



European Commission actions to combat Violence Against Women

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Violence against women is a brutal manifestation of gender inequality and a violation of human rights. **One in three women (33%)** in the EU has experienced physical or sexual violence, or both, since she was 15 years old. It is estimated that 500000 women and girls in the EU have suffered female genital mutilation.

The European Commission is putting in place actions to eliminate violence against women.

Ensuring rights, support and protection of victims of violence

Women and girls who are victims of violence need appropriate support and protection, which is reinforced by effective and deterrent laws. The Commission has put such laws in place.

The **rules establishing minimum rights for all victims, including women as victims of gender-based violence**, ensure that:

- they are treated with respect by well-trained police, prosecutors and judges and get understandable information on their rights;
- they can get specialised support in all European Union countries;
- they can participate in proceedings and have certain rights (such as right to be heard, right to legal aid, right to interpretation and translation, right to review a decision not to prosecute etc.); and
- they are protected from secondary and repeat victimisation, from intimidation and from retaliation during police investigations and court proceedings (e.g. by limiting the number of interviews and medical examinations to a minimum, by ensuring special measures to avoid visual contact with the offender during court proceedings etc.).

Victims of violence have to be protected Europe-wide. This is safeguarded with **rules** which ensure that restraining and protection orders issued in one EU country can be recognised across the EU. Thanks to this, **women who have suffered domestic violence are protected from the perpetrators if they travel or move anywhere in the EU.**

Women and girls seeking asylum have specific vulnerabilities that have to be taken into account at the personal interview stage, as specified in the rules on asylum procedures, while other rules are in place to make sure the necessary medical and psychological treatment is offered to victims of gender-based violence, including sexual violence and female genital mutilation, and the staff working with these victims should have appropriate training. Furthermore, rules are in place to prevent assault and gender-based violence, including sexual assault and harassment, within accommodation centres.

The EU has put in place **rules on sexual harassment and trafficking in human beings, as well as against sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children**, which provide a set of effective measures to prevent, support, protect the victims and punish perpetrators.

With the **Communication on eliminating female genital mutilation**, the European Commission is committed to:

- developing a better understanding of the practice;
- preventing female genital mutilation and providing victim support;
- supporting effective prosecution by Member States;
- protecting women at risk living in the European Union; addressing the problem through its external policies, in those parts of the world where this crime is perpetrated.

Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence

On 4 March 2016, the European Commission adopted two proposals for the EU's signing and conclusion of the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, the so-called Istanbul Convention. On 11 May 2017, the Council of the EU adopted a Decision authorising that the EU signs the Istanbul Convention. This is an important step forward in the process for acceding to the Convention.

The Istanbul Convention sets legally binding standards to specifically prevent violence against women and girls, protect victims and punish perpetrators. It is crucial in order to achieve real progress in fighting violence against women and its underlying structural causes that still persist in our societies. It has a holistic and comprehensive approach to the complex phenomenon of violence against women which includes the use of legislation, awareness raising and funding to make a difference for victims in practice.

The EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention will be a step forward in the fight on violence against women. It will provide a more coherent and coordinated approach among EU Member States and can make a difference in the lives of women and girls.

Getting more and better evidence on violence against women

Violence is still regrettably under-reported: only about a third of women who are physically or sexually abused by their partners contact the authorities. In addition, complaints are **not systematically recorded**, and the **collection of administrative data is not comparable between EU countries**.

The European Commission works together with EU countries and other EU bodies to get **more and better evidence**, which will strengthen our responses to violence against women.

Successful policies show the way

The European Commission organises regular **exchanges of best practices** so EU countries can learn from each other about **successful policies**, find ways to overcome common obstacles and improve their approaches. For example, exchanges focused on **awareness-raising campaigns**, using new technologies to better **support and protect victims**, and on putting in place **treatment programmes** for male perpetrators.

Supporting projects that make a difference on the ground

The European Commission funds numerous **awareness-raising campaigns** in EU countries and supports **grassroots organisations, NGOs and networks** working to prevent violence against women.

The main funding programme is called the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme, which is supplemented by funds under the Justice Programme.

Some examples of recent projects have been:

- In 2016, a consortium of shelters, educational institutions and organisations for entrepreneurs started a project that **helps victims of domestic violence to become economically independent**.
- Since 1990, the Commission supports the activities of the **European Women's Lobby (EWL)**, the largest network of women's organisations in the EU, which works to promote women's rights and gender equality, and combat all forms of male violence against women.
- Over the last 9 years, the European Commission supported **Women Against Violence Europe (WAVE)**, a network of European women's NGOs working to combat violence against women and children, in particular focused on improving victim support.
- In 2016, a partnership of academic institutions was funded to develop an **integrated and multisectoral course on female genital mutilation** to be included in the curricula of Medicine, Nursery, Midwifery, Law, Social Work, Education and International Development in 5 European universities.

The Violence Against Women Campaign

Věra Jourová, European Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, has taken the initiative to dedicate 2017 to ending violence against women. The year of focused actions will provide a framework to coordinate actions and connect efforts across the EU to end violence against women. The Commission has made 4 million euros available to EU countries for developing and implementing national practical and targeted information, awareness-raising and education activities aimed at preventing and combating violence against women, as well as financially supporting civil society organisations that make a lasting impact on the ground.

The Commission is also carrying out a social media campaign (#SayNoStopVAW) to raise awareness of the problem, draw attention to the work done by a variety of stakeholders across the EU, disseminate good practices and connect these stakeholders across borders.