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# ENERGY POVERTY AND GENDERED VIOLENCE

RECOGNISING ENERGY POVERTY AS A GENDERED  
RISK IN THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION

REPORT

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# Report Digest – Recognizing Energy Poverty as a Gendered Risk in the Istanbul Convention

## Background

The Istanbul Convention is Europe's most comprehensive legal framework for preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. Yet, it omits a critical driver of gender-based vulnerability: energy poverty. Energy poverty is not gender-neutral. Women are more likely to face it due to lower wages, greater caregiving responsibilities, and entrenched gender roles. It restricts their autonomy, worsens health outcomes, and increases dependence on abusive partners. Inadequate heating, lighting, and cooking facilities can also heighten risks of domestic violence, as confirmed by global research linking economic hardship and environmental stressors to increased abuse rates.

## Problem definition

- EU data shows energy poverty rates have nearly doubled since 2021, disproportionately affecting women.
- Gender-sensitive data on energy poverty remains scarce, limiting policy action.
- Lack of energy access can trap women in abusive households.

## Opportunity

Integrating energy justice, the principle that everyone should have equitable access to safe, affordable, and sustainable energy, into the Istanbul Convention aligns with its mandate to address the structural causes of gender-based violence.

### 4 Proposed Amendments

1. Article 6, 18, 20 – Recognize energy poverty as a form of socio-economic violence.
2. Article 23 – Require shelters to meet energy efficiency and affordability standards.
3. Article 51 – Include energy deprivation in risk assessments for victims.
4. Article 59 & 60 – Guarantee energy-secure housing for migrant and asylum-seeking women.

## 6 Policy Recommendations

1. Acknowledge Energy Poverty as a Gendered Risk: Embed it explicitly in Convention provisions and state-level compliance measures.
2. Collect Gender-Specific Energy Data: Disaggregate by gender, income, age, and caregiving status to guide interventions.
3. Guarantee Energy Access in Support Services: Include utility debt relief, renewable energy options, and energy efficiency upgrades for survivors.
4. Train Professionals: Equip frontline workers with knowledge of how energy poverty fuels dependency and limits escape from abuse.
5. Enforce and Monitor Compliance: Develop EU-wide accountability tools to ensure gender-sensitive energy measures are implemented.
6. Protect Migrant and Asylum-Seeking Women: Ensure all temporary and permanent accommodations include affordable, reliable energy access.

## Conclusion

Energy poverty is a silent enabler of gender-based violence. Without energy justice, women's safety will remain precarious—and the Convention's full potential unrealized.

# 75inQ Report: Recognising Energy Poverty as a Gendered Risk in the Istanbul Convention

## Introduction:

### Energy Poverty & the Istanbul Convention

*Foreword: Energy poverty represents unequal access to energy services, and is deeply intertwined with socio-economic inequality and gender-based violence. Integrating energy justice into the Istanbul Convention would strengthen its ability to protect women's autonomy, health, and safety by ensuring that gender equality, as stated in the Convention, includes access to basic energy needs.*

### The Structural Gendered Risk of Energy Poverty

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Energy is an essential service for survival, and as the global population increases, energy demands rise accordingly. However, rising demand contributes to energy shortages and/or increases energy prices, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations. This vulnerability intersects with poverty, defined as a state where individuals lack resources to maintain a basic standard of living. According to the European Commission, energy poverty occurs when households are compelled to reduce their energy consumption to the extent that it negatively impacts inhabitants' health and wellbeing (European Commission, 2023). Since 2021, the rate of European citizens experiencing energy poverty has nearly doubled (European Commission, 2023), largely driven by recent energy price spikes due to the energy shortages linked to the oil supply disruptions stemming from the Russian-Ukrainian war. Such sharp energy price increases exacerbate existing gendered economic disparity since the shock absorption to crisis depends on socio-economic resilience. That is because women, who often carry the primary responsibility for caregiving, face significant barriers, including lower wages and limited work opportunities compared to men, resulting in a persistent gender pay gap

(European Parliament, 2023). According to Eurostat (2022), 17.1% of women in the EU earn low wages compared to 12.6% of men.

