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# 16 Days of Activism

“Turn off violence against  
women and girls”

November 2020 – March 2021

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# Introduction

## Global 16 Days of Activism Campaign

The 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence is an annual international campaign that kicks off on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and runs until 10 December, the Human Rights Day. It was started by activists at the inaugural Women’s Global Leadership Institute in 1991. It is used as an organizing strategy by individuals and organizations around the world to call for the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls (EVAW).

In support of this civil society initiative, under the leadership of the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, the United Nations Secretary-General’s UNiTE by 2030 to End Violence against Women campaign<sup>1</sup> calls for global actions to increase awareness, galvanize advocacy efforts, and share knowledge and innovations.

In 2020, the campaign was part of UN Women’s efforts to launch bold new actions and commitments to end violence against women at the [Generation Equality Forum](#) in Mexico and France in 2021 under the global theme, **“Orange the World: Fund, Respond, Prevent, Collect!”**.

The UN Women’s [Generation Equality campaign](#) is amplifying the call for global action to bridge funding gaps, ensure essential services for survivors of violence during the COVID-19 crisis, focus on prevention, and collection of data that can improve life-saving services for women and girls.



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1 UNiTE by 2030 to End Violence against Women campaign. More information: <http://bit.ly/3cC3unT>

## A Shadow Pandemic

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Prior to COVID-19, the prevalence of violence against women (VAW) was already alarmingly high. In the area of domestic violence (DV) alone, nearly one in five women (18%) globally experienced violence in the past 12 months at the hands of an intimate male partner<sup>2</sup>. While important efforts have been made prior to COVID-19 to eliminate violence against women and girls, shifting of social attitudes and behaviors which enable violence, especially in the context of COVID-19, is an increasingly urgent priority.

Evidence from service providers suggests that rates of domestic abuse have increased in the context of the COVID-19 lockdowns, as women and girls are trapped with abusers and services that they rely on have been shut down<sup>3</sup>. The coronavirus pandemic continues to place a burden on women exposed to violence and support mechanisms in place, requiring an even stronger and louder response. Given these challenges, support of all members of society is crucial to show that survivors of violence are not alone.

## Turn off violence against women and girls

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Under the global 16 Days of Activism campaign, the UN Women Bosnia and Herzegovina local campaign “Turn off violence against women and girls”, for the fifth year in a row, took place from 25 November to 10 December 2020, with an extended element of the campaign lasting until the end of March 2021. The overall objective of the campaign in 2020 was to increase awareness regarding the impact and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and girls victims of violence, focusing on the UNiTE global campaign themes – Prevent and Respond.

The local campaign was a two-fold effort and took place through an umbrella campaign – implemented from 25 November to 10 December 2020 through public events, activities with the media and a social media campaign; and a tailor-made campaign with 11 local newsrooms in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which started in December 2020, and ended in March 2021. The goal was to ensure that VAW is part of the public discourse beyond these 16 Days. The campaign featured a wide participation of gender mechanisms, CSOs, international community, and the media.

The campaign endeavored to emphasize the role of communities during the crisis (and beyond) in combating VAW, while promoting examples of positive support to women survivors by the public, media and CSOs.



***“We see a shadow pandemic growing, of violence against women.”***

**PHUMZILE MLAMBO-NGCUKA**  
UN Women Executive Director

Photo: Kea Taylor

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<sup>2</sup> UN Women: COVID-19 and ending violence against women and girls. More information: <http://bit.ly/3tm0ltg>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid



# Turn Off Violence Against Women and Girls – The Umbrella Campaign

## Opening Event

The campaign “Turn off violence against women and girls” was initiated on 24 November with a hybrid event (a combination of a physical event and a Zoom webinar). Along with keynote opening speeches, an online panel discussion took place, on the influence of the pandemic on gender-based violence survivors, especially from the perspective of access to services.

Introductory speeches were made by: H.E. Johanna Strömquist, Ambassador of Sweden to BiH; John Kennedy Mosoti, UNFPA Representative in BiH, Country Director for the Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia, and Director for Kosovo (UNSCR 1244); and David Saunders, UN Women BiH Representative.

