



WAVE Country Report 2025

The European picture: women's specialist services, femicide, primary prevention and technology-facilitated violence

About this report

The WAVE Country Report is WAVE's primary publication: a biennial, data-driven overview of the state of women's specialist support services (WSS) across 46 European countries, covering both EU Member States and countries outside the EU. Drawing on data gathered by WAVE members in 2024, it tracks progress, identifies persistent gaps and measures the extent to which European states meet the minimum standards of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention), which remains the central benchmark for assessing the adequacy and quality of specialist services.

The 2025 edition maps national women's helplines, women's shelters, women's centres and specialist services for survivors of sexualised violence. For the first time, it also includes a dedicated chapter on technology-facilitated violence against women and girls (TFVAWG), alongside a strengthened focus on femicide and primary prevention.

Why women's specialist services matter

Women's specialist services are the cornerstone of Europe's response to violence against women and girls and, for many survivors, the first critical point of contact. Unlike generic victim-support services, WSS are led by women, run by women for women, and grounded in a gendered, rights-based and intersectional understanding of violence. Their approach is survivor-centred, holistic and gender-transformative, spanning both response and prevention. Research consistently shows that survivors are more likely to disclose and to recover when supported by services they recognise as specialist and independent. This expertise cannot be replicated by generic or gender-neutral providers, which is why protecting women's specialist services is a precondition for meeting states' obligations under the Istanbul Convention.

Key European findings and trends

1. Women's specialist services: a persistent gap between standards and reality

Across every category of WSS, provision falls well short of Istanbul Convention benchmarks, and access is deeply uneven, with countries outside the EU lagging furthest behind.

National women's helplines. The Istanbul Convention (Article 24) requires a free, state-wide, round-the-clock helpline. By 2024, 39 of 46 countries (85%) had at least one national women's helpline, while seven countries (15%) still had none. Where helplines exist, quality is high: all 39 operate free of charge, and 37 are available 24/7, meaning 37 countries (80%) meet the full standard. Across the 32 countries able to provide figures, national helplines received almost 1 million calls in 2024, underlining the scale of demand. Multilingual support, however, is available in only 63% of countries.

Women's shelters. Against the Istanbul Convention benchmark of one shelter per 10,000 inhabitants, Europe has 3,224 shelters accessible to women, providing roughly 48,860 bed spaces for a population of more than 847 million. Only 12 of 46 countries (26%) meet the standard. Provision has grown modestly since the 2023 report, but 18 of 27 EU Member States (67%) and 16 of 19 non-EU states (84%) still fail to meet the minimum standard. Access remains hardest for the most marginalised women, including undocumented, older, homeless women, and women with disabilities. Funding is a structural weakness: while 96% of countries report some state or municipal funding, much of it is short-term or project-based rather than sustained.

Women's centres. Non-residential specialist centres exist in 44 of 46 countries, with only two reporting none. Yet with 3,401 centres in total, Europe averages one centre per 129,329 women, a 61% shortfall against the Council of Europe's guidance of one counselling centre per 50,000 women. The overall number has fallen since the previous report, and for 72% of centres, the managing organisation was not recorded, pointing to persistent gaps in national data systems. Where the model is documented, the majority of qualifying centres are run by women's NGOs.

Specialist services for survivors of sexualised violence. The Istanbul Convention (Article 25) requires one rape crisis centre (RCC) or sexual violence referral centre (SVRC) per 200,000 inhabitants. Some 32 of 46 countries (70%) have at least one such service, but only 633 centres exist against an estimated 4,248 needed, a gap of 85%.

Provision is highly uneven, and only four countries meet the standard. In many countries, generic or women's centres attempt to fill the gap left by the absence of dedicated specialist provision.

2. Femicide: counted where feminists count it

At least 2,871 women were victims of femicide in 2024, based on data and estimates from 35 of 46 countries; the true figure is certainly higher. There is still no shared, internationally agreed definition, and most states collect homicide rather than femicide data, so gender-related killings frequently disappear from official statistics. Only six countries officially collect femicide data at the state level, and 12 have a femicide watch or observatory, most not yet integrated into national prevention systems. In 29 countries, feminist NGOs are the primary source of femicide data. Where cases could be disaggregated, the overwhelming majority of women were killed by a current or former partner or another family member, confirming the domestic and intimate nature of most femicide.

3. Primary prevention: recognised in principle, neglected in practice

Prevention remains chronically underfunded despite strong evidence of its efficacy, effectiveness and cost-effectiveness. While 32 of 46 countries (70%) have an official document referencing prevention, only 18 (39%) define primary prevention clearly, and just 16 (35%) provide government funding for it. Awareness-raising campaigns are the most common activity, even though they are among the least effective as standalone prevention, while more promising approaches such as school-based sex and relationship education, feminist empowerment work and practitioner training are less widespread. Monitoring and evaluation are weak, making it difficult to assess impact or target gaps.

4. Technology-facilitated violence: a fast-rising threat outpacing the response

TFVAWG is expanding rapidly and disproportionately targets women in public life. Some 37 of 46 countries (80%) reported an increase over the past two years, while no data were available for the remaining countries. The most common forms are cyberstalking, digital surveillance and online harassment, hate speech and threats, with image-based abuse rising in 26 countries and emerging forms such as deepfakes, sextortion and doxxing increasingly reported. Legal and service responses lag behind: the EU Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence (Directive (EU) 2024/1385) criminalises several forms of cyber-violence, but coverage remains partial.

Encouragingly, 30 countries report new strategies developed by WSS, including digital safety tools, apps, chatbots and updated support protocols.

Cross-cutting messages

- **A structural gap persists between the Istanbul Convention and reality.** Across helplines, shelters, centres and specialist sexualised violence services, provision falls far short of minimum standards, and the shortfall is often greatest in countries outside the EU.
- **The specialist, women-led model is essential and irreplaceable, and it is under threat.** The spread of gender-neutral and generic service models risks displacing women-specific expertise. Protecting women's specialist service provision and the principle of non-regression is central to survivors' safety.
- **Funding is chronically precarious.** Short-term, project-based funding undermines stability. This is compounded by international funding cuts, the diversion of resources towards security and defence, and the well-resourced mobilisation of anti-rights actors across Europe.
- **Data gaps weaken accountability.** Inconsistent definitions and monitoring, especially on femicide, prevention and TFVAWG, make it harder to hold states to their commitments and to direct resources where they are most needed.
- **New threats are outpacing legal and service responses.** TFVAWG, in particular, is growing faster than the frameworks and services designed to address it.

Conclusion

The 2025 Country Report findings confirm both the indispensable role of WSS and the scale of what remains to be done. Meeting the standards Europe has already committed to requires adequate, sustainable, multi-annual funding that reaches frontline women's specialist services directly; the full implementation of the Istanbul Convention and the EU Directive on violence against women, in line with the principle of non-regression; and serious investment in prevention and in areas such as femicide data and technology-facilitated violence. Despite a hostile and shrinking civic space, women's specialist services across Europe continue to demonstrate remarkable resilience, innovation and reach. Sustained political and financial commitment now would turn that resilience into lasting protection for all women and girls.