

Violence against women in the EU

State of play

SUMMARY

Violence against women is a violation of human rights and a form of gender-based discrimination. Rooted in inequalities between men and women, it takes many forms. Estimates of the scale of the problem are alarming. Such violence has a major impact on victims and imposes a significant cost burden on society.

The instruments put in place by the United Nations and Council of Europe, including the latter's 'Istanbul Convention', to which the EU plans to accede, are benchmarks in efforts to combat violence against women.

The EU is tackling the problem in various ways, but has no binding instrument designed specifically to protect women from violence.

Although there are similarities between national policies to combat violence against women, the Member States have adopted different approaches to the problem.

Parliament's efforts have focused on strengthening EU policy in the area. Parliament has repeatedly called for a European Union strategy to counter violence against women, including a legally binding instrument.

Stakeholders have expressed a range of concerns, including regarding the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and the related need to expand and adapt support for victims, and have highlighted the need for a comprehensive EU political framework on eliminating violence against women. They have also launched new initiatives of their own.

This is a further update of an [earlier briefing](#) by Anna Dimitrova-Stull, of February 2014. The [most recent previous edition](#) was from November 2020.



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Glossary

Violence against women: 'all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life'.

Gender-based violence against women: 'violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately'.

Domestic violence: 'all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim'.

Source: [Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#), Council of Europe, 2011.

The problem

Violence against women violates human rights and is a form of gender-based discrimination. It constitutes a major obstacle to gender equality. Despite increased attention, the problem still affects all levels of society and all Member States.

Causes and forms

Violence against women and girls is rooted in social inequalities between men and women. Traditional and religious values are sometimes invoked to justify it. [Factors](#) including a lack of economic independence increase women's vulnerability.¹

Violence takes many forms, including psychological violence, harassment, physical and sexual violence, female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage, forced abortion and sterilisation, sexual harassment, and 'honour' crimes. Some specific groups, such as [migrant](#) women, women with [disabilities](#), [LBTI women](#), women in [prostitution](#) or women living in [institutions](#), are more likely to experience violence and [intersecting](#) forms of violence.²

Scale of the problem not fully known

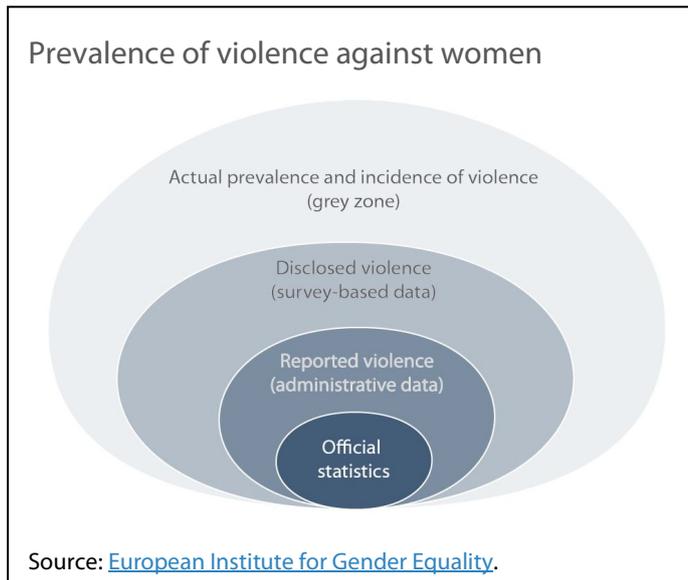
The most comprehensive [survey](#) on violence against women at EU level – based on interviews with 42 000 women in all 28 then EU Member States on their experiences of physical and sexual violence, sexual harassment and stalking over the past year and since the age of 15 – was published by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in 2014.³ The results paint a stark picture of the nature and extent of violence against women across the EU. The survey data show that one woman in three has experienced some form of physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15. One in 10 women has experienced some form of sexual violence since the age of 15, and one in 20 has been raped. Just over one in five women has experienced physical and/or sexual violence from either a current or previous partner, whilst 43 % of women have experienced some form of psychologically abusive and/or controlling behaviour when in a relationship.

At the most extreme end of the spectrum, Eurostat [data](#) on the number of reported incidents of intentional homicide, rape and sexual assault show that in many Member States⁴ over half of all female murder victims are killed by an intimate partner, relative or family member. According to a scientific study, there are approximately 3 500 domestic violence-related deaths in the EU every year. In other words, there are more than nine victims, as many as seven of them women, every day.⁵

