

The Rt Hon Caroline Nokes
Chair, Women and Equalities
Committee

By email only

From: Baroness Kishwer Falkner,
Chairwoman

Our ref: 20240307Nokes

Thursday 07 March 2024

Dear Caroline Nokes,

Violence against women and girls

I am writing to bring your attention to our comprehensive report, published today, analysing the UK and Welsh Governments' performance upholding the Istanbul Convention. In particular, we would like to highlight some of its recommendations relevant to your committee. We have published [our analysis of the Istanbul Convention](#) on our website.

The Istanbul Convention

As you know, the UK Government ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence ('the Istanbul Convention') in July 2022. As such, the UK and Welsh Governments are now bound by international law to act to protect women and girls from violence. This includes prevention activities, prosecuting those responsible, and safeguarding survivors.

As an A-status National Human Rights Institution, we have supported the Council of Europe experts on violence against women and girls' ('GREVIO') who are conducting the 'baseline evaluation' of the UK's implementation of the

Convention. We look forward to reviewing their final recommendations.

Given your important role scrutinising work in this area, we invite you to consider our recommendations for change. We would be happy to meet to discuss the issues raised in our report.

We welcome both governments' ambitious targets to improve women and girls' safety, and their focus on driving improvements. However, there is still work to do to make these targets a reality for women and girls. We have outlined some of our recommendations here.

Violence perpetrated by the police

We consider it a priority that the Government take further action on the prevalence of violence against women and girls (VAWG) perpetrated by the police. As the Domestic Abuse Commissioner has recommended, this should include ensuring the removal of warrant cards from police officers who are under investigation for crimes relating to violence against women and girls; and statutory recognition that VAWG convictions should automatically constitute gross misconduct.

Access to domestic abuse refuges

Our work has also highlighted the need to ensure the accessibility of domestic abuse refuges for disabled women. In 2021/22, just 1.1% of refuge vacancies listed on the UK-wide database were suitable for a woman with limited mobility. Just 0.9% could provide wheelchair accessible space. We are calling on the UK and Welsh Governments to work in collaboration with specialist 'by and for' disabled people's organisations to address these concerns, and for data to be

Arndale House, The Arndale Centre
Manchester, M4 3AQ

equalityhumanrights.com

published annually on progress to improve accessibility.

Protection for migrant victims of VAWG

Migrant victims of VAWG are particularly marginalised and in need of further protection to ensure their right to equal treatment under the Istanbul Convention is upheld. We have concerns about access to support services for some migrant victims of VAWG, and the impact of information sharing on their ability to report experiences of VAWG to the police.

In light of its obligations under the Istanbul Convention, we propose that the UK Government end the sharing of an individual's personal data for the purposes of immigration enforcement if the data was collected while the person was accessing essential public services (including education, healthcare and policing).

Finally, the UK Government should also remove its reservation to Article 59 of the Convention, to ensure that victims whose residence status depends upon that of their spouse or partner receive adequate protection.

Do let us know if you are happy to meet and we will be in touch to arrange a suitable time.

Yours sincerely,



Arndale House, The Arndale Centre
Manchester, M4 3AQ

equalityhumanrights.com

Baroness Kishwer Falkner of Margravine
Chairwoman
Equality and Human Rights Commission |