

# Violence against women in the EU

## State of play in 2025

### SUMMARY

Violence against women is a violation of human rights and a serious form of discrimination against women. It takes many forms and, according to survey data, affects one third of women in the EU. Such violence has a major impact on victims and imposes a significant cost burden on society.

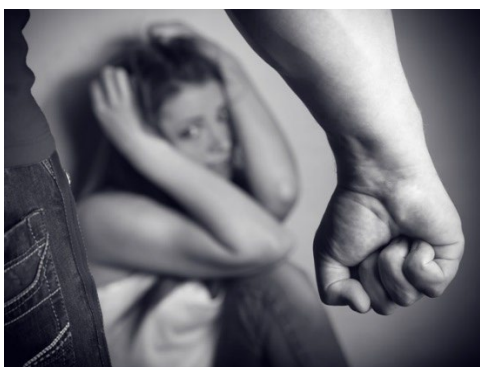
International documents adopted by the United Nations and Council of Europe, including the latter's 'Istanbul Convention', to which the EU acceded in 2023, set the normative framework for combating violence against women. The EU has embodied these international norms in its legislation and policies.

The EU has deployed all the tools at its disposal to combat this phenomenon. It has adopted specific legislation focused on violence against women and has used legislation on other related subjects to address this type of violence. It has funded multiple programmes at EU and international level and has organised exchanges of good practice among its Member States.

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

Parliament has been a strong supporter of EU action in the area. It has repeatedly called on the Commission and Member States to adopt legislative and non-legislative measures to combat violence against women, and has debated the multiple forms of this violence in its resolutions.

*This is a further update in a series of EPRS briefings on the matter dating back to February [2014](#). The most recent previous edition was from [2022](#).*



### IN THIS BRIEFING

- What is violence against women?
- International context
- What is the EU doing?
- EU Member States
- European Parliament
- Views of EU advisory bodies and stakeholders



### Glossary

**Violence against women:** 'violence against women' means all acts of gender-based violence directed against a woman or a girl because she is a woman or a girl, or that affect women or girls disproportionately, that result in or are likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life'

**Domestic violence:** 'domestic violence' means all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit, irrespective of biological or legal family ties, or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the offender shares or has shared a residence with the victim'

Source: EU Directive (EU) 2024/1385 on combating violence against women and domestic violence.

## What is violence against women?

EU Directive [2024/1385](#) on combating violence against women and domestic violence conceptualises violence against women from a twofold perspective:

- in terms of **fundamental rights** and of internationally recognised **human rights**, as a multiple violation of such rights, and a form of discrimination and breach of the principle of gender equality (recitals 3 and 4);
- through a **social lens** as a form of structural discrimination against women rooted in the socially constructed distinct gender roles that our societies assign to women and men.

This understanding of violence against women has been inspired by important, norms-setting international documents such as the 1993 UN [Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women](#) and the Istanbul Convention of the Council of Europe, as well as the case law of the European Court of Human Rights.

This definition of violence in terms of social and legal norms does not preclude a more concrete analysis of specific forms and causes of violence against women. The EU directive calls on the Member States to conduct research programmes to improve awareness and understanding among the general public of the different manifestations and root causes of all forms of violence against women and domestic violence (Article 34(2)).

## Forms and causes

Violence against women 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,

**Empirical scientific research** on human aggression has highlighted a multiplicity of factors that contribute to inter-personal violence, including violence against women. Scientific fields such as [evolutionary biology](#), psychology (e.g. [social learning theory](#)), [sociology](#), medical science and [neuroscience](#) provide insightful and often complementary perspectives on this complex phenomenon. Thus, according to [researchers](#) in neuroscience, complex processes (levels of various hormones, metabolism, stress, the use of psychotropic drugs, etc.) participate, for example, in the triggering of violent sexual acts. Such factors are not deterministic and do not exonerate perpetrators from responsibility, but a better knowledge of these elements can help build strategies and treatments to prevent violence.

older women, women with disabilities, LGBTI women, women in prostitution or women living in institutions, are more likely to experience violence and [multiple](#) forms of violence. With the rise of digital technologies, gender-based violence against women has also extended online. The risk of cyberviolence is [higher](#) for young women, those at risk of multiple discrimination and those in public life.