However, as stressed in the [gender equality index report](#) released by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) in 2021, reliable, comparable, up to date data on violence against women are still [lacking](#) at national and European level, even for the most severe forms of violence.⁶ Although the data obtained through the FRA survey give a first comparative overview of women's experiences of violence in the EU, due to the limitations of the sample, it cannot give an insight into the

experiences of women who have experienced rarer forms of violence, and forms that specific groups in the population may fall victim to, such as female genital [mutilation](#) (FGM)⁷ and ['honour' crimes](#). These can only be captured by highly developed crime survey research, which to date exists in only a few Member States, such as [Italy](#), [Spain](#) and [Sweden](#).⁸ The lack of a common definition of violence against women at European level, and differences in the way data are collected at national level, are another obstacle to collecting comparable data.⁹

Crucially, one of the key FRA survey findings, for all types of violence, is that the majority of women do not report their experiences to the authorities. Victims had reported their most serious incidents of partner violence to the police in only 14 % of cases, and the most serious incidents of non-partner violence in only 13 % of cases. Together with fear and shame, or lack of confidence in the authorities, public attitudes towards violence against women, including [victim-blaming](#), may deter women from reporting. A 2016 [Eurostat](#) survey showed that more than one in five respondents (22 %) believe that women often make up or exaggerate claims of abuse or [rape](#), and 27 % think that there are situations where sexual intercourse without consent is justified. This means that the full scale of violence against women is not reflected in official data.



Consequences

Violence has serious immediate and long-term consequences for the physical and mental health of the women who are victims, and can have consequences for children who witness it. The EU FRA survey revealed that the victims' emotional responses to victimisation had been fear, anger and shame. They suffered from a loss of self-confidence and were left feeling vulnerable and anxious. About half of the victims suffered injuries, some of them multiple. For example, 17 % of victims of sexual violence by a partner suffered two to three different types of physical injuries as a result of the most serious incident.

Besides the human suffering caused and impacts on health, violence against women imposes a significant economic burden on society as a whole, in the form of healthcare, social, policing and legal costs and lost productivity. According to [EIGE](#), violence against women costs the EU €289 billion per year. EPRS research also [quantifies](#) the impacts on individuals, society and GDP.¹⁰

Issues in the spotlight: Ongoing impacts of the coronavirus pandemic and lessons for the future

Past crises and epidemics, including the outbreaks of SARS and swine flu, were [associated](#) with increased levels of violence against both women and children. [Warnings](#)¹¹ about the risks of a similar situation unfolding during the pandemic have, unfortunately, been confirmed, with evidence of a [surge](#) in domestic abuse and increased vulnerability to other forms of gender-based violence. Globally, lockdown measures have led to increased internet usage, putting more women and girls at risk of various forms of [cyber-violence](#). There is also an increased risk of harmful practices such as [early marriage](#) and [FGM](#). Prior to the pandemic, 1 in 10 women in the EU [reported](#) experiencing cyber-harassment since the age of 15. Women and girls in Europe were also affected by [forced marriage](#) and [FGM](#). Although travel restrictions have made it more difficult to take girls abroad for [forced marriage](#) and for [FGM](#) to be performed, school closures, isolation and pressures on

prevention and support services make them more vulnerable. Women and girls already exposed as a result of intersecting forms of discrimination are reported to be particularly at risk, including [older women](#), [women and girls with disabilities](#), [LBTI+ women](#), [victims of trafficking](#), and women in [prostitution](#).

Within the EU, the biggest spotlight has fallen on the rise in domestic violence, which has been an unintended consequence of mandatory lockdowns. There are [many reasons](#) why quarantine in particular can increase the risks of domestic violence and abuse. Victims are confined with abusers and isolated from support networks, and have fewer avenues for escape. Perpetrators may [capitalise](#) on lockdown measures to exercise power and control, for instance by monitoring use of telephones and computers more closely, giving victims fewer opportunities to contact helplines and other support services. Shelters and other support services are likely to be under pressure and unable to operate normally due to the public health measures and redeployment of resources to deal with the health emergency. Legal proceedings, needed to issue barring and protection orders and evict perpetrators from the home, may be interrupted. Support for men who have already been violent or controlling towards their partners before quarantine, or who may become so as a result of the situation, may also be reduced. More generally, the economic impacts of pandemics and other crises may elevate the risk of domestic violence.

Given the lack of comparable data, it is difficult to quantify the extent of the increase in violence against women across the EU. However, as of November 2021, substantial evidence has been gathered by support organisations and some governments. In Italy, for instance, the statistics office has published [data on calls to the national anti-violence helpline](#) since 2018, providing evidence of trends. The [dataset](#) published in October 2021 confirms that lockdowns were associated with an increase in domestic violence, with a peak in the number of calls and of victims during the lockdown in the second quarter of 2020 (12 942 calls and 5 606 victims, 66.1 % of whom reported having suffered multiple types of violence). Intimate partner violence also increased in [Sweden](#), which did not implement a lockdown policy, possibly as a result of the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic. In 2020, comparative [research](#) conducted for the European Parliament examined the available data and concluded that the pandemic and the lockdown measures have led to an increase in the prevalence and intensity of violence against women in some countries. This research and EIGE's [analysis](#) of the impacts of the pandemic on intimate partner violence, published in 2021, also find that the pandemic has created significant challenges for victim support organisations.

