



Vienna, 25th of November 2022

Statement on Femicide

How European Governments Sustain a Culture of GBV

On the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the Women Against Violence Europe (WAVE) Network is taking a stance to remind the states' responsibility to tackle the widespread phenomenon of femicide.

Femicide is the most extreme form of violence against women and girls, it is a form of murder in which the victim, is killed because of their gender. It is not an incidental or random killing. It is the ultimate act of violence against women and girls which finds its root cause in the beliefs, gender stereotypes, and prejudices habitual to patriarchal societies, meaning, societies that sustain gender-based violence through power imbalances, traditional gender roles, sexism, and hostility towards women. This violence is experienced through everyday realities of intrusion, harassment, constraint, abuse, and control.

About one in three women globally has been subjected to sexual violence, almost one-third have experienced violence in their relationships¹, and nearly one in two women in the European Union have experienced psychological violence.² And every third day, a woman is killed for being a woman.³

Gender-based Violence against Women must end NOW!

"What is not Named Does not Exist":⁴ Defining and Documenting Femicide

Although several NGOs and international institutions⁵, such as the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), have pushed for the adoption of a common definition of femicide and the collection of administrative, comprehensive, and disaggregated data on this crime, there is still no standard agreement on the definition, no effective counting and documentation mechanism, and no meaningful data collection of femicide in European countries.⁶ Some states are even resisting to use of the term femicide.⁷

¹ WHO (2021) Violence against women <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>.

² EIGE 'Combating coercive control and psychological violence against women in the EU Member States'; EIGE "The costs of gender-based violence in the European Union".

³ Deutschlandfunk Kultur (2020) [Häusliche Gewalt in Frankreich - Alle drei Tage wird eine Frau ermordet | deutschlandfunkkultur.de](https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de); Independent (2020): [Every three days a woman is killed by a man – I am terrified we have become used to the horror of that statistic | The Independent](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/every-three-days-a-woman-is-killed-by-a-man-i-am-terrified-we-have-become-used-to-the-horror-of-that-statistic-the-independent-2020-10-15); Femicide census [More Than Half Of Murdered Women Are Killed By An Ex Or Current Partner – Femicide Census](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/09/21/an-eu-wide-approach-to-gender-based-violence-is-taking-shape-but-gaps-remain).

⁴Spain's equality minister, Irene Montero, cited in [Spain says it is first in Europe to officially count all femicides | Spain | The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/09/21/an-eu-wide-approach-to-gender-based-violence-is-taking-shape-but-gaps-remain).

⁵ Such as the European Observatory on Femicide, [UNODC and UN Women](https://www.unodc.org/eu/), European Union Agency for [Fundamental Rights, WHO](https://www.fundamentalrights.eu/).

⁶ EIGE (2021) Measuring femicide in the EU and internationally: an assessment.

⁷ An EU-wide approach to gender-based violence is taking shape but gaps remain <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/09/21/an-eu-wide-approach-to-gender-based-violence-is-taking-shape-but-gaps-remain>.



Currently, only two countries are officially recording femicide: France and Spain.⁸ However, Spain is the only country with a comprehensive methodology for documenting femicide, including factors such as trafficking and sexual exploitation in their data collection.⁹

As highlighted by the United Nations General Assembly: “while domestic violence, family violence, and intimate-partner violence are all relevant categories for understanding the phenomenon of femicide, none of them is sufficient as a stand-alone proxy for femicide. Methodologies should also allow for the inclusion of other types of femicide, particularly those connected to hate crimes against vulnerable groups such as lesbians, transgender women, gender-diverse persons, and sex workers.”¹⁰

Women’s Specialist Services: Key Actors in Breaking The Cycle Of Violence

With no official recording, we often rely on initiatives of civil society and on Women’s Specialist Services (WSS) to collect and raise awareness on femicides. Collecting and disseminating data is not an end in itself but a powerful tool to assess the level of gender-based violence against women to improve legislation, policy, and practice responses, including effective prevention programmes, to all forms of violence against them. It enables effective risk assessment and has the potential to save lives.¹¹