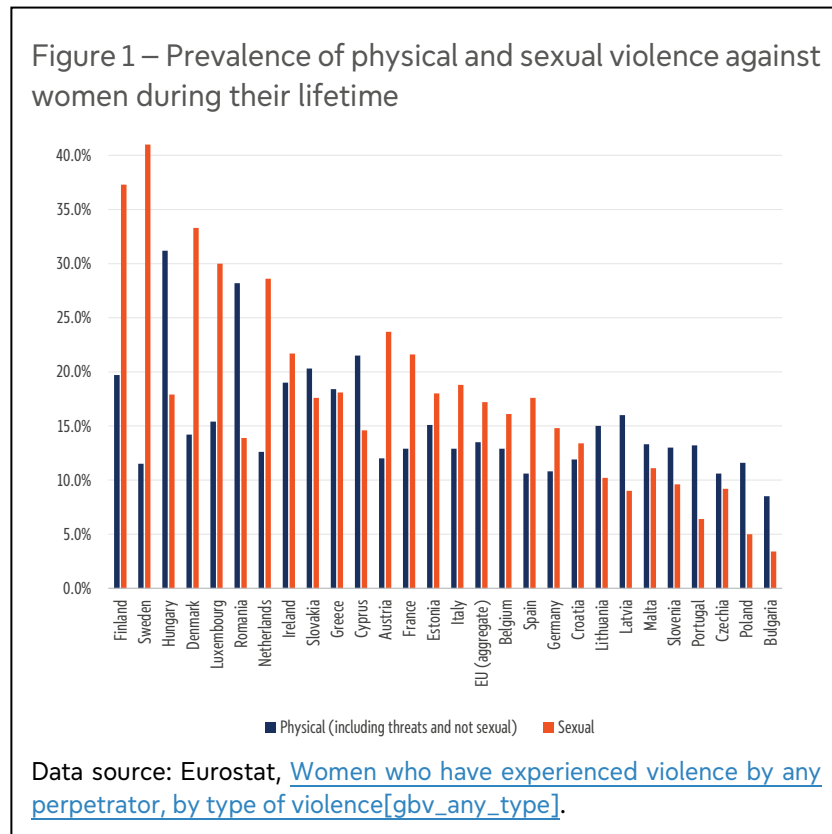
Violence against women and girls is facilitated and perpetuated by unjust social, cultural and economic factors. Thus, traditional values and norms are sometimes invoked to justify it. [Factors](#) such as a lack of economic independence increase women's vulnerability.

## EU-wide data on violence against women

### Survey data

In an attempt to assess the scale of this social problem, the EU has carried out two surveys on gender-based violence: the 2012 and 2021 'waves'. The second EU-wide survey on gender-based violence was conducted between September 2020 and March 2024 jointly by [Eurostat](#), the EU

Fundamental Rights Agency ([FRA](#)), and the European Institute for Gender Equality ([EIGE](#)). It consisted of interviews with 114 023 women in the 27 Member States on their experiences of physical and sexual violence, sexual harassment and stalking over the past year and since the age of 15.



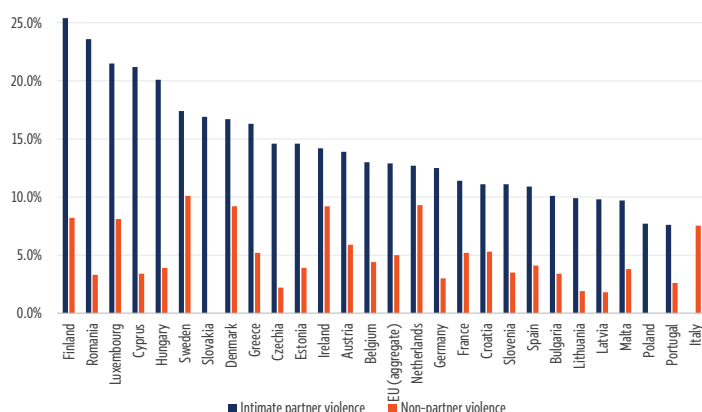
The survey data show that 30 % of women have experienced some form of physical violence (including threats) and/or sexual violence during their lifetime since the age of 15 (see Figure 1). In 10 of the [11 EU countries](#) that have also collected data about male victims of physical and sexual violence, female victims outnumber male victims of violence, and the

gap widens significantly in the case of [violence](#) by an intimate partner. The EU records one of the lowest rates of intimate partner violence against women in the world: in the last 12 months before the survey, [5.3 %](#) of women in the EU had experienced violence from an intimate partner compared to [12.5 %](#) globally.<sup>1</sup>

