



Mothers With No Exit

Submission to the report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls to the 62nd session of the United Nations Human Rights Council on Violence against mothers

Mothers With No Exit is a peer-support and advocacy network for foreign mothers in the Netherlands who are unable to leave the country with their children due to family law restrictions and international child abduction frameworks. We recently partnered with FiLiA Hague Mothers to elevate affected women's voices and support calls for systemic change.

This submission documents recurring cross-border violence against mothers and children, based on five independent testimonies primarily concerning the Netherlands. It shows how domestic abuse, coercive control, and post-separation legal abuse are enabled and prolonged by institutional failures, resulting in violations of international human rights and children's rights. Rather than isolated cases, the evidence reveals systemic patterns within family law, child-protection, immigration, and cross-border frameworks, where state action or inaction turns protective systems into sources of ongoing harm. Grounded exclusively in the five testimonies and mapped to international treaty obligations, the submission identifies failures of due diligence, gender stereotyping, and abuse-blind procedures, and highlights urgent areas for reform to ensure effective protection for women and children.

(‘T’ and ‘S’ references after each bullet-point relate to the attached testimonies.)

1.1. Violence against mothers: manifestations, causes and perpetrators

1.1.1. Forms of violence and discrimination

Emotional and coercive abuse

- Escalating intimidation, psychological pressure, and coercive legal dynamics by intimate partners during pregnancy, postpartum, and post-separation (ECHR Arts. 3, 8; ICCPR Arts. 7, 17; IC Arts. 3, 33, 34). [T1 §§2–4; T2 §2; T3 §§5–7; T4 §§6, 16; T5 §§2-6, 20-21]
- Explicit opposition to breastfeeding and early attachment; statements denying the legitimacy of a close mother–child bond (CRC Arts. 3, 9, 24; CEDAW Art. 5; ECHR Art. 8). [T3 §5; T1 §§2, 13; T5 §§6]
- Threats of child removal, litigation, and international abduction proceedings used to enforce compliance (ECHR Arts. 6, 8, 13; CRC Arts. 3, 9; IC Arts. 31, 48). [T1 §§12–16; T2 §§5–6, 11–12; T3 §3; T4 §§7, 19; T5 §§ 13-15]
- Use of communication controls (banned or restricted calls, mandatory daily calls, prohibition of parent-child communication by court-appointed guardians) as surveillance, punishment, or isolation (ECHR Art. 8; CRC Arts. 9, 12). [T1 §13; T3 §1; T4 §§4; T5 §§ 4, 9, 20]
- Physical violence dismissed or left uninvestigated (ECHR Arts. 2, 3; IC Arts. 5, 31; CRC Art. 19). [T1 §§4, 12; T2 §2; T3 §7; T4 §§8–9, 18; T5 §§ 7, 18]
- Immigration-enabled psychological abuse (CEDAW Arts. 1, 2; ICESCR Arts. 6, 11; ECHR Art. 8).

- [T2 §2; T3 §§5–6; T4 §§1, 5, 14]
- Procedural exclusion through practices undermining effective participation (ECHR Art. 6; CRC Art. 3). [T2 §7; T3 §3; T4 §3, 13-14]
- Psychological harm from minimised child-safeguarding concerns, including grooming indicators (ECHR Arts. 3, 8; CRC Arts. 3, 19). [T2 §9; T4 §§10]
- Psychological coercion through legal and child-protection systems, forcing acceptance of harmful arrangements under threat of sanctions or loss of contact (ECHR Arts. 3, 8; CEDAW Art. 5; IC Arts. 5, 31). [T1 §§12–13, 16; T2 §§6, 8–9; T3 §§1–3; T4 §§5, 8, 13–15; T5 §§15-17, 21]
- Systematic denial of mothers’ participation via interpretation refusal, oral exclusion, repeated adjudication, and reliance on state-created “communication difficulties” (ECHR Arts. 6, 13; CEDAW Art. 2; CFR Art. 47). [T4 §4]
- Prolonged severance of parent–child contact through exploitation of “flexible” or undefined contact arrangements, enabling unilateral elimination of contact without enforcement (CRC Arts. 3, 9; ECHR Art. 8). [T4 §§3–5]

Reproductive violence

- Pressure, threats, and sustained psychological coercion to force termination of pregnancy (CEDAW Arts. 1, 2, 16; ICCPR Arts. 7, 17; ECHR Arts. 3, 8). [T1 §2]
- Punitive treatment of women for reproductive choices, used to undermine court credibility (CEDAW Art. 5; ECHR Art. 6; CRC Art. 3). [T1 §§2, 12]