Women’s Specialist Services are essential public health services that ensure that women and their children affected by violence against women and domestic violence can survive and thrive. WSS are often the first agencies identifying women at high risk and men whose extreme possessive, coercive controlling behaviour and/or stalking suggests they may represent a serious threat to women’s lives. Women’s specialist services are vital in preventing femicides as they provide timely support and offer a way out to survivors.¹²

However, the work of women’s specialist services is threatened by funding cuts and staff shortages due to a gender-neutral political backlash against women’s rights.¹³

Legislative Change and Gender-Sensitive Policies

Currently, the European Parliament is discussing a draft proposal for an EU Directive on combating gender-based Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence. The Directive will create a dedicated EU *criminal law instrument* to mobilise all Member States in developing a coordinated approach to safeguarding women and children from gender-based and domestic violence, and it proposes the criminalization of five crimes: rape, FGM, non-consensual sharing of intimate or manipulated material, cyber harassment, and cyber incitement to violence or hatred. Regrettably, the proposal shies away from including femicide as the criminal offence it is. Furthermore, it proposes a data collection system

⁸ WAVE (2021) Country Report, p.66.

⁹Spain’s equality minister, Irene Montero, cited in: [Spain says it is first in Europe to officially count all femicides | Spain | The Guardian](#).

¹⁰ UN General Assembly (2021), Seventy-sixth session, Violence against women, its causes and consequences (A/76/132) [N2118750.pdf \(un.org\)](#); see also ILGA’s submission to the Special Rapporteur on violence against women (2021) [the-international-lesbian-gay.pdf \(ohchr.org\)](#); Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, Rashida Manjoo, 23 May 2012. A/HRC/20/16 - E - A/HRC/20/16 - <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G12/136/00/PDF/G1213600.pdf?OpenElement>.

¹¹ WAVE (2021) Country Report, p.66.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ WAVE (2021) Country Report, p.7.



that is less comprehensive in scope than that already described in the Istanbul Convention and the reporting parameters followed by the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO)¹⁴.

To disrupt the culture of gender-based violence against women and girls in Europe, the EU institutions must act in coherence with EU values and propose legal instruments that effectively advance gender equality and tackle the root causes of the disadvantaged position women and girls have in our societies in comparison to men. Lowering the standards for the Member States concerning women's rights will only reinforce the societal norms that allow gender-based discrimination and ultimately femicide to happen in the first place. Hence, EU institutions and EU Member States must be held accountable and abide by EU values by actively engaging in dismantling prevalent stereotypes in all spheres of society through feminist curricula, comprehensive sexuality education, and gender-sensitive/transformational policies. In addition, nationwide campaigns should focus on promoting democracy, equality and equity, diversity, and respect.

Too often, survivors face degrading treatment when seeking help from the judiciary and the police.¹⁵ Judges, prosecutors, and law enforcement must receive training to counter existing misconceptions and stereotypes, rape-supportive and victim-blaming attitudes. Additionally, health staff, the police, and social services should be trained and sensitized to better identify and document cases of femicide.¹⁶ The outcome of this training should be monitored and evaluated to understand its effectiveness and impact.

WAVE encourages European countries to adopt a holistic definition of femicide that is not limited exclusively to (cis) women. We urge states to continuously implement comparable, disaggregated, and comprehensive data collection systems and monitor the trend of femicide to develop meaningful prevention strategies. States must provide sufficient funding to Women's Specialist Services and increase their efforts in implementing the standards of the Istanbul Convention. Furthermore, we recommend that states enforce cohesive and targeted training for all professionals coming into contact with women and girls experiencing GBV, promote comprehensive sexual education, and campaigns to disrupt the culture that sustains gender-based violence against women and girls and to stop impunity. Finally, we compel the EU Parliament to meaningfully include femicide as one of the punishable crimes and concretely include prevention measures in the current proposal for an EU Directive on combating VAW and DV.

All states have a duty to protect women's human rights and lives.

¹⁴ GREVIO is the independent expert body responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence ([Istanbul Convention](#)) by the Parties.

¹⁵ Clemm (2020) "AktenEinsicht" Geschichten von Frauen und Gewalt.

¹⁶ WHO (2012) [Understanding and addressing violence against women: femicide.](#)