Against the backdrop of a further [resurgence in Covid-19 cases](#) and lockdowns in several EU countries, what lessons have been learned for the ongoing pandemic, its aftermath and other future crisis situations? EIGE flags that no EU country had a disaster plan in place to deal with domestic violence. EIGE and [European and national women's organisations](#) also stress that there were gaps in essential victim support services in most EU countries before the pandemic and that there is therefore an urgent need to understand how existing measures can be strengthened and what new measures need to be implemented.

Efforts made during the pandemic illustrate what can be done. The [Covid-19 Global Gender Response Tracker](#), launched by UN Women and UNDP in September 2020, continues to monitor the measures taken by governments worldwide to address violence against women and girls. It shows that the majority of EU countries have responded proactively to protect women, maintain existing services and introduce innovative ways of providing support for victims.¹² EIGE's research and two studies for Parliament, on the [gendered impact of the Covid-19 crisis](#) and the [added value of the Istanbul Convention](#) detail these promising measures, which include awareness-raising campaigns, new places and ways for victims to access help, additional funding and comprehensive action plans. The research for Parliament demonstrates that ratification of the Istanbul Convention – one of the EU's [priorities](#) for preventing and combating violence against women – remains an important way forward. The Convention has contributed directly to the creation of services for victims in a number of countries, while countries that have ratified the Convention have implemented more measures

during the pandemic than those that have not, suggesting greater political awareness and readiness to respond to violence against women.

International context

United Nations

The [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (1979)¹³ and the [Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women](#) (1993) are benchmark documents in the field. Although not binding, the declaration was the first international text to deal exclusively with violence against women.

Violence against women was one of the critical areas of concern identified in the [Beijing Platform for Action \(BPfA\)](#) adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. The platform lists the measures that states, and international and non-governmental organisations, should take to prevent and tackle this form of violence. The [Commission on the Status of Women](#) monitors and reviews progress on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. In [2016](#), the commission strongly condemned all forms of violence against women and girls, and called for a number of [measures](#), including improvements to legislation and better implementation. At its 64th session in 2020, the commission committed to full, effective and accelerated implementation of the BPfA, including eliminating and preventing all forms of violence and exploitation, off- and online and ensuring provision of support services for all women victims of violence.¹⁴

In 2017, the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women [assessed](#) the adequacy of the current international legal framework, concluding that the main challenge in addressing violence against women is the failure to fully incorporate and apply international norms. [General Recommendation No 35](#) on gender-based violence against women, adopted in July 2017, is intended to accelerate their implementation. This and the previous [General Recommendation No 19](#), which it updates, are landmark documents because they frame violence against women as a human rights issue and form of gender-based discrimination (No 19) and recognise the prohibition of gender-based violence as a norm, expanding the definition of violence to include violations of sexual and reproductive health rights (No 35). The Special Rapporteur's [2021 report](#) makes recommendations for further progress on the prevention of femicide or gender-related killings of women and girls.¹⁵

The UN [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) include a gender-equality goal, which incorporates targets aimed at ending violence and discrimination against women and girls, including a target on eliminating FGM and child, early and forced marriage (CEFM).

International Labour Organization

In June 2019, the International Labour Organization adopted the [Violence and Harassment Convention](#), which applies to violence and harassment in the world of work, and obliges the signatory states to adopt an inclusive, integrated and gender-responsive approach to prevent and eliminate violence and harassment in this context. The Convention will [enter into force](#) in Greece and Italy in 2022.

Council of Europe

In 2002, the Committee of Ministers adopted a [Recommendation on the protection of women against violence](#) in which it called on the member states to draw up action plans to prevent violence and protect victims.

The [Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#) ('[Istanbul Convention](#)') was opened for signature in May 2011 and entered into force in August 2014. Europe's first legally binding convention in the field, it creates a comprehensive framework for preventing violence, protecting victims and prosecuting perpetrators. As of November 2021, all EU Member States have [signed](#) the convention, and 21 (AT, BE, DE, CY, DK, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, IE, IT,

LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI) have ratified it. However, in July 2020, the Polish government announced its intention to withdraw from the Convention, a move which has not so far been made.

What is the EU doing?

The [Treaty on European Union](#) (TEU) affirms the principle of gender equality and non-discrimination (Article 2). The [Charter of Fundamental Rights](#) guarantees people's right to dignity (Title I) and equality (Title III). It also includes specific provisions on people's right to physical and mental integrity, and bans any form of discrimination on the grounds of sex. Although it has no legal force, Declaration 19 on Article 8 of the [Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union](#) (TFEU) affirms the political commitment of Member States to combat all forms of domestic violence.