Sexual violence and coercion

- Sexual access demanded in exchange for parental consent or legal cooperation, including permission for child travel or contact (IC Arts. 36, 40; ECHR Arts. 3, 8). [T1 §14]

Social isolation

- Forced isolation from family, cultural communities, and support networks, including blocked grandparent contact (CRC Arts. 8, 9, 30; ECHR Art. 8). [T1 §13; T3 §§1, 5; T4 §§1, 4, 15; T5 §§ 2, 4, 9]
- Total isolation during COVID-19 lockdowns without access to family or social support (CRC Art. 3; ECHR Art. 8). [T2 §2; T3 §6]
- Housing instability, repeated forced relocations, and homelessness risk as single mothers (ICESCR Art. 11; CRC Arts. 3, 27). [T1 §3; T2 §6; T5 §§ 15-17]

Economic violence

- Financial abandonment during pregnancy and early motherhood (IC Art. 3(b); CRC Arts. 26, 27). [T1 §2; T5 §§11, 15-17]
- Systematic financial depletion through repeated litigation, penalties, travel costs, sanctions, and child-support manipulation, constituting prolonged economic coercion (CEDAW Art. 2; ECHR Art. 6; CRC Arts. 3, 26, 27; ECHR Prot. 1 Art. 1). [T1 §16; T2 §§5–6; T3 §2; T5 §§15-17, 20-21]
- Economic coercion through enforced non-residency and inability to return, reframed as parental failure (ECHR Art. 8; CRC Arts. 3, 9). [T4 §5]
- Fraudulent diversion of child benefits without effective judicial restitution (CRC Art. 27; ECHR Prot. 1 Art. 1; IC Art. 3(b)). [T1 §16]

Institutional and legal violence

- Reframing of domestic abuse and coercive control as “parental conflict” by police, mediators, child-protection bodies, and courts (IC Arts. 5, 48; CEDAW Art. 5). [T1 §12; T2 §4; T3 §§2–3; T4 §§10–11; T5 §§7, 15, 18, 20]
- Mandatory or court-ordered mediation imposed despite indicators of abuse and power asymmetry (IC Art. 48; ECHR Art. 6). [T1 §12; T3 §3; T5 §§ 15]
- Abrupt and prolonged severance from the primary caregiver (and from siblings) without safeguarding or psychological assessment (CRC Arts. 3, 9, 19; ECHR Art. 8). [T1 §§13, 16; T2 §6; T3 §1; T4 §§2-4, 12, 20]
- Severe restrictions on mother–child communication during separations (CRC Arts. 9, 12; ECHR Art. 8). [T1 §13; T3 §1; T4 §4]
- Proceedings conducted without jurisdiction or effective participation (ECHR Arts. 6, 13; CRC Art. 3). [T1 §16; T2 §11; T4 §3, 13-14]
- Rejection of extensive documentary evidence of abuse without substantive judicial engagement (ECHR Art. 6; CFR Art. 47). [T1 §12; T2 §6; T5 §§5, 7, 10, 18]
- Withdrawal or absence of legal representation at critical stages, forcing mothers to self-represent in high-stakes proceedings (ECHR Art. 6; CRC Art. 3). [T2 §7; T3 §3]

1.1.3. Linkages between violence against mothers and children

Children as Coercive Tools

- Explicit expressions of intent to sever the child–mother relationship (CRC Art. 9; ECHR Art. 8). [T1 §§13, 16; T3 §5; T4 §§3, 5, 14–15]
- Weaponization of contact schedules, schooling, travel requirements, and parental consent to control mothers (CRC Arts. 3, 9, 12; ECHR Art. 8). [T1 §§13, 16; T2 §§6, 11; T3 §§1, 3; T4 §§3–6, 14; T5 §§15-17]
- Blocking children’s relationships with maternal family, culture, language, and identity (CRC Arts. 8, 30; ECHR Art. 8). [T1 §13; T3 §§1, 5; T4 §§2, 5, 15]
- Use of travel bans and mobility restrictions to immobilise both mother and child (CRC Art. 10; ECHR Art. 8). [T1 §16; T2 §§6, 10; T3 §3; T4 §§6, 14; T5 §§15-17]
- Sustained manipulation of children to reject a parent, with authorities aware and failing to intervene (CRC Arts. 3, 9, 12, 19). [T4 §§6, 16]
- Use of children as instruments of harassment (CRC Arts. 19, 34; ECHR Art. 3). [T4 §10; T5 §§6, 21]