In the EU, [31 % of women](#) surveyed have experienced harassment at work during adulthood, and 13 % have suffered it during the last 12 months, while [18.5 % of women](#) have been stalked during their adult life, and 2.8 % have suffered stalking during the last 12 months.

Most of the violence endured by women occurs in the home, and it is most often perpetrated by an intimate partner (see Figure 2 below).

Figure 2 – Violence against women by type of perpetrator during the past 5 years



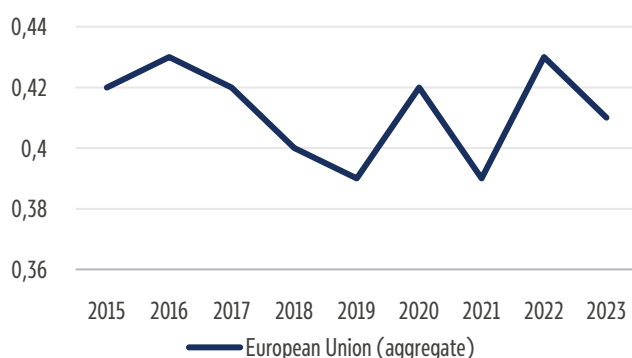
Data source: Eurostat, Gender-based violence by perpetrator ([gbv\\_ipv\\_occ](#), [gbv\\_npv\\_occ](#)) (some countries provide data for only one type of violence).

The results of the EU survey are to be relativised by taking account of subjective factors, including local cultural and social norms, that shape women's perception of the violence suffered and thus their readiness to report it in the survey. For example, the level of education matters for the self-perception of violence. Thus, across the EU more women with higher education levels reported having suffered violence, but there are big disparities among EU countries.<sup>2</sup> In some, women with less education reported more violence.

## Administrative crime data

[Administrative data](#) are another important source for estimating the scale of violence against women. Nevertheless, they only illustrate the tip of the iceberg, given the extent of underreporting of such crimes to authorities by victims.

Figure 3 – Prevalence of intentional homicides of women by family member/intimate partner by 100 000 inhabitants)



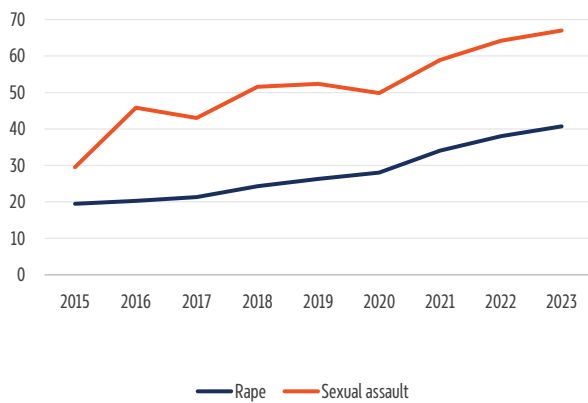
Data source: Eurostat, [Intentional homicide victims by victim-offender relationship and sex\[crim\\_hom\\_vrel\]](#).

Eurostat collects data from Member States on the number of certain crimes as reported to authorities, including intentional homicide cases disaggregated by the sex of victims, and sexual violence crimes. Eurostat data<sup>3</sup> on the number of reported cases of intentional homicide show that in many Member States<sup>4</sup> over half of all female murder victims are killed by an intimate partner, relative or family member. Overall, twice as many [women](#) as men fall victim to intentional homicides by family members or intimate partners in the EU. Intentional homicide of women by strangers can also have gender-related motives, but Member States still collect insufficient data on various crime characteristics that would allow correct

identification of femicides (understood<sup>5</sup> as intentional homicides of women related to gender motives). In 2023, 749 women were killed by someone known to them in the 17 EU reporting countries. The number of femicides relative to the population has remained fairly constant, despite some yearly variations, during the past decade (as shown in Figure 3).