Beyond these economic disparities, energy poverty imposes systematic forms of discrimination rooted in entrenched gender roles. In the EU, 80% of care work is provided informally through family ties, predominantly by women (59%) (Euro Carers, 2021). As primary caregivers and household managers, women are disproportionately impacted by inadequate heating, lighting, and energy access, adversely affecting their physical and mental health. Moreover, limited household access to affordable energy increases women's economic dependence, diminishing their ability to escape unsafe or abusive domestic environments, thus perpetuating domestic violence. This correlation between care responsibilities and energy poverty intensifies the cycle of gender-based vulnerability.

Women's increasing vulnerability to energy poverty is also linked to physiological factors, such as further sensitivity to extreme temperatures and socio-cultural aspects through enforced gender roles and caregiving responsibilities (European Economic and Social Committee, 2022). Despite this clear gender dimension, the availability of gender-sensitive data on energy poverty within the European Union remains limited (Andreosatou, 2024). Although the EU Energy Poverty Observatory acknowledges this data gap, most collected data still lack gender specificity. In 2016, the European Parliament passed a resolution emphasizing energy access to vulnerable groups, including women (European Economic and Social Committee, 2022). However, concrete follow-up action by the EU has been absent. Although recent discussions around the European Green Deal and the Social Climate Fund have slightly increased attention to gender sensitivity, systematic integration is yet to be seen. Only a few EU member states have developed national indicators that reflect gender-specific impacts of energy poverty. Most national definitions continue to focus exclusively on income levels, housing quality, and energy prices, omitting crucial gendered and intersectional dimensions (European Economic and Social Committee, 2022).

Academic research shows that energy poverty can be an important risk factor for physical violence. Research on intimate partner violence demonstrates that households in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods have a higher chance of experiencing domestic violence (Cunradi et al., 2020). Similarly, social class literature highlights that poor socioeconomic status is highly related to increasing dissatisfaction from intimate partners, which can magnify the likelihood of having violent arguments and physical abuse (Conger et al., 2010). Additionally, the literature on environmental health perspective also highlights that extreme outdoor temperatures indicate a positive association between temperature, crime and violence, including domestic violence (Choi et al., 2024). Extreme outdoor temperatures impact energy poverty as it represents the inability to keep homes warm in winter and cool in summer. These findings emphasize the need to consider energy

poverty not only as a material deprivation but also as a compounding stressor that increases the risk of gender-based violence.

## The Istanbul Convention addressing structural gendered inequalities

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In this context, the Istanbul Convention, which seeks to prevent and combat gender-based and domestic violence, provides a crucial policy framework for addressing structural inequalities that contribute to energy poverty. The Istanbul Convention emphasizes protection against all forms of violence against women, advocates for the elimination of gender discrimination, and promotes gender equality as a foundational baseline. The Istanbul Convention, officially The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, was adopted in 2011. It is the first legally binding international treaty which aims to prevent gender-based violence and protect the victims of domestic violence.

The Convention entered into force in 2014, and it has been ratified by 37 countries, including most EU member states and non-EU states like Türkiye (later withdrawn in 2021). Ratifying states have committed to implementing policies in four areas: prevention, protection, prosecution and coordinated policies to combat violence against women and domestic violence. Although the Convention is comprehensive in scope across different life cycles and domains, it does not address energy poverty, which is a form of structural inequality to access services that has a significant impact on women's safety, autonomy and their ability to escape violence.

This insufficient recognition of the gendered nature of energy poverty restricts the EU's capacity to fulfill the goals outlined by the Istanbul Convention. By not systematically addressing energy poverty as a significant structural contributor to gender-based vulnerability, EU institutions overlook critical factors exacerbating women's economic dependence, health risks, and exposure to domestic violence, all central concerns explicitly targeted by the Istanbul Convention. Integrating energy justice into the Istanbul Convention framework would represent an essential step towards addressing gender-based inequalities in a more comprehensive manner.

# The integration of energy justice into the Istanbul Convention

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Women's disproportionate caregiving responsibilities, rooted in entrenched gender roles, make them more dependent on reliable and affordable energy services for household management, caregiving tasks, and maintaining safe living conditions. In contexts of energy poverty, access to heating, cooling, lighting, and cooking facilities is limited. This dependence is intensified, placing additional strain on women's physical and mental health and reinforcing their economic reliance on their partners. Such reliance can trap women in abusive relationships, as the loss of energy access can mean an inability to meet basic needs for themselves or their dependents. This structural vulnerability not only restricts their autonomy but also creates conditions in which domestic violence and coercive control can flourish, making energy poverty a significant yet under-recognized driver of violence against women.