Direct harm to children

- Exposure to domestic violence, including assaults and non-fatal strangulation (CRC Art. 19; ECHR Arts. 2, 3). [T1 §4; T2 §2; T3 §7; T5 §§6-7]
- Abrupt separation from the primary caregiver and, in some cases, from siblings (CRC Arts. 3, 9; ECHR Art. 8). [T1 §§13, 16; T2 §6; T3 §1; T4 §§5–7, 15]
- Psychological harm to children from systemic instability rather than protection (CRC Arts. 3, 19, 24). [T1 §13, 16; T2 §§8, 10–11; T3 §§1–3; T4 §§8–16; T5 §§15-17, 20-21]
- Exposure of children to credible lethal threats, ignored by authorities despite Interpol notification (CRC Arts. 3, 19; ECHR Arts. 2, 3). [T4 §§8-9, 18]

- Exposure of a child to sexually inappropriate behaviour without safeguarding intervention (CRC Arts. 19, 34). *[T4 §10]*
- Denial of the right to education through prolonged non-enrolment in school, despite judicial and child-protection awareness (CRC Arts. 3, 28). *[T4 §7, 15]*
- Children's sustained involvement in adult legal conflict, including role reversal and parentification, causing cumulative psychological harm (CRC Arts. 3, 19, 34). *[T4 §§7, 10, 15]*

Systemic failure to protect children

- Absence of child-centred, trauma-informed risk assessments despite known indicators of harm (IC Art. 31; CRC Arts. 3, 19). *[T1 §§12, 16; T2 §8; T3 §§1, 3; T4 §§8–11; T5 §§5, 7-8, 14]*
- Dismissal of safeguarding concerns, including potential grooming behaviour (CRC Arts. 19, 34).
[T2 §9; T3 §1; T4 §§10]
- Ignoring independent expert reports and primary attachment evidence (CRC Arts. 3, 12; ECHR Art. 6). *[T1 §12; T3 §§1, 3; T4 §6; T5 §§5, 8, 10]*
- Prolonged non-enforcement of court-ordered contact, causing psychological harm and chronic instability (CRC Arts. 3, 9, 19; ECHR Art. 8). *[T4 §§2-4, 12, 20-21]*
- Documented child-protection risks without protective action (CRC Arts. 3, 19; IC Art. 5). *[T4 §§10-11, 15; T5 §§5, 7-8]*
- Arbitrary denial of parent–child communication by court-appointed guardians, causing prolonged family severance (CRC Arts. 3, 9; ECHR Art. 8). *[T4 §4, 15]*
- Failure to act on known parental risk factors despite child-safety relevance (CRC Arts. 3, 19).
[T4 §8; T5 §§5-7, 18]

1.1.4. Causes and contributing factors increasing mothers' vulnerability

- Geographic, legal, and immigration-related vulnerability (CEDAW Arts. 2, 3; ECHR Art. 8). *[T2 §2; T3 §§5–6; T4 §§1, 14; T5 §§2, 13-17]*
- Abuse-blind family-law frameworks and mediation models (IC Arts. 31, 48; CEDAW Art. 5). *[T1 §12; T3 §3; T4 §§2; T5 §§5, 15, 20]*
- Procedural rigidity prioritising formal compliance over safety and best interests (CRC Art. 3; ECHR Art. 8). *[T1 §§12, 16; T2 §§6, 11; T3 §§1, 3; T5 §§15-17]*
- Economic precarity, housing insecurity, and cumulative legal costs (ICESCR Art. 11; CRC Art. 27). *[T1 §3; T2 §6; T3 §2; T4 §5; T5 §§15-17]*
- Gender stereotyping and pathologisation of mothers (CEDAW Art. 5; CFR Art. 21). *[T1 §12; T2 §4; T3 §2]*
- Legal gatekeeping denying mothers access to justice (ECHR Art. 6; CRC Art. 3). *[T1 §§16–17; T2 §7; T3 §3; T4 §§3, 14; T5 §§7-8, 14, 18]*
- Reframing documented economic impossibility as parental failure, disproportionately affecting non-EU and economically displaced mothers (ECHR Art. 8; CRC Arts. 3, 9). *[T4 §6]*

1.1.5. Perpetrators and enabling circumstances

Primary perpetrators

- Fathers/ex-partners engaging in coercive control, psychological abuse, physical violence, sexual coercion, economic abuse, and post-separation legal harassment (IC Arts. 3, 34). [T1 §§2–4, 14–16; T2 §§2, 5–6, 10–11; T3 §§5–7; T4 §§6–10, 16, 19; T5 §§3-4, 6-7, 11, 15-17, 20-21]