After the introductory speeches, a panel discussion “Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violence against women” was held, with the participation of Joško Mandić, Expert Advisor at the BiH Agency for Gender Equality of the BiH Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees; Jasmina Mujezinović, Executive Director of the Foundation for Local Democracy from Sarajevo; and Radmila Žigić, Director of the Foundation “Lara” from Bijeljina. The event was moderated by journalist Marina Riđić.

About 70 attendees followed the event via Zoom. Also, the event was broadcast live on Facebook. A recording of the opening event is available [here](#).



Opening event of 16 Days of Activism, 24 November 2020, Sarajevo

Photo: UN Women Bosnia and Herzegovina/Masha Durkalic

## Introductory Speeches

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*“We cannot just accept the increased violence against women. We need an international discussion on how we can build back better and build for the future.”*

JOHANNA STRÖMQUIST,  
Ambassador of Sweden to BiH

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*“Violence against women and girls must be a priority in COVID-19 response plans. Governments must at least maintain existing budget lines for specialized services in support of survivors. Violence will only increase as economic crisis deepens.”*

DAVID SAUNDERS,  
UN Women BiH Representative

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*“Violence against women and girls does not emanate from nowhere. It is simply the most extreme example of political, financial, social, and economic oppression of women and girls worldwide. Ending this violence is central to our efforts to empower women and girls and to build back stronger and better, fairer, and more inclusive.”*

JOHN KENNEDY MOSOTI,  
UNFPA Representative in BiH,  
Country Director for the Republic of North  
Macedonia and Serbia, and Director for Kosovo  
(UNSCR 1244)

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## Panel discussion “Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violence against women”



*“The media should extend their questions on violence against women from CSOs to all other institutions which are responsible for providing protection to the victims under the law – the police, centers for social work, prosecutors’ offices, centers for legal aid, government, as we are all responsible for protecting victims of violence. The conditions of the pandemic have contributed to a situation in which a huge responsibility has been assigned exclusively to CSOs providing specialized support to survivors.”*

**RADMILA ŽIGIĆ,**  
Director of Foundation  
“Lara” from Bijeljina

*“The funds which safe houses received during the pandemic were welcome, as we lacked resources, while the need to provide help was increasing. However, the financing of safe houses needs to be resolved, especially in the Federation of BiH, where we still don’t have a legal framework which would enable founding and financing of safe houses.”*

**JASMINA MUJEZINOVIĆ,**  
Executive Director of Foundation  
for Local Democracy from  
Sarajevo

*“Since the pandemic started, the Agency for Gender Equality of BiH has kept up regular communication with all institutional and other partners, including CSOs. We also issued recommendations to all relevant institutions, line ministries and crisis teams to include the gender perspective in all measures, including eliminating violence against women. In addition, we created an intervention plan of measures, part of them targeting certain institutions providing protection from domestic violence in order to strengthen their capacities in responding to an increase in violence and in maintaining the necessary services during the pandemic.”*

**JOŠKO MANDIĆ,**  
Expert Advisor at the BiH Agency  
for Gender Equality of the BiH  
Ministry of Human Rights and  
Refugees

## Social Media Campaign

The social media campaign was implemented on UN Women BiH social networks - [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#).

The campaign featured eight bilingual photo statements and three videos of representatives of the CSO sector, service providers, the media, and the international community. With their statements, the protagonists emphasized the importance of joint action in preventing violence against women, especially during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thousands of persons were reached with the campaign messages through the social media campaign, and accompanying collaboration with the media.

SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN  
20 NOVEMBER - 10 DECEMBER 2020

 22,8K views

 7,8K reach

 26,4K impressions



Amidst COVID-19, staying at home is the safest choice, unless you are one of the all too many women who experience violence at home. Authorities must ensure all citizens are protected. Combatting gender-based violence **requires maintaining services** that are the lifeline for survivors of domestic violence – especially at present, when there are few other places to escape to.

Johann Sattler, EU Ambassador to BiH



Crises regularly cause havoc. This is also the case with the coronavirus pandemic. One of the worst is violence against women, because the fight against the virus has burdened both the system and the media. We must show that the system works and does **not forgive violence**.