To identify potential additions and amendments to the Istanbul Convention, this report analyses the articles in the Convention through a gender and energy lens.

## Analysis

**The Istanbul Convention has the following main sections, which this report will cover through key articles and in order:**

Chapter I. Scope, Definitions and Principles: Articles 6.

Chapter III. Prevention: Articles 12 – 17.

Chapter IV. Protection and Support: Articles 18 – 28.

Chapter V. Substantive Law: Articles 29 – 48.

Chapter VI. Investigation, Prosecution, Procedural Law and Protective Measures: Articles 49 – 58

Chapter VII. Migration and Asylum: Articles 59 – 61.

Chapter VIII–XII. Other Provisions: Article 62 – 81.

# Scope, Definitions and Principles: Purposes, definitions, equality and non-discrimination, general obligations – Chapter I.

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## *Article 6 – Gender-sensitive policies*

The Gender-Sensitive Policies article emphasizes the necessity of integrating a gender perspective into the implementation and evaluation of the Istanbul Convention's provisions. This article serves as the cornerstone of this report because addressing gender-based inequalities and promoting equality between women and men are central to effectively tackling energy poverty. Recognizing energy poverty as inherently gendered highlights how limited access to reliable, affordable energy disproportionately impacts women, deepening their vulnerability to violence and economic dependency. By incorporating energy poverty explicitly into Article 6, policies can systematically address gender disparities through targeted, inclusive interventions in energy access. The following sections will further illustrate how specific articles within the Istanbul Convention can integrate concrete measures against energy poverty, thereby strengthening the overall protection of women's rights, autonomy, and safety.

# Prevention – Chapter III.

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## *Article 12– General Obligations*

General Obligations under the Prevention chapter states that the ratified states shall oblige to protect women from acts of violence caused by gender roles, cultural, religious, traditional norms which are used to justify violence against women. In addition to this the article ensures the protection of the vulnerable populations and addresses their needs in order to maintain their protection. Lastly, it states the obligation to take the necessary measures to promote programs and activities for the empowerment of women. When it comes to the integration of energy justice it is crucial to include informative workshops and/or initiatives that highlight the gendered-nature of energy poverty. These informative programs should specifically focus on how limited access to affordable energy disproportionately affects women, and accordingly reinforces harmful

stereotypes around women's domestic responsibilities and therefore limits their economic independence.

Additionally, to provide holistic and supportive programs for women, it is advised for professionals such as social workers, shelter providers and policymakers to receive specialized training programs to enable them to respond effectively to the intersection of energy poverty and gender-based violence.

## Protection and Support – Chapter IV.

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### *Article 18- General Obligations*

General Obligations of the Istanbul Convention highlights an essential legislative and other measures required to protect victims from acts of violence, by emphasizing a human rights based approach and keeping victim's safety as the central concern. It advocates for integrated measures that consider the interconnectedness between perpetrators, children, and the broader social environment. Specifically, the article highlights the need to empower women economically, provide diverse protection and support services, and address the distinct needs of vulnerable groups, including child victims.

However, article 18 does not explicitly mention energy independence, which is a crucial yet an overlooked factor that is contributing to domestic violence. Lack of energy independence or energy poverty can pressure women to remain in violence households, which significantly undermines the safety and autonomy of the victims. The connection between domestic violence and lack of energy independence is supported by a study conducted in Australia, which stated that energy poverty increases the likelihood of experiencing physical violence by 1.9 % to 3.2% (Hailemariam et al., 2021). Integrating energy justice into Article 18 would therefore require recognizing energy access and affordability as essential components of women's economic empowerment and safety. Measures ensuring energy independence could include providing support for affordable, reliable, and renewable energy solutions, particularly for vulnerable populations.

### *Article 20 -General Support Services*

General Support Services of the Istanbul Convention emphasizes the importance of providing necessary support services for the victims of violence. These support services include counselling, financial assistance, housing, training and employment assistance.

When energy poverty from a gender perspective is taken into account, it is undeniable to see the intersection with housing and financial assistance. If energy justice is taken into consideration, it would incorporate energy affordability and access to energy as important factors of housing and financial assistance. It is essential to consider reliable energy provision as a part of the general support services because energy poverty affects different groups of people including divorced families and elderly people (TNO, 2021), who are also a main target group for domestic violence.

By embedding energy justice by the general support services obligations for the Istanbul Convention, there would be further protection by ensuring the creation of safe and supportive environments that comprehensively address the root causes of domestic violence.

