KEY THEME[1]
Article 4
Domestic servitude

(Last updated: 31/08/2026)

Introduction

For Convention purposes, "servitude" means an obligation to provide one's services that is imposed by the use of coercion, and is to be linked with the concept of slavery (*Siliadin v. France*, 2005, § 124).

Domestic servitude is a specific offence, distinct from trafficking and exploitation, which involves a complex set of dynamics, involving both overt and more subtle forms of coercion, to force compliance (*C.N. v. the United Kingdom*, 2012, § 80).

State obligations in brief

Article 4 substantive limb:

- The positive obligation to set in place a legislative and administrative framework that prohibits and punishes forced or compulsory labour, servitude and slavery (*C.N. and V. v. France*, 2012, § 105);
- The positive obligation to take operational measures to protect persons in a situation of slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour (*C.N. v. the United Kingdom*, 2012, § 67).

Article 4 procedural limb:

- The duty to investigate where there is a credible suspicion that an individual's rights under Article 4 have been violated (*C.N. v. the United Kingdom*, 2012, § 69).

Noteworthy examples

- *Siliadin v. France*, 2005 – the Court extended the application of positive obligations to Article 4 (§§ 77-89);
- *C.N. and V. v. France*, 2012 – the Court clarified the meaning of "forced or compulsory labour" and "servitude" when it comes to domestic help (§§ 73-79 and 92-94);
- *I.C. v. the Republic of Moldova*, 2025 – failure to fulfil substantive and procedural obligations to protect an intellectually disabled woman from trafficking and servitude after her removal from State care and placement with a family on a farm (a "deinstitutionalisation" procedure) where she was forced to work without pay.

Recap of general principles

- For a recapitulation of general principles, see *C.N. v. the United Kingdom*, 2012, §§ 65-69.

[1] Prepared by the Registry. It does not bind the Court.

KEY CASE-LAW REFERENCES

Leading case(s):

- *Siliadin v. France*, no. 73316/01, ECHR 2005-VII (violation of Article 4).

Other cases under Article 4 of the Convention:

- *C.N. and V. v. France*, no. 67724/09, 11 October 2012 (violation of Article 4 (substantial) in respect of the first applicant; no violation of Article 4 (procedural) in respect of the first applicant, no violation of Article 4 in respect of the second applicant);
- *C.N. v. the United Kingdom*, no. 4239/08, 13 November 2012 (violation of Article 4);
- *Kawogo v. the United Kingdom* (dec.), no. 56921/09, 3 September 2013 (strike-out);
- *I.C. v. the Republic of Moldova*, no. 36436/22, 27 February 2025 (violation of Article 4 (substantial and procedural); violation of Article 14 in conjunction with Article 4).