



Stop violence against women: Statement by the European Commission and the High Representative

Brussels, 23 November 2020

Ahead of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on 25 November, the European Commission and High Representative/Vice-President, Josep **Borrell**, issued the following statement:

"Violence against women and girls is a violation of human rights, and has no place in the European Union, or anywhere else in the world.

The scale of the problem remains alarming: one in three women in the European Union have experienced physical and/or sexual violence. Violence against women exists in every country, culture and community. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown once more that for some women not even their home is a safe place.

Figures show that violence against women and children has increased since COVID-19 lockdown measures started. Some Member States have introduced gender-sensitive response measures, such as special alert mechanisms in pharmacies, to protect women and children from all forms of violence. We urge all Member States to develop and implement such measures.

Change is possible, but it requires action, commitment and determination. The EU is committed to continue to work tirelessly with its partners to investigate and punish acts of violence, ensure support for victims, and at the same time to address the root causes and reinforce the legal framework. Through our Spotlight Initiative we are already fighting violence against women and girls, in 26 countries across the globe. This week we will present a new Action Plan on gender equality and women and girl's empowerment in our external actions. We also call on Member States to ratify the Istanbul Convention - the first legally binding instrument at the international level to combat violence against women and domestic violence.

Our goal is very clear: to end all forms of violence against women and girls. We owe it to all the victims."

Background

Violence against women and girls is a widespread and devastating human rights violation that takes place across the globe. The World Health Organisation estimates that one third of women and girls worldwide experience violence at some point in their life. These numbers are only the tip of the iceberg, as this type of violence remains largely unreported due to the stigma and shame surrounding it. As a result, many perpetrators remain unpunished.

As stated in the [Gender Equality Strategy](#), the European Commission will facilitate the development of a new framework for cooperation with online platforms to tackle online violence against women, propose a recommendation on the prevention of harmful practices, and launch an EU network on the prevention of gender-based violence and domestic violence.

The European Commission is working on concluding the EU accession to the [Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#). Should the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention remain blocked, the Commission will take alternative legal measures to achieve the objectives of the Convention.

The EU has a comprehensive set of rules to protect [Victims' Rights](#) and the Commission presented a new [Strategy on victims' rights](#) earlier this year. The EU recognises trafficking in human beings as violence against women and girls. The Commission's latest [progress report](#) confirms that sexual exploitation is the main reason for human trafficking in the EU, with more than 90% of victims being women and girls.

In partnership with the United Nations, the EU launched in 2017 the [Spotlight Initiative](#) with a €500 million contribution, a global, multi-year initiative focused on eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls. In the light of upsurge in domestic violence triggered by the COVID-19

pandemic, the Spotlight Initiative was swift to boost prevention and increase support for victims in 26 countries in six regions, as well as support for women's grassroots organizations providing essential services. In the past months, almost €18 million of Spotlight funds have been redirected to address violence against women and girls.

During 2018 and 2019, the EU allocated more than €62 million in humanitarian aid for the prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence worldwide under its protection and health programming.

The European Commission, European External Action Service and the Council of the EU will be lighting up its buildings in Brussels, in orange on the eve of Wednesday 25 November to show its support for combatting violence against women. Pictures will be available on [EbS](#).

For More Information

[Factsheet on EU action to combat violence against women](#)

[Ending gender-based violence](#)

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