EU legislation

The EU does not have a specific binding instrument designed to protect women from violence. However, legal instruments have been established in areas in which women may be victims of violence, and in areas where there is violence with a cross-border element, because this is where the EU has the strongest competence for crime-related action. This means that unfortunately, the EU 'has not addressed comprehensively the wider manifestation of violence as women experience it'.¹⁶

These instruments concern, among other things:

- equal treatment and non-discrimination, which includes a ban on sexual harassment ([Directive 2006/54/EC](#), a recast of [Directive 2002/73/EC](#), concerning equal treatment as regards access to employment and working conditions, [Directive 2010/41/EU](#) on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity, and [Directive 2004/113/EC](#) on equal treatment in the access to and supply of goods and services);¹⁷
- trafficking in human beings ([Directive 2011/36/EU](#) on combating trafficking and [Directive 2004/81/EC](#) on the residence permit issued to third-country nationals who are victims of trafficking);
- protecting victims by strengthening the rights of victims whatever their nationality and wherever in the EU the crime takes place, including if the victims travel or move within the EU ([Directive 2012/29/EU](#) on the rights and protection of victims of crime, [Directive 2011/99/EU](#) on the European protection order in criminal matters, and [Regulation \(EU\) No 606/2013](#) on mutual recognition of protection measures in civil matters).¹⁸

Political commitments

In her [political guidelines](#) and State of the Union address in [2021](#), President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen committed to prioritising preventing and combating violence against women. The Commission set out concrete measures in its '2020-2025 [gender equality strategy](#) and its annual work programmes'.¹⁹ Regarding specific forms of violence, new EU strategies for combating [trafficking in human beings](#) and [child sexual abuse](#) have also been introduced for 2021-2025. More broadly, a new [victims' rights strategy](#) focusing on ensuring more effective access to justice and compensation addresses the specific needs of victims of gender-based violence.

The key priority remains [EU accession](#) to the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention, which could help to provide more equal protection for women across Europe against all forms of violence. In October 2015, the Commission issued a [roadmap](#) for EU accession, followed in March 2016 by two proposals for Council decisions, one on the [signature](#) and the other on the [conclusion](#) (ratification) of the Convention on behalf of the EU. The EU [signed](#) the Convention on 13 June 2017. The next step is formal accession to the Convention, which requires the Council to adopt a decision, having obtained the consent of the European Parliament.

The gender equality strategy also set out other options to achieve the same objectives should progress stall on EU accession to the Istanbul Convention. Since this has proved to be the case, the Commission's work programme for 2021 includes a [legislative proposal](#) to prevent and combat specific forms of gender-based violence, to be put forward by the end of the year. On 11 November 2021, the equality Commissioner, Helena Dalli, [clarified](#) to the European Parliament's Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) and Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) Committees that the Commission expects the proposed directive to set standards for prevention, protection and access to justice for victims, and criminalisation of specific forms of violence against women, to the extent of EU competence. It will take a victim-centred and intersectional approach and go beyond the Istanbul Convention by addressing both online and offline forms of violence.

The Commission is also exploring other legislative options. To address the pervasive problem of online violence against women and girls, it has proposed a [digital services act](#) to ensure a safer and more accountable online environment. Work is also ongoing on a proposal to add [hate crime and hate speech](#) based on protected grounds, including sex, to the list of areas of serious crime included in the EU Treaties. Under its work programme for 2022, the Commission plans to [consider](#) a revision of the Victims' Rights Directive and possibly to propose new legislation.

Beyond legislation, in line with its increased focus on prevention, the Commission has committed to launch an EU network on the prevention of gender-based violence and domestic violence, where Member States and stakeholders can exchange good practice. It will also issue a recommendation on the [prevention of harmful practices](#), including FGM.

Funding will be provided for training, capacity-building and support services. The [Daphne programme](#), which funds [projects](#) aimed at preventing and combating violence and protecting victims, is continuing under the new [citizens, equality, rights and values programme](#) for 2021-2027. Member States are also encouraged to report on how they are using [EU recovery and resilience funding](#) to tackle gender-based and domestic violence.

Another key area for action is improving the availability, quality and reliability of data on gender-based violence through cooperation with Eurostat, the EIGE and the FRA. EIGE is engaged in a [project](#) to improve the collection and harmonisation of the data on violence against women collected by national police forces, justice systems, and health and social services across the EU. Since 2017, it has been able to [include](#) violence against women within its [gender equality index](#), which measures progress across the EU. Furthermore, an [EU-wide survey](#) coordinated by Eurostat will provide new data on violence against women and other forms of interpersonal violence. The results are due to come out in 2023.