Sandra Gojković-Arbutina, Editor-in-Chief of Nezavisne novine



The COVID-19 pandemic pointed to numerous shortcomings of the institutional and systematic response to violence against women. Women and girls were faced with **constant control** by perpetrators of violence and inability to seek help.

Aleksandra Petrić, Executive Director of the Foundation "United Women" from Banja Luka



The number of reports of cases of domestic violence has increased **three to four times** in the last eight months. A large number of new cases of violence has been registered, which indicates that the crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic is influencing the increase in violence.

Ognjen Đurđić, police officer from East Sarajevo



*“We know that women are the backbone of the Sustainable Development Goals. Unless we ensure the support is provided to women survivors of violence, we risk sliding back decades of progress that has been made.”*

**INGRID MACDONALD,**  
**UN Resident Coordinator in BiH**

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*“While authorities are calling on people to stay in their homes, which are declared as the safest places during the coronavirus pandemic, we must not allow those same authorities to turn their backs on those who will find themselves locked inside their homes with perpetrators.”*

**ARDUANA PRIBINJA,**  
**Al Jazeera Balkans reporter**

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*“Violence against women and girls in BiH was a cause for concern even before the pandemic. But in the current health crisis, the number of cases of domestic violence has increased. These women and girls need protection. In BiH, authorities at all levels, service providers, civil society, the media, the international community and private companies, must join forces.”*

**MATT FIELD,**  
**Ambassador of the  
United Kingdom to BiH**

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## Collaboration with the media

During the campaign, UN Women cooperated with a variety of national and local media that supported the campaign. The BiH media provided support to the campaign through regular reporting on campaign activities, but also through dedicated reporting on VAW in 11 communities in BiH. The challenges faced

by service providers during the coronavirus pandemic were communicated to the public in the form of interviews with members of local multisectoral teams. The momentum was used to highlight the importance of availability of institutional support to survivors during the crisis.



A total of **117 media announcements** were generated.



### Orange the media

To mark the beginning of the campaign “Turn off violence against women and girls together” and raise awareness on VAW, national and local TV and print media were engaged in the “Orange the media” activity. Specifically, the hosts of five TV media outlets wore “Turn off violence” badges during 11 TV shows which were used to announce the start of the campaign, and three print media outlets branded their cover pages with the campaign logo.

### Pledge on responsible reporting on gender-based violence

As a part of a collaboration with the media, a Pledge for Responsible Reporting on Gender-Based Violence was created. This Pledge calls on BiH media to join the efforts regarding responsible and professional reporting on gender-based violence against women and girls, especially during the COVID-19 crisis. The online pledge was presented during the final event of the campaign and was available for signing by BiH media representatives, editors, and journalists.



BY THE END OF MARCH 2021,  
A TOTAL OF **56 MEDIA PROFESSIONALS** SIGNED THE PLEDGE  
FOR RESPONSIBLE REPORTING ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE.

## Closing Event

An online panel discussion “The role of media in preventing violence against women” was held on 10 December 2020. The aim of the panel discussion was to highlight the importance of responsible reporting on gender-based violence, especially in the context of the COVID-19 crisis.

During the event, in addition to presenting the results of the campaign, the Pledge for Responsible Reporting on Gender-Based Violence was also presented. Media outlets in BiH were invited to join the cause by signing the Pledge. This also marked the beginning of UN Women intensified efforts to work with the media in 11 local communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina on VAW prevention.

The panel discussion was marked by an introductory address by Torgny Svenungsson, Head of Development Cooperation and Deputy Head of Mission at the Embassy of Sweden, and David Saunders, UN Women BiH Representative. Elvira Jukić-Mujkić, editor-in-chief of the Media.ba portal; Katarina Panić, journalist of Srna news agency; and Dijana Tepšić, founder and editor of the online magazine Ultra.ba, participated in the panel discussion. The event was moderated by journalist Hana Sokolović.

About 50 attendees followed the event via Zoom, which was also broadcast through Facebook. A recording of the opening event is available [here](#).