Eurostat data on sexual violence illustrate a significant, twofold increase over the last decade (see Figure 4 below) in the number of reported cases of rape and sexual assault in the EU, but this increase is unequally distributed among Member States.<sup>6</sup> In France, Denmark, Czechia, Spain, Latvia

Figure 4 – Sexual violence against women (victims per 100 000 inhabitants, EU average)



Data source: Eurostat, [Intentional homicide and sexual offences by legal status and sex of the person involved\[crim\\_hom\\_soff\]](#).

and Finland, the number of reported rapes more than doubled in the period 2021–2023 compared to 2014–2016, but in a few countries (Poland, Bulgaria, Lithuania) it decreased. The increase, where it occurred, was probably also related to increased social awareness of sexual crimes and readiness of victims to report it following the #MeToo movement, related debates, as well as institutional and legal reforms which facilitate reporting.

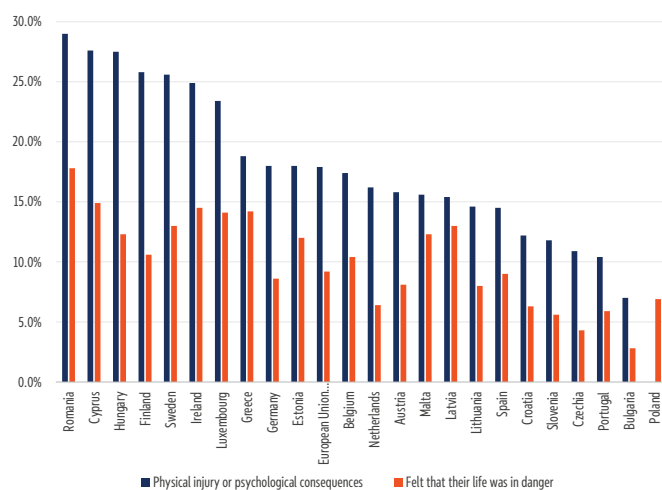
Existing data do not adequately identify rarer forms of violence suffered specifically by women, such as [female genital mutilation \(FGM\)](#)<sup>7</sup> and ['honour' crimes](#).

Comparing survey data with administrative data shows the extent of underreporting of violent crimes to authorities. This is also one of the key findings from the gender-based violence survey, for all types of violence. According to the survey, victims had reported incidents of violence in only **14 %** of cases to the police, and in 20.5 % of cases to a healthcare service or social service. Together with fear and shame, or lack of confidence in the authorities, public attitudes towards violence against women, including victim-blaming,<sup>8</sup> may deter women from reporting.

## Cost of violence

Violence has serious immediate and long-term consequences for the physical and mental health of

Figure 5 – Share of women who have suffered health consequences of violence



Data source: Eurostat, Crime and criminal justice, [Women who have experienced violence by any perpetrator and consequences of violence\[gbv\\_any\\_cnq\]](#).

the victims and can have consequences for children who witness it. The second EU survey has collected data about the health impact of violence for victims and reveals that over half of victims (**57 %**) suffered health consequences from violence. Overall, 13 % of women in the EU have sustained physical injuries because of violence and 12 % have suffered psychological consequences. [Research](#) conducted by EIGE in 2022 finds that psychological violence leads to heightened risk of suicide, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The impacts of online violence can be [as severe](#) as for offline violence.

Besides the human suffering caused and impacts on health, violence against women imposes a significant economic burden on society, 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 and puts the cost of cyberviolence against women and girls at €49.0 billion to €89.3 billion per year.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, there is evidence that offline and [online](#) violence is having a chilling effect on women's and girls' presence in [public spaces](#) and participation in [politics](#) and other areas of public life.

## Issues in the spotlight: New social and technological developments

Violence against women continues to persist and affect significant numbers of women. Its forms and motivations are evolving, driven by profound social and technological changes. New ideas and technologies act as a double-edged sword, playing a crucial role in both combating this violence but also in encouraging and amplifying it.

