determine whether Latvia upholds its commitment to protecting women and children from violence against women or becomes only the second European nation to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention - following Türkiye, where femicides surged after withdrawal.

The proposal has drawn formal opposition from UN bodies, the Council of Europe, European diplomatic missions, and allied parliaments, formally urging Latvia not to proceed.

Women Against Violence Europe (WAVE), representing 190 organisations and over 2,000 women's specialist services across Europe, stands in solidarity with Latvian women, their children, and girls facing a direct threat to their safety and rights.

The Urgent Threat

The opposition party *Latvia First*, supported by the *Greens* and the *Farmers Union*, has introduced legislation to withdraw Latvia from the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence—the Istanbul Convention.

This matters because in 2024 alone, Women Specialist Services in the country, for example, the MARTA Centre, assisted over 800 women, children, and families affected by gender-based violence, each life protected through standards established by the Istanbul Convention. These lives will be endangered if the Convention is withdrawn.

Using fearmongering and deliberately misguided interpretations of the Convention, particularly regarding the term *gender*, these parties are seeking to confuse Latvian society and undermine protections that save lives. Under false



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claims of "protecting" children and family values, they are making it easier for perpetrators to commit acts of gender-based violence against the very families, children, and women they claim to protect. **Protection that benefits perpetrators is not protection: it is impunity.**

What Latvia has Achieved in 18 Months

Latvia ratified the Convention on November 30, 2023, with entry into force on May 1, 2024. In barely 18 months, the Convention has enabled transformative reforms that directly benefit survivors.

The criminal justice system has been fundamentally strengthened through enhanced sanctions for stalking, threats, and violations of protection orders that have transformed previously minor infractions into serious crimes. Perpetrators now face imprisonment or probation rather than fines, representing zero tolerance for violence against women. Alongside these enhanced sanctions, an electronic monitoring system for high-risk perpetrators has been introduced, enabling authorities to track offenders who pose the greatest danger to their victims and protect women and children at greatest risk.

For the first time in Latvia's legal history, the Criminal Code now establishes direct liability for emotional violence, providing legal recourse for psychological abuse that was previously difficult to prosecute. This landmark development acknowledges that violence is not limited to physical harm but encompasses psychological abuse that can be equally devastating to victims. By criminalising emotional violence, Latvia has recognised the full spectrum of harm that survivors endure.

Perhaps most importantly, Latvia has adopted its first comprehensive National Action Plan on combating violence against women and domestic violence, coordinating government ministries, law enforcement, social services, and civil society organisations. This represents a shift from fragmented responses to a coherent, evidence-based strategy addressing the 25.1% of Latvian women and girls who have experienced this type of violence, according to the EIGE-FRA survey¹.

¹ This percentage refers to women in Latvia who have experienced physical violence or threats and/or sexual violence by any perpetrator in their lifetime. For more detailed information, see the European



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These reforms address violence against women and girls, which affects 1 in 4 women in Latvia, by providing systematic, coordinated protection rather than fragmented responses.

The Misinformation Campaign

The Convention addresses violence against women because such violence is rooted in gender inequality—the structural discrimination placing women at greater risk. The term "gender" refers to socially constructed roles and expectations, not biological sex. This distinction is critical for understanding why violence against women requires specific, targeted measures.

What the Convention does NOT do:

- It does not mandate changes to marriage, family, or adoption law. Latvia's ratification declaration explicitly protects constitutional provisions on family.
- Article 14 encourages teaching materials on non-violent relationships and mutual respect—not content about sexual orientation or gender identity. It asks that young people learn that violence is unacceptable and that healthy relationships are built on respect.
- It imposes no external obligations without consent. Latvia participated in drafting through its Council of Europe representatives. The decisions to sign (2016) and ratify (2023) were sovereign choices by Latvia's elected representatives.

European Isolation and a Cautionary Tale

The proposed withdrawal contradicts European Union policy. The EU ratified the Istanbul Convention in 2023 and adopted its Directive on combating violence against women in May 2024, which **Latvia must transpose into national law by June 2027**. This Directive builds upon the Istanbul Convention's standards, creating a comprehensive legal framework across the EU.



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Parliament is debating withdrawal from the treaty providing the foundation for these EU obligations, at the precise moment when the country should focus on implementing its National Action Plan and preparing for Directive transposition. This represents an active undermining of Latvia's European commitments.