### Introductory speeches



*“All members of society need to be part of this continuous effort to combat violence against women. The media have a central and important role in this process. People read news, they watch TV, they are active on social media. The media have a substantial influence on public opinion on these issues. So, obviously responsible media reporting is crucial when it comes to preventing violence and eliminating harmful stereotypes that affect violence against women and girls.”*

**TORGNY SVENUNGSSON,**  
Head of Development Cooperation and Deputy  
Head of Mission at the Embassy of Sweden



*“The media have a crucial role in shaping public discourse. They shape our perceptions, our priorities. Professional reporting that does not sensationalize but brings the facts to our attention is a real social good. This is especially important when reporting on sensitive topics such as violence against women and girls.”*

**DAVID SAUNDERS,**  
UN Women BiH Representative

Panel discussion  
"The role of the media in preventing violence against women"

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*"The media have a crucial role in shaping the awareness of the public on violence against women and girls in BiH because of the way they report on it, and the audiences they are reaching. Media reporting can't stop gender-based violence, but it can contribute to a wider action in society to tackle it."*

ELVIRA JUKIĆ MUJKIĆ,  
editor-in-chief of the Media.ba web portal

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*"Both the media and institutions should work on making better use of their capacities. The media think that institutions make it hard to get information, and the constant reproach to the media is that they report periodically and in a sensational way. Both sides have a responsibility to use their capacities."*

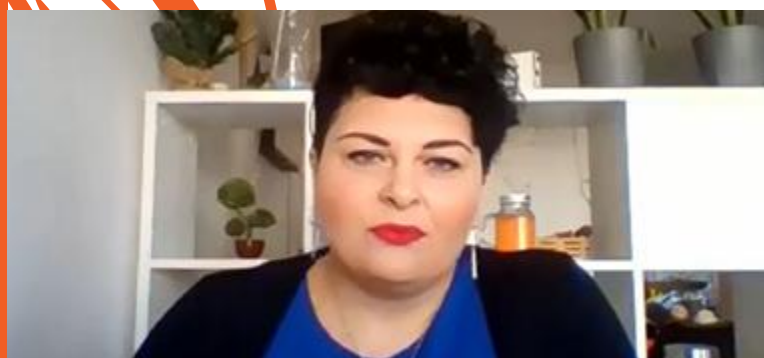
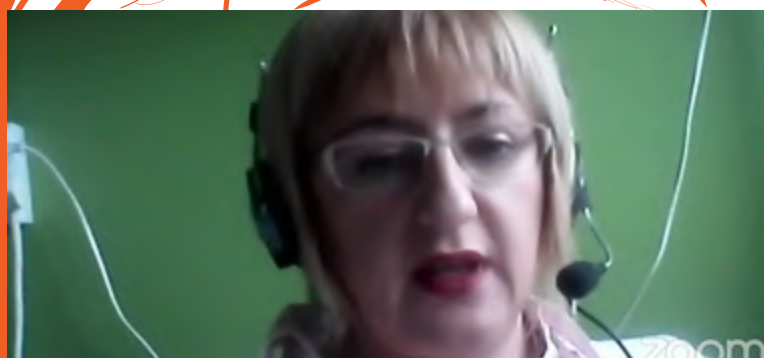
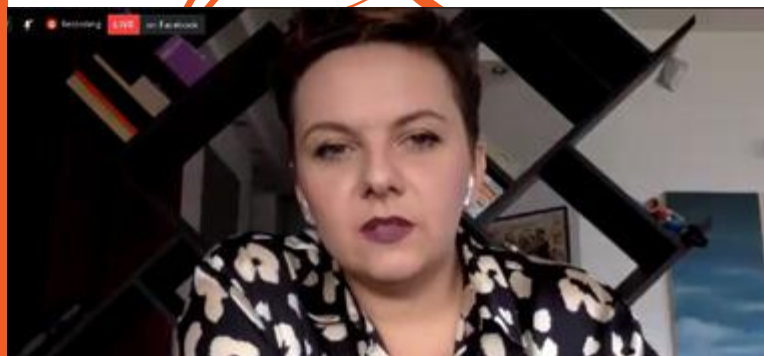
KATARINA PANIĆ,  
journalist of Srna news agency