Thus, increased social awareness about violence against women – spurred by campaigns such as #MeToo! – has encouraged [reform](#) of legislation on sexual violence and led to campaigns about the importance of consent in sexual relations. On the other hand, radical anti-feminist [movements](#) and ideas have spread in the digital world, encouraging the subordination of women and justifying gender-based violence.

Such social polarisation is facilitated by new digital technologies, which are also the medium for various forms of [cyber-violence](#). These technologies are powerful [tools](#) in the hands of stalkers, misogynists and other cyber-criminals who target women's dignity, safety and privacy. The spread of violent pornography and deep-fakes generated by artificial intelligence is a form of digital violence with frequent spillovers in the real world.

## International context

### United Nations

The UN [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW, 1979)<sup>10</sup> and the UN General Assembly [Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women](#) (1993) are benchmark documents which set the core international norms and objectives in the field. Although not binding, the declaration was the first international text to deal exclusively with violence against women. The CEDAW Committee's [General Recommendation No 35](#) on gender-based violence against women, adopted in July 2017, 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).

In recent resolutions, the UN General Assembly has focused on the need to address gender stereotypes and negative social norms as an important driver of violence against women and girls ([resolution 77/193](#)), and on actions to eliminate violence against women and girls in the digital environment ([resolution 79/152](#)).

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. On the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), the UN Secretary General published a [report](#) on progress under the BPfA that notes the persistence of violence against women across the world and also welcomes significant efforts

deployed by UN states, such as the introduction of national action plans (79 % of all states in the world have done so), and the adoption or reform of legislation on the matter (90 % of all states).

The [UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls](#) draws attention to specific issues in her annual reports.<sup>11</sup>

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 women-focused approach to prevent and eliminate violence and harassment in this context. The Convention has entered or will [enter into force](#) by the end of 2025 in 14 EU Member States.

## Council of Europe

In 2002, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe 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 May 2025, all EU Member States have [signed](#) the convention, and 22 have ratified it. Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Lithuania and Slovakia are the remaining five Member States not to have ratified it. The EU ratified it in June 2023, effectively becoming a party on 1 October 2023.

## What is the EU doing?

The [Treaty on European Union](#) (TEU) affirms the principle of equality between women and men 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 on violence against women

The EU has established a dedicated instrument to prevent and combat violence against women through Directive 2024/1385. This EU directive sets minimum standards for prevention, protection and access to justice for victims, and criminalises some specific forms of violence against women, to the extent of the EU's competence: namely female genital mutilation and forced marriage, and several forms of cyber violence. It introduces safer, more women-friendly procedures for reporting and individual risk assessments for victims; requires Member States to provide dedicated services to the victims of sexual and domestic violence, and to take preventive measures to eliminate the root causes of violence through education and awareness raising campaigns; and improves coordination and cooperation between the different authorities involved.

In addition, [EU accession](#) to the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention in 2023 ensures that all relevant EU legislation will be in line with this important norms-setting international document, but

does not extend in any way EU competences to act on the matter as they derive from the EU Treaties.

Other legal instruments have been established in areas in which women are at heightened risk of becoming victims of violence, and in areas where violence has a cross-border element, because this is where the EU has the strongest competence for crime-related action. These instruments concern:

- equal treatment and non-discrimination, which includes a ban on sex-based harassment at work, in independent professional activities and in access to services ([Directive 2006/54/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);<sup>12</sup>
- trafficking in human beings ([Directive 2011/36/EU](#) on combating trafficking, [amended](#) in 2024, 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);<sup>13</sup>
- **cyberviolence**: the [Digital Services Act](#), adopted in 2022, aims to ensure a safer, more accountable online environment and thereby address the problem of online violence against women and girls by obliging platforms to take appropriate measures. The EU Audiovisual Media Services Act ([Directive 2010/13/EU](#)) and the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, [Regulation \(EU\) 2016/679](#)) also include specific mechanisms to address cyberviolence against women.