In the field of EU external action, the [EU guidelines on violence against women](#) adopted in 2008 affirm the EU's commitment to promote and protect the rights of women in third countries. The Union addresses the problem of violence against women in its [specific dialogues on human rights](#) and supports projects to combat violence against women by means of the [European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights](#). Ensuring freedom from all forms of gender based violence is a [priority](#) in the gender action plan for external relations ([GAP III 2020-2025](#)), which builds on the achievements of earlier plans (GAP I and [GAP II](#)).²⁰ In 2017, the European Union and the United Nations launched the [Spotlight Initiative](#), with an initial investment of around €500 million, to support measures to eliminate violence against women and girls, in line with the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#). The [2020-2021 impact report](#) illustrates how the initiative has boosted national spending on combating violence, supported women's organisations working at grassroots level, maintained hotlines and other services during the coronavirus pandemic and helped to change attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate violence.

Member States

Although there are similarities between national policies to combat violence against women, the Member States have adopted different approaches to the problem.

As far as [legislation](#) is concerned, domestic physical violence and sexual violence are the main types of violence punishable by law.²¹ Domestic psychological violence, forced marriage, sexual harassment and FGM are punishable in different ways depending on the country. In some cases, victims must submit a formal complaint before legal proceedings can begin. The low prosecution and conviction rates for crimes of domestic violence and rape appear to be a problem common to a number of Member States. In order to address this problem, Spain has established [specialised courts](#) to deal with cases of violence against women.²²

In addition to legislative provisions, in recent years Member States have adopted policy strategies to combat violence against women, either in the form of national action plans (NAPs) targeting all or specific forms of violence, or through measures built into other action plans aimed for example at promoting gender equality and social inclusion.²³ Non-governmental organisation [data](#) from 2017 show that 24 EU Member States had NAPs on combating gender based violence in place in 2016 or after. Domestic violence and people trafficking are the most common areas addressed by the NAPs, although there is an increased concern for sexual violence, especially sexual harassment and FGM. Increasing emphasis is placed in these plans on prevention measures (e.g. awareness campaigns, training professionals working with victims, treatment programmes for perpetrators) and on support (shelters for women victims, telephone helplines). Meanwhile, reinsertion programmes focused on the needs of women victims of violence (access to affordable housing, employment, training and income support) are less common. In 2020, the Council of Europe [concluded](#) that many countries could do more to ensure their NAPs cover all forms of violence and that measures are monitored and fully resourced. Some EU Member States will use [EU recovery funding](#) to expand support for women victims, including Belgium (housing) and Spain (hotlines).

European Parliament

The European Parliament first sounded the alarm about the problem of violence against women in a [resolution](#) of 11 June 1986. Since then, it has played an important role in the field, not least through the work of its [FEMM committee](#). In 2015, the committee launched a [Working Group on Violence against Women](#) to create a forum for exchange of views and formulation of strategy on the issue.

Parliament has previously asked the Commission to monitor the implementation of existing EU gender equality legislation more effectively and has carried out its own assessments of the [Victims' Rights Directive](#), and the [European Protection Order](#) (EPO). These [found](#) that the directive had not been fully implemented across the EU, in particular when it comes to access to support services, and that differences between judicial systems (for example, stalking is not a criminal offence in all EU countries) are obstructing the use of EPOs. In February 2021, Parliament [assessed](#) the implementation of the [Trafficking Directive](#), calling on Member States to improve support for victims, adopt a gender perspective across all measures and combat the gender inequalities and gender stereotypes that are root causes of trafficking.

Since [2009](#), Parliament has also been urging the Commission to draw up a comprehensive proposal for a directive on preventing and combating all forms of violence against women, to ensure that all women in the EU have the same level of protection from male violence. In its [resolution](#) of 25 February 2014, it also called on the Council to add violence against women to the [areas of particularly serious crime](#) listed in Article 83(1) [TFEU](#), and asked the Commission to launch the procedure for EU accession to the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention, as a complement to a future EU directive. It has continued to push for progress on these recommendations.²⁴ A [European added value assessment](#) conducted for Parliament found that an EU directive would have far greater impact on national legal orders than EU accession to the Istanbul Convention, but taken together, the two instruments would 'guarantee a true European Area of Freedom, Security and Justice where violence against women becomes not only rhetorically but also legally outlawed'.