The scale of international concern is unprecedented: the Chair of the UN CEDAW Committee, the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, the Parliament of Ukraine, and nine European Ambassadors stationed in Latvia have all intervened with formal statements urging Parliament not to proceed. **This extraordinary mobilisation of international actors—spanning UN bodies, European institutions, allied parliaments, and diplomatic missions—underscores the seriousness with which the international community views this potential departure from established international law and human rights standards.** The breadth of opposition reveals that Latvia's withdrawal would not be a quiet domestic policy shift, but rather a conspicuous break with the European and international human rights framework.

Withdrawal would signal to European institutions and international human rights bodies that Latvia does not share the EU's commitment to gender equality and ending violence against women. This isolation would damage Latvia's standing and credibility across all forums, placing Latvia outside the community of European nations committed to the highest standards of women's rights protection.

Should this institutional move forward, Latvia would become only the second Council of Europe country to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention, following Turkey in 2021. Turkey's withdrawal offers a stark warning. According to data from the *We Will Stop Femicide Platform*, femicides in Türkiye increased from 280 women in 2020 to 342-474 women in 2021, the year of withdrawal. Nearly 2,000 women have been murdered or died under suspicious circumstances since Türkiye's 2021 withdrawal. The pattern is clear: **withdrawal from the Convention directly endangers women's lives.**

Consequences of Withdrawal

Immediate impacts for survivors would be severe and far-reaching. Reforms achieved since May 2024 would lose their international legal foundation, while



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coordinated inter-institutional approaches would weaken. The national action plan would lose its framework and accountability mechanisms, and international monitoring through GREVIO would cease.

Most critically, withdrawal would send a devastating message to survivors: that their safety is negotiable, that their protection depends on political calculations rather than human rights principles, and that the state's commitment to ending violence against women is conditional and reversible. This erosion of trust discourages victims from reporting violence and seeking help when they most need protection.

Civil Society Mobilisation

We acknowledge and applaud the extraordinary mobilisation of Latvian civil society. Multiple protests, led by women's rights advocates, have drawn hundreds of participants, and over 10,000 citizens have signed a petition urging Parliament to reject withdrawal. This groundswell demonstrates that the Convention's protection of women and children resonates deeply with Latvian society.

WAVE recognises the leadership of our member organisations, the **MARTA Centre**, the **Krīžu un Konsultāciju Centrs "Skalbes"**, and **Latvijas Sieviešu nevalstisko organizāciju sadarbības tīkls**, which provide frontline support and unparalleled insight into the Convention's life-saving importance. We stand with them and all Latvian women's rights defenders who continue to speak truth to power.

WAVE's Call to Action

As a pan-European network of 190 organisations representing over 2,000 women's specialist services, WAVE speaks with the authority of Europe's leading expertise in combating violence against women.

We call on the Latvian Parliament to vote NO on the de-ratification, thus reaffirming Latvia's commitment to the Istanbul Convention.

We urge the Latvian Parliament, the Ministry of Welfare, and all responsible authorities to genuinely listen to and engage with the expertise of Latvian women's rights organisations, feminist civil society, and specialist service providers who work daily on the front lines of violence prevention and survivor support. These organisations are not simply stakeholders to be consulted; they are



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essential partners whose knowledge must meaningfully shape decisions affecting women's safety and rights.

We urge Latvia's government to recognise the evidence-based achievements already realised through the Convention's implementation. The voices of survivors and service providers who understand firsthand the critical importance of the Convention's protections must be heard and valued in this debate. Public discourse must be grounded in facts rather than misinformation about the Convention's purpose and requirements.

The parliamentary vote expected during the week of October 27 will determine not only Latvia's legal commitments but also its standing within the European Union. The Istanbul Convention is not a threat to Latvian values; it is a tool to realise them. It does not undermine families; it protects them from violence. It does not impose foreign ideology; it operationalises universal human rights principles that Latvia has long endorsed.

WAVE will continue to support our Latvian members and amplify their voices as they advocate for women's rights. Their agency, expertise, and leadership must be recognised and respected by decision-makers. We stand ready to work with them, with European institutions, and with the international community to ensure that Latvia upholds its obligations to women and girls.

**Feminist solidarity is our strength. Collective action is our strategy.
Women's liberation is our goal.**

The WAVE Network

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