## Political commitments and policy frameworks on violence against women

The Commission's '2020–2025 [gender equality strategy](#)' has had a strong focus on preventing and combating violence against women.<sup>14</sup> The EU's first-ever [strategy for victims' rights](#) (2020–2025) also addresses the specific needs of victims of gender-based violence. EU strategies for combating [trafficking in human beings](#) and [child sexual abuse](#) have also been introduced for 2021–2025.

The [Roadmap on Women's Rights](#) adopted by the European Commission in March 2025 includes combating violence against women – online and off-line, in public and private life – among the eight fundamental principles that should guide EU action on women's rights and gender equality.

In November 2023, the Commission established an EU network on the prevention of gender-based and domestic violence, where Member States and stakeholders can exchange good practice. To complement the 2024 directive, the Commission plans to adopt a recommendation on preventing harmful practices against women and girls, including FGM, forced abortion and forced sterilisation, early and forced marriage, and 'honour-related violence'.

EU funding is being 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, EIGE and 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.

In the field of EU external action, 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).<sup>15</sup> In 2017, the EU and the UN 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](#).

## EU Member States

Member States have adopted different legislative and non-legislative approaches for dealing with the problem. As far as [legislation](#) is concerned, a study for the European Parliament, published in October 2022, finds that all Member States have criminalised FGM and most have criminalised forced marriage, forced abortion and forced sterilisation. However, degrees of criminalisation for other forms of violence are more mixed. Only 15 Member States had, at the time, criminalised psychological, physical, economic and sexual forms of domestic violence, and femicide is directly criminalised in only four Member States.

The four EU countries to have introduced a legal definition of femicide in their criminal codes are: Cyprus ([2022](#)), Malta ([2022](#)), Croatia ([2024](#)), and Italy ([2025](#)). Belgium has adopted specific [legislation](#) in 2023 to prevent and combat it. In some other Member States, homicides of women are considered aggravated if they are based on gender (Spain, France and Portugal) or motivated by discrimination (Spain, France, Portugal and Romania), according to an [EIGE analysis from 2023](#).

National legal provisions on combating domestic violence take either a gender-specific approach focusing on women, or a gender-neutral approach (e.g. Denmark, Finland, Netherlands) that also includes men as victims of domestic violence under the scope of the law. GREVIO (the monitoring experts body of the Istanbul Convention) has criticised the gender-neutral [approach](#) as hindering the effective protection of women. Recent [Eurostat data](#) from the 11 EU countries that collect data about both female and male victims of violence show that the victimisation rate for men who suffer physical violence by an intimate partner varies from 92 % of the rate for women (in Belgium) to 21 % (in Lithuania).

Spain was the first EU country to have also established [specialised courts](#) to deal with cases of violence against women, a measure which helps to address low prosecution and conviction rates for crimes of domestic violence and rape.<sup>16</sup> In the Netherlands, the city of Rotterdam has adopted a similar approach to prosecuting domestic violence, establishing a domestic violence court that conducts criminal and civil proceedings.

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.<sup>17</sup>

## European Parliament

The European Parliament first [sounded the alarm](#) about the problem of violence against women in [1981](#) and devoted its first full [resolution](#) to the issue in 1986. Since then, it has played an important role in the field, not least through the work of its [Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality \(FEMM\)](#).

Parliament has supported the **adoption of EU legislation** in the area. It provided strong impetus to the adoption of the 2024 EU directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence.

It urged the Commission to draw up a comprehensive proposal in this respect for the first time in 2009 and, in 2014, it adopted a [legislative-initiative resolution](#) suggesting the outline of a future legislative text on the matter. It further [supported](#) the inclusion of cyberviolence against women under the scope of the future directive. It also [called](#) on the Council to add violence against women to the [areas of particularly serious crime](#) listed in Article 83(1) [TFEU](#) – a [demand](#) it reiterated in a [2021 resolution](#). This would require unanimity in the Council.

