



Stop Violence Against Women: Statement by the European Commission and the High Representative

Brussels, 24 November 2021

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

"Violence against women and girls is a pervasive human rights violation.

In Europe, one woman in three aged 15 or above reported having experienced some form of physical and/or sexual violence. One in 10 women reported having been victim to some form of sexual violence, and one in 20 had been raped. Just over one in five women have suffered 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.

Domestic violence had been a 'shadow pandemic' already before COVID-19 broke out. During the COVID-19 pandemic, cases of domestic violence have increased, bringing to the attention of all that for many women and girls home is not a safe place. The scale of the problem remains alarming. A vision for a Europe where women and men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, are free from violence and stereotypes and have the opportunity to thrive and to lead – this is the basis of the [EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025](#).

Gender-based cyber violence is spreading fast. A relatively new phenomenon is experienced by all women, though women visible in public life, such as journalists and politicians, experience gender-based cyber violence disproportionately often, which can affect democratic decision-making: they do not dare express political opinions due to fear of online targeting.

Over the year, we also witnessed worrisome developments threatening women and girls worldwide. In March, the Turkish government decided to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention, generating a resolute reaction from women in and outside Turkey who poured on to the streets in protest. Since June, the unfolding events in Afghanistan are threatening the rights of Afghan women and girls, many of whom remain at risk due to their work, studies, activities and their opinions. The use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and related impunity in Tigray, Ethiopia, and in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) continue, without end in sight. These are just a few examples. We condemn and call for the end of violence against women everywhere, including in conflict situations.*

Progress is possible and we must continue to work together tirelessly to achieve more. The Commission will propose to extend the list of 'EU crimes' to cover hate speech and hate crime. This will allow the EU to be able to criminalise gender-based hate speech and hate crime. We will also propose new legislation to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence. It will propose concrete measures to prevent such violence, including when perpetrated online, to protect and support victims, improve their access to justice, and to ensure better coordination between competent authorities.

We will continue with the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative which has helped 650,000 women and girls worldwide and protected them or prevented violence against them, educated 880,000 men and boys on positive masculinity, non-violent conflict resolution and parenting, and contributed to the signature or strengthening of 84 national laws and policies to fight gender-based violence.

We are stepping up our action and call to others for continued commitment and collaboration.

Let's make Europe and the rest of the world safe for all women and girls."

Background

Violence against women and girls is a widespread and devastating human rights violation that takes place everywhere across the globe. This type of violence remains largely unreported due to the stigma and shame surrounding it, and the lack of confidence in authorities. As a result, many

perpetrators remain free and unpunished.

The Commission will also present an initiative inviting the Council to take a decision to include hate crime and hate speech in the list of 'EU crimes' set out in Art. 83 TFEU. This would subsequently allow the Commission to propose legislation addressing also those specific forms of serious violence against women that can be defined as misogynous hate speech or hate crime.

The Commission continues to work on the EU's accession to the [Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#), the Istanbul Convention. The Istanbul Convention is a comprehensive and powerful legal instrument to prevent and combat gender-based and domestic violence and protect the victims. As part of the initiative A New Push for European Democracy, the Commission will launch a new legislative proposal to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence. The initiative will have the same objective as the Istanbul Convention; ensuring that EU Member States have effective measures in place to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence.

Internationally, the [Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in External Relations 2020 – 2025](#) (GAP III) provides an ambitious external policy framework for achieving progress on gender equality and women's empowerment, in coherence with the EU gender equality strategy. Ensuring freedom from all forms of gender-based violence is a central part of it. The EU will continue its efforts to curb sexual and gender-based violence throughout the world, including in fragile, conflict and emergency situations, for example through the [Spotlight Initiative](#), a joint EU-UN global programme to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls.

The European Commission, the European External Action Service and the Council of the EU will be lighting up their buildings in Brussels in orange on the evening of Thursday 25 November to show their 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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