Institutional enabling factors

- Authorities failure to document abuse or act on safeguarding concerns (ECHR Arts. 3, 13; IC Arts. 5, 49–50). [T1 §12; T2 §9; T3 §1; T4 §§9–11, 18; T5 §§7-8, 14, 18]
- Courts prioritising procedural formalism over participation and child safety (ECHR Arts. 6, 8; CRC Art. 3). [T1 §§12, 16; T2 §§6, 11; T3 §§1–3; T4 §§2-4, 12-14, 20; T5 §§15-17]
- Judicial practices excluding a parent from effective participation across repeated proceedings without corrective review (ECHR Arts. 6, 13; CFR Art. 47). [T4 §3, 13-14]
- Child-protection services delaying, surveilling, or acting without lawful basis instead of protecting (CRC Arts. 3, 19; Hague 1996 Arts. 32–35). [T1 §16; T2 §8; T3 §1; T4 §§10–11, 15; T5 §§7-8]
- Systematic non-enforcement of family-court orders, allowing repeated and prolonged violations of contact arrangements without consequences (ECHR Art. 8; CRC Art. 9). [T4 §§2–4, 12, 15, 20–21]
- Failure of court-appointed guardians and child-protection authorities to fulfil statutory mandates, including restoring contact and ensuring school attendance (CRC Arts. 3, 19, 28). [T4 §§4, 7, 15]

1.2. Groups of mothers affected

1.2.1. Groups disproportionately affected

Mothers of infants and young children (CRC Arts. 3, 24).

[T1 §§2–4, 13; T2 §§2, 6; T3 §§5–7; T5 §§1-7, 15-17]

Pregnant and postpartum women (CEDAW Arts. 1, 12).

[T1 §2; T2 §2; T5 §§2, 6]

Single mothers facing housing insecurity (ICESCR Art. 11).

[T1 §3; T2 §6; T4 §5; T5 §§15-17]

Mothers in cross-border or immigration-dependent contexts (ECHR Art. 8).

[T1 §§16–17; T2 §§2, 10–14; T3 §§1–3; T4 §§1, 5, 14; T5 §§12-15, 19]

Protective mothers who report abuse (CEDAW Art. 2).

[T1 §12; T2 §§4, 9; T3 §§1–2; T4 §§8–11; T5 §§7, 14]

Non-EU and foreign mothers economically forced to leave the State of habitual residence and subsequently disadvantaged in maintaining parent–child relationships (CEDAW Art. 2; ECHR Art. 14).

[T4 §§1, 5, 14, 20]

Mothers of multiple children experiencing cumulative harm through prolonged sibling-wide separation (CRC Arts. 3, 9).

[T4 §§1, 4, 12, 15]

Non-resident mothers' legal rights denied in practice (CEDAW Art. 2; ECHR Arts. 6, 8; CRC Arts. 3, 9).

[T4 §§2-4, 12, 13-15, 20]

1.2.2. Intersectional vulnerabilities

Motherhood combined with migration (CEDAW Art. 2).

[T2 §2; T3 §§5–6; T4 §§1, 5, 14; T5 §§2, 12-15]

Motherhood combined with economic insecurity (CRC Art. 27).

[T1 §3; T2 §6; T3 §2; T4 §5; T5 §§11, 15-17]

Motherhood combined with reproductive autonomy (CEDAW Art. 16).

[T1 §2]

Motherhood combined with gender stereotypes in law (CEDAW Art. 5).

[T1 §12; T2 §4; T3 §2]

Motherhood combined with non-EU status and enforced non-residency, resulting in compounded disadvantage and denied access to justice (CEDAW Art. 2; ECHR Art. 6; CRC Art. 3).

[T4 §§1, 3, 5, 13- 14]