Parliament played an important role in the **ratification of the Istanbul Convention**. In April 2019, Parliament [decided](#) to ask the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU) for an opinion to clarify the appropriate legal basis and ratification procedure of EU accession to the Convention. The CJEU issued its [ruling](#) on 6 October 2021, which opened the way to ratification with a qualified majority in the Council. Parliament also asked the Commission to be proactive in dispelling [misconceptions](#) about the Istanbul Convention, particularly around the use of the terms 'gender' and 'gender-based violence', which are [blocking](#) ratification by some EU Member States.

In the [legislative process](#) leading to the adoption of the **2024 EU directive**, Parliament supported a comprehensive approach to violence against women, including an EU-wide definition of sexual crimes such as rape. This was not possible in the end because of concerns in the Council related to the limits of EU competence. However, Parliament succeeded in proposing important amendments in the negotiations, such as the criminalisation of forced marriage, of unsolicited sending of sexual images, more severe penalties for crimes defined in the directive committed against women public figures, and the recognition of the need to run education campaigns on the central role of consent in sexual relations. It also introduced the possibility to review the text five years after the transposition deadline.

Parliament has played an active role in the **assessment and review of existing EU legislative acts** that are important for protecting women from violence. It carried out its own assessments of the [Victims' Rights Directive](#) and the [European Protection Order](#) (EPO) in 2018. These [found](#) that the Victims' Rights Directive had not been fully implemented across the EU, particularly 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 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.

Parliament contributed to the recent [amendment](#) of the Directive on trafficking by including the exploitation of surrogacy among offences concerning trafficking in human beings, and by criminalising the knowing use of services of victims of human trafficking.

Parliament has taken a position on many **issues that affect women's security** and freedom from violence, such as crises (namely, the [climate crisis](#) and the [war in Ukraine](#)), [intimate partner violence and custody rights](#), [sexual harassment](#), particularly following the #MeToo! movement, [trafficking, prostitution of women](#), and [FGM](#).<sup>18</sup> Parliament has also stressed the need to deal with new forms of violence against women, particularly those related to the [use of technology](#).

It has drawn attention to the **vulnerability** of and issues facing particular groups such as [women asylum-seekers and refugees](#), [LBTI women](#) and [Romani women, racialised women and migrant women, including those with disabilities](#).

Parliament [has 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, and [has asked](#) for abortion to be recognised as a EU fundamental right.

Parliament has flagged that the [backlash against women's rights and gender equality](#) is undermining the fight against violence against women, 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.

Parliament has also called repeatedly for the collection of comprehensive statistics on gender-based violence in the EU.

## Views of EU advisory bodies and stakeholders

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) has been a strong supporter of EU action to combat violence against women. In a February 2025 EESC opinion on '[Violence against women as a human rights issue: state of play of measures across the EU](#)', the EESC emphasises that violence against women is a human rights violation and one of the most persistent forms of gender discrimination, and calls for the EU directive to address all forms of violence and include a definition of rape and sexual violence based on consent. It also asks for gender-based violence to be added to the list of 'Eurocrimes' based on Article 83(1) of the TFEU.

The [European Women's Lobby](#) (EWL), Europe's main umbrella organisation for women's rights, had [called](#) for an EU directive for many years, set out its own [recommendations](#) ahead of the Commission proposal, [welcomed](#) the adoption of the directive, but expressed disappointment about the directive not including a definition of rape based on consent. EWL asks for violence against women to be recognised as an area of serious crime listed in the Treaties to provide the EU institutions with a clear legal basis to tackle [all forms of male violence against women](#). It also asks for a definition of sexual exploitation aligned with the '[equality model](#)'. This matches EWL's call for the EU to adopt legislation to [end prostitution](#) and [sex trafficking](#) by criminalising the purchase of sex.

The [Women against Violence Europe](#) (WAVE) network had already highlighted gaps in support through its [mapping](#) of helplines, women's centres and shelters. An important area of action for the network has been raising awareness of the importance of [specialist support services for women](#) and the fact that women survivors of violence encounter several forms of discrimination. It has advocated for a better inclusion of women's organisations in the transposition of the 2024 EU directive and for renewed discussion on consent-based legislation. It has made [some proposals](#) inspired by the EU roadmap on women's rights for the future EU gender equality strategy, including a focus on preventing violence through actions such as supporting feminist self-defence and civil-courage initiatives.