With respect to the Istanbul Convention, before receiving a formal request for its consent, Parliament has been [considering](#) the matter of EU accession. In its [interim resolution](#) of

12 September 2017, it welcomed the signing of the Convention by the EU and urged the Council to speed up EU ratification. However, it also called for EU accession to be broad and without limitations, and regretted that it had been restricted to two areas (judicial cooperation in criminal matters and asylum and *non-refoulement*). In Parliament's view, this raises legal uncertainties about the scope of the EU's accession and concerns about its implementation. In its [resolution](#) of 4 April 2019, Parliament decided to ask the European Court of Justice for an opinion to clarify the appropriate legal basis and ratification procedure, and [therefore the scope](#), of EU accession to the Convention. The CJEU issued its [ruling](#) on 6 October 2021. It found that the appropriate legal basis is Articles 78(2), 82(2), 84 and 336 TFEU, covering asylum, judicial cooperation in criminal matters and the obligations of the EU institutions and public administration. The opinion also clarifies that the EU is not required to wait until all Member States have ratified the Convention before acceding. The Council may not make agreement of all Member States a prerequisite for the accession decision, which should be made based on a qualified majority. However, it is within the Council's discretion to take time to build support before adopting a decision. Parliament has also asked the Commission to be proactive in dispelling [misconceptions](#) about the Istanbul Convention, in particular around the use of the terms 'gender' and 'gender-based violence', which are [blocking](#) ratification by some EU Member States.

Parliament continues to back the approach of pushing in parallel for both accession to the Istanbul Convention and additional options. In September 2021, it adopted a [legislative-initiative resolution](#) with recommendations to the Commission on adding gender-based violence to the existing areas of serious crime. This would go beyond the current Commission proposal to add hate crime to the areas listed in Article 83(1) TFEU, in that it would cover all forms of gender-based violence and provide a stronger legal basis for the Parliament and the Council to adopt a directive setting minimum standards for prosecuting them as crimes and protecting victims. The accompanying [European added value assessment by EPRS](#) identifies five reasons why the EU has grounds to criminalise gender-based violence and evaluates the advantages of this policy option.

Beyond legislation, Parliament has [repeatedly called](#) for establishment of a coherent system for collecting statistics on gender-based violence in Member States; for a European Observatory on Violence against Women and Girls; and adoption of an EU-wide strategy and action plan to combat violence against women. Parliament has also put the spotlight on [emerging forms of gender-based violence](#) such as cyberstalking and online harassment and drawn attention to the need to combat specific forms of violence including [sexual harassment](#), [trafficking](#), [forced prostitution of women](#), and [FGM](#),²⁵ and to the vulnerability of and issues facing particular groups such as [undocumented women migrants](#), [women asylum-seekers and refugees](#), [women and girls with disabilities](#) and [LBTI women and Roma women](#). Parliament has also flagged that a [backlash against women's rights and gender equality](#) is eroding the machinery and resources for combating violence against women at national level, and called for renewed commitment at national, EU and [global](#) level. It called for and [obtained](#) increased funding for the [citizens, equality, rights and values programme](#) for 2021-2027, which covers the Daphne programme for preventing and combating violence against women.

In 2021, Parliament has adopted resolutions on the importance of addressing gender-based violence in the context of the [coronavirus pandemic](#) and the issue of [intimate partner violence and custody rights](#). In its [resolution](#) of 24 June 2021 on the situation of sexual and reproductive health and rights in the EU, Parliament recognised violations of women's sexual and reproductive health and rights as a form of violence against women and girls that hinders progress towards gender equality. As of November 2021, Parliament's FEMM and LIBE committees are preparing a legislative-initiative resolution on [combating cyber-violence](#), with an accompanying [EPRS European added value study](#).

Stakeholder views

A number of specific issues relating to violence against women have been the focus of attention and advocacy by civil society organisations and other stakeholders.

The negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on women's safety and security has been noted by several organisations, including the European umbrella organisation, the [European Women's Lobby](#) (EWL), which warned from the start that women and girls are at [higher risk](#) of domestic violence while obliged to shelter at home, owing to increased tensions in the household. The EWL is [calling on](#) national authorities to work with women's organisations to get a clearer picture of what is happening on the ground and to provide them with the immediate and long-term support they need to assist survivors. It also recommends specific measures for ensuring continued access to helplines and legal services. The [Women against Violence Europe](#) (WAVE) network had already highlighted gaps in support through its mapping of support services such as helplines, women's centres and shelters available to women survivors in Europe. Their most recent [report](#), issued in December 2019, found that 21 EU countries have at least one helpline for survivors, but only 16 meet the Istanbul Convention minimum standards of being free and available round the clock, and only five Member States meet the minimum standards for bed spaces in women's shelters.

Another issue dominating recent debates has been the amount of money dedicated to combatting violence against women in the EU's funding programmes for 2021 to 2027. In September 2020, 14 members of the European Coalition to end violence against women and girls wrote an [open letter](#) to EU decision-makers regarding the 2021-2027 MFF and the EU's Next Generation EU recovery plans, in which they urged the EU to ensure adequate EU funds to promote gender equality and the fight to end violence against women and girls. The Coalition advocated that the amount dedicated to the citizens, equality, rights and values programme be tripled to €1.83 billion. They also asked for an increase in funding for the EIGE. The EWL made similar calls for robust funding in an [open letter](#) to the ECOFIN Council on 3 November 2020.