3.3. Mother's Barriers to protection, justice, and remedies

3.3.3. Barriers

- Systematic dismissal of domestic violence and coercive control as “parental conflict” (IC Art. 48). *[T1 §12; T2 §4; T3 §§2–3; T4 §§9, 18; T5 §§7, 15, 18, 20]*
- Denial of access to police records, authorities failure to investigate (ECHR Art. 13; CFR Art. 47). *[T1 §12; T2 §9; T5 §§7, 18]*
- Failure to respond to credible threats to children despite Interpol escalation (ECHR Arts. 2, 3, 13; CRC Arts. 3, 19). *[T4 §§8-9, 18]*
- Rejection of extensive evidence without engagement, while imposing disproportionate evidentiary burdens on mothers (ECHR Arts. 6, 13; CEDAW Art. 5). *[T1 §12; T2 §6; T3 §2; T5 §§5, 7-8, 10, 18]*
- Proceedings conducted without legal representation or adequate notice (ECHR Art. 6). *[T1 §16; T2 §7; T3 §3]*
- Financial exhaustion preventing access to remedies (CRC Arts. 3, 27). *[T1 §16; T2 §§5–6; T3 §2; T5 §§15-17]*
- Jurisdictional violations and contradictory rulings (ECHR Art. 13; Brussels IIb Art. 7; CRC Art. 3). *[T1 §§16–17; T2 §§11–12; T3 §§2–3]*
- Travel bans, sanctions, and enforcement measures entrenching coercive control (ECHR Art. 8; CRC Art. 10). *[T1 §16; T2 §6; T3 §3; T5 §§15-17]*
- Child-protection actions increasing surveillance without protection (CRC Arts. 3, 19). *[T1 §16; T2 §8; T3 §1; T4 §10-11, 15]*
- Non-enforcement of court orders as a structural barrier, where remedies exist on paper but are ineffective in practice (ECHR Art. 13; CRC Art. 9). *[T4 §§2-4, 12, 15, 20-21]*
- Arbitrary denial of translation and language assistance based on mode of participation (remote vs in-person) (ECHR Art. 6; CFR Art. 47). *[T4 §3, 13-14]*
- Permitting repeated unsubstantiated applications to terminate parental rights (ECHR Art. 6; CRC Art. 3). *[T4 §§7, 19]*

3.3.4. Preventive steps / Recommendations

- States should implement mandatory, proactive, abuse-informed legal information measures for mothers—particularly foreign or newly arrived mothers—at the point of child registration, residence registration, or immigration regularisation. [T1 §§16–17; T2 §§2, 10–11; T3 §§1–3; T4 §§1–5, 13–14; T5 §§2, 12–15]
- Such information should clearly explain that international child abduction frameworks (including the Hague Convention) may operate independently of domestic-violence considerations at the initial stage, and may be invoked even in the absence of formal custody orders (CRC Arts. 3, 9, 10; ECHR Art. 8). [T1 §§16–17; T2 §§10–14; T3 §§1–3; T5 §§13–15, 21]
- States should ensure mothers receive clear, abuse-informed legal information at irreversible decision points on jurisdiction, relocation, separation, and their effects on care, contact, travel, and child-maintenance obligations, regardless of nationality (CRC Arts. 3, 9, 10, 27; ECHR Art. 8). [T1 §§13, 16–17; T2 §§6, 10–11; T3 §1–3; T4 §§2–5, 12, 20; T5 §§14–17]
- States should make clear that a child’s citizenship is legally irrelevant for determining jurisdiction and applicable law at the separation stage, and does not protect against travel restrictions, relocation bans, or Hague Convention proceedings once habitual residence is established (CRC Arts. 7, 10; ECHR Art. 8). [T1 §§16–17; T2 §§10–14; T3 §§2–3; T5 §§13–15]
- States should ensure that mothers are informed, at the moment when legal consequences become irreversible, that certain procedural steps (such as child registration, residence establishment, or interim orders) will severely limit future protective, relocation, or exit options (CRC Arts. 3, 9; ECHR Art. 8). [T1 §§16–17; T2 §§10–11; T3 §§1–3; T4 §§2–4, 12, 20; T5 §§14–17]
- Such information must be provided in writing, in a language the mother understands, with referral pathways to independent legal advice and domestic-violence support; failure to do so undermines informed consent, exposes foreseeable harm, and breaches due-diligence obligations (CEDAW Art. 2; CRC Art. 19; IC Art. 5; ECHR Arts. 3, 8). [T1 §§16–17; T2 §§2, 6, 7, 10–11; T3 §§1–3, 6; T4 §§3, 13–14; T5 §§4, 8]
- States should ensure that “flexible” or informal contact arrangements are not approved without enforceable safeguards, clear schedules, and mechanisms to prevent unilateral severance of contact. [T4 §§2–4]
- States should establish effective enforcement mechanisms for contact and visitation orders, with proportionate consequences for non-compliance. [T4 §§3–4, 12, 20–21]
- States should guarantee interpretation and language assistance in proceedings irrespective of physical presence. [T4 §3, 13–14]

Legend:

IC = Istanbul Convention

T1-T5 = Testimonies of 5 mothers

Please note: No testimony may be published without the explicit consent of the mother concerned due to risk of adverse repercussions.