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*"The media have a great responsibility regarding the way in which prejudice and stereotypes are represented in their reporting on domestic violence and violence against women, as well as gender equality. It is important to talk about violence on a daily basis, to emphasize positive examples of women and men who are breaking stereotypes and prejudices. All of this leads to a decrease of gender inequality and to prevention and elimination of violence against women."*

DIJANA TEPŠIĆ,  
founder and editor of the online magazine Ultra.ba

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## Local campaigns across BiH

Having in mind that the work with local media in the prevention of VAW and DV is of utmost importance – as they are the closest to local communities, to professionals who work in response to violence, and to survivors – UN Women reached out to 11 media outlets across the country to strengthen their role in the prevention of VAW. Engaged journalists welcomed the opportunity to increase their knowledge, as this topic is rarely available through formal education.

Local newsrooms from 11 local communities participated in the project (Istočno Sarajevo, Sokolac, Prijedor, Derventa, Zvornik, Livno, Brčko, Travnik, Novi Travnik, Gornji Vakuf/Uskoplje, Goražde).



The media professionals participated in trainings on responsible reporting on VAW. In order to further strengthen their role in the prevention of VAW, discussions with the local service providers - members of the local teams providing support to women survivors of violence – were organized. All multisectoral teams recognized the importance of working with local media outlets, emphasizing that sensitized and trained media professionals can positively influence how society perceives VAW. These discussions led to the development of tailor-made plans for enhanced cooperation between the media and multisectoral teams in these communities.

As a part of this cooperation, the local media newsrooms contributed to the campaign by developing high quality and innovative content addressing different aspects of VAW in the period from December 2020 to March 2021.

Each media outlet contextualized this topic within their community and, where appropriate, had at least one community leader / local prominent figure pledging to act as an agent of change in promoting zero tolerance to VAW and DV.

A final event, bringing together members of multisectoral teams and journalists, took place on 12 March 2021, and was an opportunity to summarize the results of the work initiated in November 2020. After a round of extensive consultations with all parties involved, representatives of multisectoral teams and media outlets reflected on their approach, starting points, and ways forward toward active and constructive collaboration in the area of prevention of violence against women in their communities. Some of the conclusions highlighted the need to further enhance the education on this topic within local communities, as well as the need to continue campaigning for the prevention of VAW among members of local communities, especially youth.





## Joint Initiative of UNHCR, UNFPA and UN Women

The COVID-19 pandemic influences the increase of gender-based violence globally. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the already concerning migration crisis, coupled with restrictive movement measures, especially those in place in reception centers for migrants, asylum-seekers, and refugees, increase the possibility of occurrence of gender-based violence.

To tackle this topic, UNHCR and UNFPA joined the UN Women campaign “Turn off violence against women and girls”. Along with its implementing partner, Foundation BHWI, and in collaboration with UN Women and UNFPA, UNHCR ensured the availability of preventive messaging through 400 posters translated in six key languages (English, Urdu, Pashto, Farsi, Arabic and Kurdish).

The posters were placed across eight reception centers and other relevant places in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They highlighted that violence should never be tolerated and should always be reported to the relevant staff in the centers.

Furthermore, UNHCR and its partner, Foundation BHWI, organized workshops in three reception centers (TRC Ušivak, RRC Salakovac and AC Delijaš) with the aim to engage women, girls and men in meaningful discussions related to combating gender-based violence and produce meaningful messaging for wider center communities.



Photo:UNHCR Bosnia and Herzegovina



# Impact of COVID-19 on Domestic Violence in BiH

## Global impact

Violence against women globally increased as the COVID-19 pandemic, combined with economic and social stress and measures, restricted contact, and movement. Crowded homes, substance abuse, limited access to services and reduced peer support are exacerbating these conditions.<sup>4</sup>

Many women were trapped in their homes with the abusers, without access to private spaces; thus, many women struggled to make a call or to seek help online.<sup>5</sup> Inequities are a leading risk factor for violence against women, as violence disproportionately affects women living in low- and lower-middle-income countries. An estimated 37% of women living in the poorest countries have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in their life, with some of these countries having a prevalence as high as 1 in 2.<sup>6</sup>

Service providers noticed an increase in frequency and intensity of violence. This included an increase in psychological and physical violence, as well as economic violence and control. Some organizations reported that their beneficiaries indicated that violence became more intense after the pandemic outbreak in the Western Balkans and Turkey.<sup>7</sup>