Other stakeholders, such as the [European Network of Migrant Women](#), also highlight the importance of addressing the specific situations and needs of diverse groups of women and advocating for particular populations.

## FURTHER READING

Topical Digest on [Gender equality across policy areas](#) (chapter on gender-based violence), EPRS, European Parliament, March 2025.

Murphy, C. and Zamfir, I., [Cyberviolence against women in the EU](#), EPRS, European Parliament, December 2024.

Zamfir, I., [Combating violence against women and domestic violence](#), EPRS, European Parliament, May 2024.

Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, [The legislative frameworks for victims of gender-based violence \(including children\) in the 27 Member States](#), European Parliament, October 2022.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> According to the SDG Indicators database of the United Nations, geographical Europe has the second lowest rate of violence by an intimate partner, with only Australia and New Zealand recording lower rates (see [Review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly](#), Report of the Secretary-General, Commission on the Status of Women, Sixty-ninth session, New York, 10-21 March 2025, p. 55).
- <sup>2</sup> See Eurostat dataset [Women who have experienced violence by any perpetrator, by level of education\[gbv\\_any\\_ed\]](#).
- <sup>3</sup> [0.66](#) women per 100 000 inhabitants in the EU were victims of intentional homicides in 2023, [0.41](#) of them by an intimate partner or family member.
- <sup>4</sup> For this category, not all Member States provide data. In 2023 and 2022, 17 Member States (AT, DE, EL, ES, FR, HR, IT, LT, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK) did so, compared to 15 only a decade ago in 2015.
- <sup>5</sup> See EIGE report, [Femicide indicators: pilot study of data availability and feasibility assessment](#), November 2022.
- <sup>6</sup> A three-year frame was used for comparison (2014-2016 versus 2021-2023) in order to attenuate yearly fluctuations due to various factors. Eurostat data for each Member State is sometimes incomplete, with some countries not having reported in certain years (e.g. France in 2014, Poland in 2014 and 2015).
- <sup>7</sup> Between 2012 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)).
- <sup>8</sup> As shown in a Eurobarometer survey published in November 2024 on [Gender stereotypes – Violence against women](#), public attitudes are changing, with most people rejecting victim blaming, but minorities still believe that women make up or exaggerate claims of rape or abuse (17 %) or that they are partly responsible for the sexual violence they endure if they are intoxicated (16 %).
- <sup>9</sup> van Ballegooij, W., [Equality and the Fight Against Racism and Xenophobia: Cost of Non-Europe Report](#), EPRS, European Parliament, March 2018, pp. 25-27; Fernandes, M., Navarra, C. and Lombo, N., [Combating Gender based Violence: Cyber Violence](#), EPRS, European Parliament, March 2021.
- <sup>10</sup> 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.
- <sup>11</sup> The [annual reports](#) for 2022, 2023, and 2024 focused, respectively, on [violence against indigenous women and girls, on violence against women and violence against children in custody, and on prostitution and violence against women and girls](#).
- <sup>12</sup> These directives prohibit harassment on grounds of gender and sexual harassment and consider them to be a form of gender-based discrimination.
- <sup>13</sup> 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.
- <sup>14</sup> Progress is assessed in the Commission's annual reports on gender equality.
- <sup>15</sup> 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](#).
- <sup>16</sup> For information on the effectiveness of the Spanish courts see García-Hombrados, J., Martínez-Matute, M. and Villa, C., [Specialised courts and the reporting of intimate partner violence: Evidence from Spain](#), Journal of Public Economics, volume 239, November 2024. According to this article, these courts have led to a rise in report of offences by 28 %, but this concerns mainly moderate offences, without a demonstrable effect on homicides by intimate partners.
- <sup>17</sup> Examples of current plans are included in the [monitoring reports](#) on implementation of the Istanbul Convention, as well as in the reports submitted by EU Member States in the framework of the [Beijing Platform +30 reporting](#) to the UN Commission on the Status of Women.
- <sup>18</sup> In its resolutions of [2009](#), [2012](#), [2014](#), [2020](#), [2021](#) and [2024](#), Parliament has called on the Commission and the Member States to take measures to eliminate the practice.

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