Accession to the Istanbul Convention is an issue that has been on the agenda for longer, but it is still current and important, not least because it provides the foundation for a systematic and EU-wide approach to combatting gender-based violence. This is recognised by numerous organisations, many of which have advocated over the years that the EU and the Member States ratify the Convention, including the [European Economic and Social Committee](#) and the [EWL](#). In 2021, to mark the 10th anniversary of the Istanbul Convention, the EWL published a report entitled [Towards a Europe Free from Male Violence Against Women and Girls](#), which identifies positive results brought about by the Convention, including improvements in efforts to prevent violence, prosecute perpetrators and support victims. The EWL [regrets](#) that, although the European Court of Justice opinion on EU accession to the Istanbul Convention clarifies that a qualified majority would be sufficient to proceed with the ratification, it means that the decision could remain stalled in the Council for an indefinite period.

In this context, the EWL is [calling](#) for an EU directive, and, [amongst others](#), has set out its own [recommendations](#) ahead of the Commission proposal. It would like to see a directive, which covers the continuum of all forms of male violence against women and girls, including sexual exploitation and online violence, and which meets and exceeds the standards set out in the Istanbul Convention. The EWL calls for violence against women to be recognised as areas of serious crime listed in the Treaties, as the best route to a comprehensive directive. The EWL would also like to see harmonisation of existing EU legislative instruments relating to forms of violence against women and girls. In addition, the EWL [has called](#) for a comprehensive EU strategy to end all forms of violence against women in Europe. The EWL also urged the EU to adopt legislation to [end prostitution](#) and [sex trafficking](#) by criminalising the purchase of sex, by 2020. It is now 20 years since the EWL passed [a motion](#) affirming that 'prostitution and trafficking in women constitutes a fundamental violation of women's human rights'.

A further focus for stakeholders is monitoring. The EWL's [Observatory](#) on violence against women, with members from 32 European countries and seven international and European women's organisations, identifies issues and continuously monitors progress towards eliminating violence against women. A recent area of interest and action is the adoption of international standards to end violence against women in the [world of work](#). Another key focus, for the EWL and other

organisations, is to raise awareness of the reality and impacts of online violence. The EWL [mapped](#) the situation in 2017 and launched an initiative to support [politically engaged women](#). WAVE has published research on cyberviolence against women and girls, as part of the CYBERSAFE project. Their [2020 report](#) presents a literature overview on the situation in several EU Member States.

Stakeholders are also highlighting the importance of addressing the specific situations and needs of diverse groups of women and advocating for particular populations. An important area of action for the WAVE network has been raising awareness of the importance of [specialist support services for women](#) and working to protect these services from gender-neutral policy and practice. In 2020, WAVE published a [handbook](#) on how to counteract this phenomenon, which foregrounds the need for these services to take account of the fact that different women survivors of violence encounter various forms of discrimination. The network has also published a [position paper](#) on intersectionality and an inclusive approach to dealing with gender-based violence and specific recommendations for [improving support and protection for older women](#) and [women with disabilities](#). A number of organisations are working to raise awareness of and prevent harmful practices such as [FGM](#). The [European Network of Migrant Women](#) (ENOMW) has [drawn attention](#) to an increase in the number of women victims of trafficking arriving in the European Union and called for comprehensive support and rehabilitation programmes, together with better training for reception centre staff and measures to tackle demand. More recently, the network has drawn attention to the perilous situation of migrant women during the [pandemic](#), for whom safety measures can often not be applied. In 2021-2022, EU citizens are debating action to combat violence against women in the [Conference on the Future of Europe](#).

FURTHER READING

European Institute for Gender Equality, [Gender Equality Index 2017: Measurement framework of violence against women](#), 2017 and [Gender Equality Index 2021](#).

[Tackling violence against women and domestic violence in Europe: The added value of the Istanbul Convention and remaining challenges](#), European Parliament, Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, October 2020.

[The gendered impact of the COVID-19 crisis and post-crisis period](#), European Parliament, Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, 2020.

[Implementation of the Daphne programme and other funds aimed at fighting violence against women and girls](#), European Parliament, Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, 2019.

[Protecting Women against Violence – Best Practices from all over Europe](#), German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, 2020.

ENDNOTES

¹ G. Malgesini, L. Cesarini Sforza, M. Babović, [Gender-based Violence and Poverty in Europe](#), Briefing, EAPN Gender and Poverty Working Group, 2019; A. Peterman, S. Roy, M. Ranganathan, [How is economic security linked to gender-based violence? New insights from the Sexual Violence Research Initiative Forum 2019](#), International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), 2 December 2019; F. Bettio, E. Ticci, [Violence against women and economic independence](#), European Commission, 2017.

² See also [Violence against women and the role of gender equality, social inclusion and health strategies: synthesis report](#), European Commission, 2010, Section 1.13, pp. 81-85.