#### *Article 22- Specialist Support Services*

Specialist Support Services mentions the importance of having tailored services that meet the specific needs of the victims. Although it does not mention a list of support services, it can be assumed that having accessible and safe energy would not be considered a part of Article 22. Therefore, in order to integrate energy justice within this article, it would involve developing specialized energy programs that specifically address energy poverty.

Several EU countries have introduced targeted programs to address energy poverty among vulnerable populations, including low-income households and refugees. For example, Bulgaria provides heating assistance through EU-supported initiatives to help households, including refugees, manage their energy costs. Greece similarly offers subsidies to households to alleviate the financial strain caused by rising electricity prices (Reuters , 2024). Additionally, the EU's Social Climate Fund supports vulnerable households by providing financial aid and funding for energy efficiency improvements (Jüngling et al., 2025). Even though there are various programs in the EU for citizens and migrants struggling with energy poverty, there is no direct support for the energy needs of women who struggle with gender-based violence.

To enhance the effectiveness of Article 22 of the Istanbul Convention, which emphasizes specialized support services for victims of gender-based violence, it is suggested that energy assistance be included explicitly as part of these specialized services. Specifically, Article 22 could incorporate measures such as energy subsidies or financial aid for energy efficiency upgrades to directly

support victims. This integration would address energy poverty as a key factor exacerbating women's economic vulnerabilities and their exposure to unsafe or abusive living environments. By providing essential relief from energy costs, the revised article would better support women's autonomy, safety, and overall stability.

#### *Article 23-Shelters*

Article 23, of the Istanbul Convention states the importance of providing easily accessible, suitable and secure shelters for victims of gender-based violence and their children. In order to effectively integrate energy justice within this article, it is recommended to include several measures which would address energy poverty. Firstly, it is a necessity for the shelters to be equipped with reliable, affordable and sustainable energy sources. It would also be encouraged for the shelters to contain renewable energy systems and energy efficient technologies. The practical implementation could involve mandatory energy assessments which would ensure that shelters are meeting minimum standards of energy efficiency and affordability.

Similarly, in order to ensure that the provided shelters to the victim groups follow a standardized quality it is encouraged to apply regular monitoring and reporting mechanisms to maintain compliance and encourage continuous improvement in provided shelters.

The integration of energy justice is essential as it enhances the victim's basic energy and cooking needs and therefore further supports their sense of stability, security and overall well-being and promotes their long-term resilience.

## Substantive Law – Chapter V.

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#### *Article 30 – Compensation*

The Compensation Article recognizes the right for the victims to claim a type of compensation for damages suffered. In order to integrate energy justice within this article, we would need to acknowledge energy poverty as an additional burden when calculating the damages for the compensation. For example, victims who are forced to live within violent households due to

unaffordable energy costs or women who suffer from health issues due to being forced to live in energy dangerous environments should be entitled to have access to compensation that would support the victim's energy independence. The type of compensation can be expanded to make sure that it includes assistance for installing renewable energy systems, covering utility arrears, or facilitating access to energy-efficient housing. This approach would not only address the financial harm caused by violence but also remove barriers to escape and ensure recovery. Lastly, reinforcing the long-term resilience and autonomy of survivors.

#### *Article 46 – Aggravating Circumstances*

Article 46 outlines the conditions for perpetrators to receive harsher sentencing, which includes abuse of vulnerability and repeated offences. Energy poverty can deepen a victim's dependency on an abuser, especially when the perpetrator controls access to essential utilities like electricity and heating. Recognizing energy dependency as an aggravating circumstance would reflect the seriousness of manipulating a victim's basic needs as a form of coercive control. Including this in sentencing guidelines would reinforce accountability for abusers who exploit energy poverty to maintain power, while also encouraging legal systems to understand the structural dimensions of victim vulnerability.

## Investigation, Prosecution, Procedural Law and Protective Measures – Chapter VI.

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#### *Article 51 – Risk Assessment and Risk Management*

Article 51 states that it is required from the authorities to assess the lethality and severity of the threats faced by the victims and manage those risks accordingly. In order to integrate energy justice in this article we need to recognize energy injustice as a significant factor for the risk assessment. In this case energy injustice can refer to victims living in unsafe or energy inadequate homes, which may lead to intensifying the vulnerability of the victims as it puts another limitation on their 'freedom'. Risk management strategies regarding energy should therefore include ensuring the access to energy-secure housing, prioritizing the extension of energy assistance programs to maintain safe and healthy living conditions for the victims. Lastly, it is essential for the risk

management strategy to recognize how energy deprivation may signal or enhance patterns of abuse and control within domestic households.