## Impact in Bosnia and Herzegovina

In 2019, before the pandemic, it was estimated that nearly 1 out of 2 women experienced violence during their lifetime in BiH.<sup>8</sup>

In March 2020, UN Women in BiH assessed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the provision of specialized support services (shelters, SOS helplines, psychosocial support, and free legal aid) by CSOs running safe houses in BiH. The assessment focused on the major challenges faced by the eight safe houses in BiH during the COVID-19 crisis and the immediate needs in terms of support to be able to keep providing these services.<sup>9</sup>

At the beginning of the pandemic, the capacities of service providers were limited since first responders (police, healthcare, and the centers for social welfare) were actively engaged in the state of emergency. It was not possible to identify and support children potentially exposed to violence because educational institutions were closed. Moreover, the centers for social welfare were working at limited capacity and were only able to process urgent social care cases. Health institutions have drastically reduced public access to general services because of the restrictions on movement, lack of basic personal protective equipment and restricted public transportation. Finally, multi-sector coordination at the local level has been reduced significantly.<sup>10</sup>

4 Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women. UN Women, April 2020, p. 17. Read more: <https://bit.ly/3eH6JJa>

5 Ibid, p. 17

6 Press Release: Devastatingly pervasive: 1 in 3 women globally experience violence. Read more: <http://bit.ly/3tiH7Kl>

7 Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on specialist services for victims and survivors of violence in the Western Balkans and Turkey. UN Women, 2020, p. 52.

8 OSCE: Well-Being and Safety of Women: Bosnia and Herzegovina Results Report. Read more: <http://bit.ly/3qJytU1>

9 Focus on Gender Bosnia and Herzegovina, Protection from Domestic Violence and Violence against Women and the Impact and the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic, Issue 1, p.6. Read more: <https://bit.ly/33YZr1Q>

10 Ibid, p.7



# Promoting Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in Europe and Central Asia - Summary of the Istanbul Convention

## What is the Istanbul Convention?

In 2005, member states of the Council of Europe launched a large-scale campaign on the issue of violence against women in Europe. It highlighted the need for harmonized legal standards to ensure the same level of protection for victims everywhere in Europe. This led to the development of a human rights mechanism to combat and prevent violence against women – the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, also referred to as the Istanbul Convention.<sup>11</sup> The Istanbul Convention is the first international treaty to contain a definition of gender as “a socially constructed category” that defines “women” and “men” according to socially assigned roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes. It firmly establishes the link between achieving gender equality and the eradication of violence against women. Based on this premise, it recognizes the structural nature of violence against women and that it is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between women and men. The Convention entered into force on 1 August 2014. So far, 46 member states of the Council of Europe (EU and non-EU countries) signed the Convention, and 33 ratified it. The European Union signed the Convention on 13 June 2017. In BiH the Istanbul Convention entered into force on 1 August 2014.

### 4 PILLARS OF THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION



PREVENTION



PROTECTION



PROSECUTION



INTEGRATED POLICIES

## UN Women BiH work on combating VAW and DV in BiH

Since 2016, UN Women has intensified its efforts on strengthening institutional and social response mechanisms to combat VAW and DV in BiH. With the support of Sweden and the European Union, and in collaboration with the governmental institutions and civil society organizations, UN Women aims to harmonize the legal and policy frameworks with the Istanbul Convention, and strengthen the protection system by improving availability, accessibility and quality of multisectoral services for survivors of domestic violence and violence against women, especially those from marginalized groups (Roma women, women with disabilities, women from rural areas etc.). Alongside the work on an enabling normative and protection environment, UN Women focuses also on working with men, women and youth in changing their attitudes and beliefs about gender stereotypes and violence against women. This work also includes strengthening the role of the media and religious leaders in preventing VAW. The emphasis is placed on strengthening the role of local communities to actively contribute to increasing awareness and changing harmful attitudes that perpetuate violence.

<sup>11</sup> Promoting Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in ECA  
Advocating for the ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention. Read more: <https://bit.ly/3s1CdBP>







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[www.unwomen.org](http://www.unwomen.org)  
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