

# EUROPE'S SHORTFALLS ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

An explainer

## Background

Violence against women (VAW) is rooted in patriarchal structures and constitutes a violation of women's rights to life, physical and psychological integrity, and a life without violence.

Extremely widespread, it affects women everywhere, with European women being no exception. Specifically, it negatively affects women's immediate and long-term physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health, and can escalate into murder, also known as femicide.

## Violence against Women in the EU

Despite the progress of several EU Member States with regards to women's rights, all of them remain far from eradicating VAW. To give a couple of examples, [one in three women](#) has experienced physical and/or sexual violence and more than 70% of professional women have experienced sexual harassment at the workplace.

Zooming into Member States, a woman is murdered by her partner or ex-partner every two days in [France](#), a woman per hour is victim of domestic violence in [Germany](#), and a woman is raped every five hours in [Spain](#). Only about 150 of the 5,000 rapes that occur in [Greece](#) every year are certified by a medical examiner.



## What our MEPs say



**Maria Eugenia Palop**  
(Podemos, Spain)

*“The lockdown led to an increase in the prevalence and intensity of VAW while the extreme right and several EU governments attack women’s rights or put in cause the Istanbul Convention. The EU must act in the next months to stop the backlash and to prevent it from spreading.”*



**Sandra Pereira**  
(PCP, Portugal)

*“We want to call the attention to all forms of violence, exploitation and inequality against women. At a time when the situations of violence to which women are exposed may increase, concrete measures are needed to effectively combat such violence and protect women.”*

Unfortunately, these numbers only show part of the whole picture, as VAW is systematically under-reported. Indeed, the majority of women survivors of intimate partner violence or sexual violence ([55-95%](#)) do not seek any type of help or services. This may be caused by varying factors, from rape culture to the stigmatisation of victims, shame, fear, re-victimisation by judiciary systems, and misinformation about our rights and services.

Moreover, structural austerity policies, namely the privatisation of public services, put women in an even more vulnerable situation. This is particularly relevant for women who are oppressed or discriminated against on other grounds, such as women in poverty and migrant women. Further, girls and young women, women belonging to ethnic and other minorities, refugees, transwomen, and women with disabilities face a higher risk of different forms of violence.

In the current context, COVID-19 has also exposed the insufficiency of women’s protection from male violence, as we are witnessing an exacerbation of VAW incidents since the first confinement.

Additionally, VAW in the sex industry remains not only socially accepted and encouraged, but also legal in a number of our Member States. Indeed, many women exploited in prostitution suffer from acute and chronic [PTSD](#) comparable to state tortured victims, and [88% of popular porn videos show VAW](#). Besides, both of them have been strictly linked to [the increase of human trafficking in the EU](#), most of whose victims are women and girls.

### EU Inaction

The lack of a harmonised system to collect data at the EU level, and the different legal definitions behind terms that describe violence - including femicide, rape and sexual harassment - compromise our understanding and comparison of this issue. Most of the efforts of the last Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality (2016-2019) were watered down due to its non-legally binding character.

In this light, although the FEMM committee has highlighted the need for a binding instrument, the upcoming Gender Equality Strategy will not create legal obligations. While NGOs have pressured the Parliament to increase the budget on gender equality - which is however obscured by the Council -, various stakeholders are calling on the EU to access the Istanbul Convention and to pressure the Member States that have not yet ratified it - namely Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia and Slovakia - to do so.

### The View of The Left

For women to live in this world, we need protection. Our voice as women is missing because the testimonies and experiences of women are not heard and are ignored by the judicial system.

Today, attention must be drawn to the current lacunae at the EU level, and reiterate the Left’s demand for a holistic and legally binding plan to combat VAW. This would indeed be the only way for the EU to comply with its own rules, such as the Charter of Fundamental Rights, and Article 2 of the TEU.

To put an end to VAW, we need to mobilize and demand quality public education that will prevent violence by raising new generations in respect and equality, more efficient judiciary systems and greater financial means to help victims, both at national and European levels.