

Türkiye's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention and its impact on women's rights

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Türkiye's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention accurately depicted the growing tension between progressive human rights frameworks and rising authoritarian, conservative politics within the nation. It has actively demonstrated and symbolized the value of human rights compared to political interests, and has left the women and young girls of Türkiye deprived of their rights and hope for a better future. The withdrawal has had a significant impact on women's rights specifically. This article elaborates on the Istanbul Convention, Türkiye's withdrawal from it, and its impact on women.

The Istanbul Convention

The Istanbul Convention, also known as the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, is an international human rights treaty that determines the basic standards for violence against women, domestic violence, and the obligations of states in this regard. It was formed by the Council of Europe on April 7th, 2011, and signed by 45 countries alongside the European Union (EU) on April 11th, 2011, in Istanbul, Türkiye. According to the Kadın Cinayetlerini Durdurma Platformu (KCDP)(also known as the We Will Stop Femicide Platform), 2011-2012 were the only years between 2010–2019 when femicide rates declined, coinciding with the ratification of the Istanbul Convention in Türkiye. The Istanbul Convention legally binds the contracting states and is the first international regulation of a binding nature that characterizes violence against women as a human rights violation and a form of discrimination. The convention defines and criminalises various forms of violence against women, obliges states to establish appropriate support services and invest in needed fields such as awareness-raising campaigns and treatment programmes

for perpetrators, addresses asylum and migration, etc. A two-pillar monitoring mechanism has been established for the Istanbul Convention, consisting of an independent expert body (GREVIO) and a Committee of the Parties for effective and proper implementation. GREVIO draws up reports on the themes of the Convention, while the Committee of the Parties follow up on GREVIO reports and make recommendations to the parties and states involved.

Türkiye's Withdrawal and Its Impact on Women's Rights

Prior to the withdrawal, Türkiye ratified the convention in 2012, and on March 20th, 2021, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Türkiye's President, announced the country's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention by presidential decree, which is a procedure many experts in Türkiye consider unconstitutional. The reasoning for Türkiye's spurious withdrawal was (according to Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the president of Türkiye at that time and currently) that the Istanbul Convention "normalizes homosexuality", and that that was "incompatible with Türkiye's social and family values". Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has also previously stated that men and women were not biologically created as equals and that a woman's priority should be her family and motherhood. "At a time when femicide and other forms of violence against women are on the rise in the country, Türkiye should not step back and reduce its tools to fight against this scourge," stated Dunja Mijatović, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, along with Secretary General Marija Pejcinovic Buric, who said "This move is a huge setback to these efforts and all the more deplorable because it compromises the protection of women in Turkey, across Europe and beyond,"

This shameful act of Türkiye caused a rage of protest throughout the nation for women's and LGBTQ+ rights. In Istanbul, the location where the convention was held, people gathered for a protest under the slogan "You'll never walk alone." The withdrawal of the Istanbul Convention meant lost hope and an ongoing feeling of fear for all women in Türkiye. During the uprise of protests and demonstrations in Türkiye, particularly in 2021, KCDP's secretary general, Fidan Ataselim, said "millions of women" could not be ignored, imprisoned, effaced, or silenced, and tweeted "Withdraw the decision, implement the convention.", which became a widely used slogan throughout the protests along with signs that read "I don't want to die" which were the last words spoken by Emine Bulut, who died in a cafe in Kirikkale, Türkiye after her husband slit her throat in front of her 10 year old daughter in 2019. According to the KCDP, 2011-2012 were the only years between 2010–2019 when femicide rates declined, coinciding with the ratification of the Istanbul Convention in Türkiye. The absence of the Istanbul Convention has weakened the mechanisms designed to protect women, undermined legal protections for women, and created an environment where women feel less empowered to report abuse. Post-withdrawal, Türkiye recorded its highest ever number of femicides, with 394 women murdered by men, showing a significant and terrifying increase since.

Conclusion

Türkiye's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention marks a dangerous deterioration in the fight for women's rights. It is a direct symbol and reflection of the prioritization of political ideology over women's rights. The erosion of legal protections, the rise in femicides, and widespread fear among women are the direct consequences of the withdrawal decision made by Erdoğan. Türkiye has directly

removed itself from a critical international framework mainly designed to combat violence and discrimination against women. Due to the absurd choices made by the current government, protests have significantly and rapidly erupted throughout Türkiye, mainly in Istanbul, remembering the horrific femicides committed and making sure women's voices are heard loud and clear, even with a misogynistic president.

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