³ The FRA's [2019 Fundamental Rights Survey](#) has data on women's and men's experiences of selected forms of violence, but the data is not comparable with the earlier violence against women survey due to differences in methodology. The EU statistics agency, Eurostat is [collecting data](#) for a follow-up survey, the results of which are expected in 2023.

⁴ For this category, though, the data are not available for all Member States. As of 2018, comparable data on women victims of intimate partner femicide were available for 14 Member States. See: the EIGE [gender statistics database](#) and analysis of the data in [The EU is inching towards comparable data on intimate partner violence](#), EIGE, 2020. The [European Observatory on Femicide](#) also published [findings on femicide in Europe](#) in 2018.

⁵ Figures for 2006. See: Estimated mortality related to domestic violence in Europe, summary of scientific report, Psytel, June 2010, p. 5. The scientific report and summary are available at: <http://www.psytel.eu/en/>.

⁶ See section 8.1 of the EIGE [report](#), p 70.

⁷ EIGE is working on a methodology for assessing the number of girls at risk of FGM in the EU. Between 2021 and 2021, EIGE published [four studies](#), the first mapping the situation in the EU and the others focusing on the risk of FGM in

- specific EU Member States (Ireland, Portugal and Sweden (2015); Belgium, Greece, France, Italy, Cyprus and Malta (2018) and Denmark, Spain, Luxembourg and Austria (2020).
- ⁸ J. Goodey, [Violence against women: placing evidence from a European Union-wide survey in a policy context](#), *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 2017, Vol. 32(12): 1760-1791.
- ⁹ For an overview of national indicators and definitions, see: EIGE, [Data Collection on Violence Against Women](#).
- ¹⁰ W. von Ballegoij, [Equality and the Fight Against Racism and Xenophobia: Cost of Non-Europe Report](#), EPRS, European Parliament, 2018, pp. 25-27.
- ¹¹ Actors in the EU that sounded the alert include the [European Women's Lobby](#), the Council of Europe's [Secretary General](#) and the [Group of experts on action against violence against women and domestic violence](#), the EU's [Commissioner for Equality](#), the [EIGE](#), and the European Parliament's [FEMM Committee](#).
- ¹² As of November 2021, Hungary and Slovakia are the only EU Member States with no entries for this category. To provide information on national measures to be included in the Covid-19 Global Gender Response Tracker, contact COVID.gender.helpdesk@undp.org
- ¹³ The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, in [General Recommendation No 19 \(1992\)](#), contributed to having violence against women recognised as a form of discrimination within the Convention's meaning.
- ¹⁴ In 2020, the EIGE issued a [review of the BPfA](#) with specific findings and recommendations for the EU and the Member States.
- ¹⁵ The [annual reports](#) for 2018, 2019 and 2020 focused, respectively, on [online violence](#), [obstetric violence](#) and [violence against women journalists](#).
- ¹⁶ See J. Goodey, p. 1762 and [The Legal Protection of Women From Violence Normative Gaps in International Law](#), Rashida Manjoo, Jackie Jones, eds., Routledge, 2019: Chapter 5.
- ¹⁷ These directives prohibit both harassment on grounds of gender and sexual harassment, and consider them to be a form of gender-based discrimination.
- ¹⁸ The regulation, which has applied since 11 January 2015, is of importance for women [victims of domestic violence](#) who wish to make use of their right to free movement within the EU.
- ¹⁹ Progress is assessed in the Commission's annual report on gender equality (most recently in [2021](#)).
- ²⁰ The action plan was adopted in the form of Presidency conclusions, since the Council could not reach the necessary consensus to endorse it. For further details see Parliament's [legislative train carriage on GAP III](#).
- ²¹ For further information on national legislation, see the [monitoring reports](#) on implementation of the Istanbul Convention. The European network of legal experts in gender equality and non-discrimination also follows [legislative developments](#) in individual Member States.
- ²² For information on the effectiveness of the Spanish courts see, [Specialised gender violence courts in Spain](#), Pour la Solidarité, August 2021; and Martínez Matute, M. and García-Hombrados. J., [Specialized Courts and the Reporting of Intimate Partner Violence: Evidence from Spain](#), 2021.
- ²³ Examples of current plans are included in the [monitoring reports](#) on implementation of the Istanbul Convention and [appendices](#) to evaluations of the Council of Europe 2018-2023 Gender Equality Strategy. The European network of legal experts in gender equality and non-discrimination also follows [developments](#) in individual Member States.
- ²⁴ For example in its resolutions of [9 June 2015](#), [24 November 2016](#), [14 March 2017](#), [12 September 2017](#), [11 September 2018](#), [28 November 2019](#) and [13 February 2020](#).
- ²⁵ In its resolutions of [2009](#), [2012](#), [2014](#), [2020](#), and [2021](#) Parliament has called on the Commission and the Member States to take measures to eliminate the practice.

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