## Migration and Asylum – Chapter VII.

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### *Article 59 – Residence Status*

Residence Status Article of Istanbul Convention allows victims of gender-based violence whose legal residency depends on their spouse or partner to apply for an autonomous residence permit. Besides the emotional challenges, leaving an abusive partner can bring legal and material challenges related to electricity and energy costs. Existing literature shows that low levels of socioeconomic status is a big risk factor for violence which indicates that violence low socioeconomic status and access to energy has association. For migrant women, this dependence on an abusive partner for basic services like heating or electricity further limits their ability to seek independence. Integrating energy justice into Article 59 would mean ensuring that women applying for residence status have access to energy-secure housing and utility assistance, preventing economic conditions from becoming a barrier to legal protection.

### *Article 60 – Gender Based Asylum Claims*

Article 60 states that gender-based violence can be grounds for asylum. However, women seeking asylum are often placed in shelters or camps with inadequate infrastructure and limited access to energy. In order to integrate energy justice into Article 60, we must make sure that gender based asylum claims require guaranteeing that asylum procedures and accommodations are designed with safe, affordable, and reliable energy access in mind. This would not only ensure physical safety and health but also support a dignified and empowering environment for women escaping gender-based violence.

## Other Provisions – Chapter VIII–XII.

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By embedding energy justice within these obligations, the Istanbul Convention could further strengthen its commitment to creating safe, supportive environments that comprehensively address the root causes of domestic violence.

## Policy Recommendations

Once this detailed analysis has been formulated, the following set of recommendations for civil society actors, policymakers and any stakeholders involved can be made. In order to embed a protection from the risks associated with energy poverty into the Istanbul Convention, efforts for change should be directed towards provisions that:

1. Acknowledge energy poverty as a gendered risk: Embed it explicitly in Convention provisions and state-level compliance measures. Amend Articles 6, 18, and 20 to acknowledge limited energy access as a factor contributing to socio-economic violence and dependency.
2. Collect gender-specific energy data: Develop gender-specific energy poverty indicators; mandate data collection disaggregated by gender, age, income, and caregiving status. Disaggregate by gender, income, age, and caregiving status to guide interventions.
3. Guarantee energy access in support services: Require housing, shelter, and financial assistance programs to guarantee affordable, reliable, and safe energy access; include utility debt relief, renewable energy options, and energy efficiency upgrades for survivors.
4. Train professionals: Equip frontline workers with knowledge of how energy poverty fuels dependency and limits escape from abuse. Equip social workers, shelter staff, and policymakers with training on the links between energy poverty, dependency, and domestic abuse (aligning with Article 12 prevention goals).
5. Enforce and monitor compliance: Develop EU-wide accountability tools to ensure gender-sensitive energy measures are implemented. Implement EU-wide mechanisms to track and enforce gender-sensitive energy access measures in compliance with the Convention.
6. Protect migrant and asylum-seeking women: Ensure all temporary and permanent accommodations include affordable, reliable energy access. Mandate energy-secure housing in residence status (Article 59) and asylum accommodations (Article 60) to prevent energy deprivation from undermining safety and legal protection.

## Conclusion

Energy poverty is a silent but potent enabler of gender-based violence. Its intersection with economic inequality, caregiving burdens, and housing insecurity traps women in unsafe

environments, erodes their autonomy, and worsens health outcomes. The Istanbul Convention already provides a comprehensive legal framework to address violence against women, but its current omission of energy justice leaves a critical gap. Recognizing access to affordable, reliable energy as both a human right and a gender equality issue is essential for dismantling the structural barriers that keep women vulnerable. Integrating energy justice into the Convention would not only strengthen its preventive and protective measures but also promote lasting resilience, autonomy, and dignity for survivors.

This report aims to demonstrate how energy poverty has a gender dimension, with serious implications on women's health, safety and autonomy. Although the Istanbul Convention addresses gender inequalities, it currently lacks the integration of energy justice within its framework. The report highlights how recognising energy access as a human right and gender issue aligns with Convention's overarching goal of protecting women from violence and promoting gender equality but also ensures that victims of violence are not left in the dark.

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