



International Women's Day 2022: Commission proposes EU-wide rules to combat violence against women and domestic violence

Strasbourg, 8 March 2022

Today, the European Commission is proposing [EU-wide rules to combat violence against women and domestic violence](#). The proposed Directive will criminalise rape based on lack of consent, female genital mutilation and cyber violence, which includes: non-consensual sharing of intimate images; cyber stalking; cyber harassment; and cyber incitement to violence or hatred. The new rules also strengthen victims' access to justice and encourage Member States to implement a one-stop shop mechanism, meaning that all support and protection services would be located in the same place. The victims should be able to claim compensation in the course of criminal proceedings. The proposal also calls for adequate and specialised protection and support, for instance, through free of charge helplines and rape crisis centres. It also provides for targeted support for groups with specific needs or at risk, including women fleeing armed conflict.

The **key elements** of the proposed new rules:

1. Criminalisation of rape, female genital mutilation, and cyber violence

The Commission is proposing to criminalise the following offences across the EU: (i) rape based on the lack of consent; (ii) Female Genital Mutilation (FGM); (iii) cyber stalking; (iv) non-consensual sharing of intimate images; (v) cyber harassment; and (vi) cyber incitement to hatred or violence.

The proposal complements the Digital Services Act (DSA) making it operational by defining illegal online content related to cyber violence. It will also allow for quick judicial proceedings to have relevant online content removed swiftly.

2. Safe reporting and risk assessment procedures

The proposal tackles the underreporting of violence against women that still exists today. It introduces new ways to report acts of violence, which are gender-sensitive, safer, easier, more accessible - including online - and child-friendly. Professionals, such as healthcare workers or psychiatrists, would no longer be hindered by confidentiality regimes to report any reasonable suspicions of an imminent risk of serious physical harm. Authorities would also be obliged to conduct individual risk assessments when the victim first makes contact, to assess the risk posed by the offender. On this basis, authorities would need to provide immediate protection through emergency barring or protection orders.

3. Respect for victims privacy in judicial proceedings and right to compensation

The Commission is proposing that evidence or questions relating to the victims' private life, especially their sexual history, can only be used when strictly necessary. Victims would have the right to claim full compensation from offenders for damages, including the costs of healthcare, support services, lost income, physical and psychological harm. They should also be able to obtain compensation in the course of criminal proceedings.

4. Support for victims through helplines and rape crisis centres

To address the very specific needs of victims of sexual violence, the Commission is proposing that Member States provide dedicated services including rape crisis centres. Victims at an increased risk of violence, including women fleeing armed conflict, should receive targeted support from Member States. National helpline to support victims of violence against women and domestic violence should be made available 24/7, all year round, and be free of charge. When a victim is a child authorities should provide age-appropriate support in the best interests of the child. Victims of cyber violence will also be entitled to adequate support, including advice on how to seek legal help and how to remove online content. In cases of sexual harassment at work, external counselling services should be made available for victims and employers.

5. Better coordination and cooperation

Member States should exchange best practices and consult each other in criminal cases, including via Eurojust and the European Judicial Network. To track progress and monitor the situation in all Member States, the Commission is also proposing an obligation on Member States to collect data on violence against women and domestic violence to feed into an EU-wide survey every five years.

2022 Report on Gender Equality

The Commission is also publishing today the [2022 edition of the European Commission's annual report on gender equality in the EU](#). 2021 saw important steps taken in terms of legislative proposals, namely on [pay transparency](#) and [adequate minimum wages in the EU](#), as well as on a new [Digital Services Act](#) (DSA) which will help to protect users online. In [December 2021](#), the Commission also proposed to include hate speech and hate crime in the list of EU crimes.

The report also indicates that women have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. During 2020, women's participation in the workforce declined by 0.5% from 2019, after a decade of steady increase. Violence against women and domestic violence also remains widespread in the EU and has also been exacerbated by the pandemic, including online violence.

As the report also shows, failing to address violence against women and domestic violence costs money – an estimated [€289 billion a year](#).

Members of the College said:

President of the European Commission, Ursula **von der Leyen**, said: *"I want Europe to be at the side of women with protection and support. I want a society where violence against women is prevented, condemned, and prosecuted when it occurs. The time for justice and equality is now. That's why we come forward today with the right rules to accelerate change."*

Vice-President for Values and Transparency, Vera **Jourová** said: *"Too many women and girls suffer from rape, harassment or abuse. There is no place for this in modern Europe. Unfortunately, the situation is not getting better fast enough and violence is soaring online. Today, we are proposing for the first time EU wide law to combat violence against women. This will offer real tools for victims. The perpetrators must face consequences of their actions."*

Commissioner for Equality, Helena **Dalli** said: *"Violence against women impinges directly on women's equality, impacting our ability to thrive and lead in society. The Commission's aim and commitments are clear. Today, we are pushing forward a comprehensive legislative proposal on combating violence against women and domestic violence while living up to international standards. With this proposal, we will make a difference to women and girls across Europe."*

Background

The need to prevent and combat violence against women, protect victims and punish offenders was announced in [President von der Leyen's Political Guidelines](#) as a key priority for the Commission, and is part of the [Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025](#).

Violence against women and domestic violence are pervasive throughout the EU and are estimated to affect **1 in 3 women in the EU**. One in two have experienced sexual harassment. One in 20 women report having been raped. **Online violence** is also on the rise, targeting in particular women in public life, such as journalists and politicians. 1 in 2 young women experienced gender-based cyber violence. Women also experience **violence at work**: about a third of women in the EU who have faced sexual harassment experienced it at work.

The European Parliament, as well as NGOs across the EU and victims' rights organisations, have repeatedly called for a legislation on violence against women and domestic violence, as well as on cyber violence against women more generally.

As part of the Commission's ongoing work to tackle gender-based violence and promote equality and under the new €1.55 billion Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values funding programme, in 2022 [€30.5 million is now available](#) for projects preventing and combatting violence against women and children as well as [€6.8 million for projects](#) promoting women's full enjoyment of their rights, freedom from gender stereotypes, work-life balance, women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming.

For more information

[Proposal for a Directive on Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence](#)

[Factsheet on Championing Gender Equality](#)

[Questions and Answers on the Commission's Proposal for a Directive on Combating Violence against](#)

[Women and Domestic Violence](#)

[2022 Report on Gender Equality in the EU](#)

[Webpage on ending gender-based violence](#)

[Webpage on Gender Equality Strategy](#)

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Related media

 [Message by Helena Dalli, European Commissioner on the occasion of the adoption of the legislative proposal combatting violence against women and domestic violence](#)

 [Domestic violence](#)