



COUNTRY REPORT 2021



Statistical Factsheet

1 in 3 women has experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15 – that's a total of 62 million women in Europe.

Violence Against Women in Europe

“Violence against women” is understood as a **violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women** and shall mean all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women [...] (Article 3, Istanbul Convention).

The Fundamental Rights Agency survey on violence against women (VAW) demonstrated that **one in three women has experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15**. This amounts to 62 million women in Europe. Worldwide one in every three women is affected by domestic violence and women aged 15–44 are more at risk from rape and domestic violence than from cancer, car accidents, war and malaria combined, according to World Bank data. Moreover, incidents of violence against women and femicides have increased significantly since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many women's (and children's) lives are saved every year by women's specialist support services (WSSS) who work against VAW by providing vital services such as advocacy, legal support, emergency accommodation, therapeutic services, and much more.

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The importance of Women's Specialist Support Services

"Women's Specialist Support Services" (WSSS) is a term that encompasses **all services supporting women survivors of violence and their children**, such as women's helplines, women's shelters, women's centres, rape crisis and sexual assault centres.

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Women aged 15–44 are more at risk from rape and domestic violence than from cancer, car accidents, war and malaria combined.

A gendered approach to violence against women requires addressing entrenched gender inequalities and cultural beliefs that are both cause and consequence of VAW.

WSSS put the safety of the survivors at the centre while empowering them to take back control of their lives and facilitating recovery.

For every €1 invested in WSSS, they return on average 6–9 times this cost in social value to society.

International and European legislation, including the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Council of Europe on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention – IC), recognises the importance of specialist services to provide gender-competent responses to VAW and its structural manifestations such as gender inequality and gender discrimination. A gendered approach to violence against women requires addressing entrenched gender inequalities and cultural beliefs that are both cause and consequence of VAW and responding to this violence with services that place the **safety, autonomy, and human rights of survivors and their children at the centre** of all protection and support measures employed.

Women Specialist Support Services provide survivor-centred assistance which recognizes women's multiple and intersecting needs. Their comprehensive approach aims to support women in overcoming the impact of violence at every phase of the cycle of violence they might be facing. WSSS do this by providing timely information and advice, quality care, and access to services with a gendered understanding that puts the safety of the survivors at the centre while empowering them to take back control of their lives and facilitating recovery. To be able to play this important role in overcoming cycles of violence, **WSSS services need to be properly resourced, easily accessible and have an adequate geographical distribution** to meet the needs of women. Such services are often run by non-governmental organisations and are **best ensured by women's organisations that apply a gender-specific approach and are based on feminist principles**.

Measures supporting survivors of VAW must be implemented by way of effective cooperation among all relevant agencies, institutions, and organisations. By supporting and financing the work of WSSS, governments and decision-makers can significantly reduce human and economic costs associated with the impact of VAW. Not only can women's and children's lives be saved this way, their abilities to re-integrate with the wider society, (re-)enter the labour market, continue education, and ultimately rebuild their lives will thus be ensured. Research in several European Countries has demonstrated that for every €1 invested in Women's Specialist Services, they return on average 6–9 times this cost in social value to society, as their holistic service provision means that there is less need for repeated police and social services interventions, fewer hospital visits, less emergency housing costs, less lost working hours because of injury, and most importantly significantly less human costs of ongoing suffering and trauma.¹

¹ Solace Women's Aid and Ascent (2015), Ascent Advice and Counselling: For women and girls affected by domestic and sexual violence; WeWorld Onlus (2017), *Violenza sulle Donne. Non c'è più tempo. Quanto vale investire in prevenzione e contrasto. Analisi SROI* delle politiche d'intervento.*

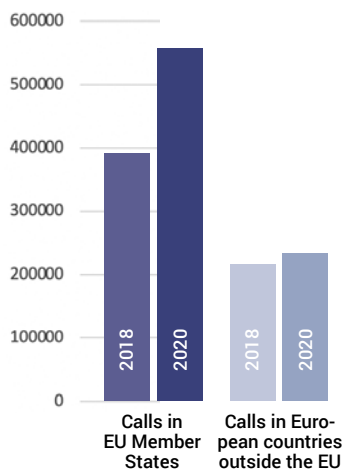
Women Against Violence Europe Network (WAVE) is a European-wide network of over 150 members in 46 European countries, who are dedicated to addressing and preventing violence against women and girls. Since its foundation in 1994, WAVE has been working to promote and strengthen the human rights of women and children, and to enable women and their children to live free from violence, particularly through building and sustaining a strong European network of specialised support services, experts, and survivors.



The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's specialist support services

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the chronic “shadow pandemic” of violence against women has exacerbated: rates of domestic violence, sexual assault, and other manifestations of violence against women and girls have escalated. In particular during lockdown periods, women survivors faced increased risk with the perpetrator always present in the home. **Data collected by WAVE on the impact of the pandemic on the provision of WSSS highlights that significant changes took place due to increased levels of violence and consequent increased demand for assistance, with limitations in the provision of in-person services due to the COVID restrictions.** For instance, access to protection and to the justice system was hindered, WSSS faced an increased need for funds, which were ensured in countries where WSSS normally receive significant state support.

Increase of calls recorded by national women's helplines in 2020:



Women's shelters in particular had to adapt rapidly to maintain safe accommodation for women and their children. Helplines played a vital role, being often the only source of help for women. In fact, helplines reported an increase in the length and intensity of calls, as women were experiencing additional stress and complex trauma. In 2020, the overall increase in calls to helplines was 30%, compared to 2018. In the EU Member States, calls increased by 43% and only 7% in countries that are not EU members.

There may be several explanations for this disparity, e.g. the existence of women's helplines is more established in many EU countries compared with others, there is already a greater general awareness that they are available, and they may be more strongly integrated into government VAW strategies and plans. This shows how an adequate provision of women's support services is necessary to support survivors of VAW, especially in challenging times such as during the pandemic.

To read the WAVE Country report 2021, click [here](#).



National women's helplines



A national women's helpline is a service provided specifically for women and it only, or predominantly, serves women survivors of violence. A national women's helpline should operate 24/7, be free of charge and should serve survivors of all forms of VAW. National women's helplines should have a widely advertised public number and provide referrals to other relevant services. It should operate nationally and provide adequate support to women from all regions; this means the staff must be properly trained and have a gender-specific approach towards VAW, offer effective communication skills and be knowledgeable about regional situations and all relevant provisions.

Overview of service provision – national women's helplines in Europe

	Total number of countries with national women's helplines	Free of Charge	Operating 24/7	NWH free of charge and 24/7 (meeting the IC standard)
Europe (46)	39	36	33	30
EU Member States (27)	23	22	19	18
European countries outside the EU (19)	16	14	14	12

Recommendations

- All European countries must establish at least one national women's helpline to provide specialist support on all forms of VAW. The line(s) must operate 24/7, be free of charge and be accessible by all survivors, ensuring the availability of multilingual support.
- To ensure the sustainable service provision of all National Women's Helplines, especially those that rely on volunteers and donors, states must guarantee sustainable funding for these services.
- The telephone number of national women's helplines should be widely advertised throughout the country, and routinely included in all broadcasts, print, or social media coverage of issues pertaining to VAW.
- Staff must be adequately trained and have a gender-specific approach in dealing with VAW, including knowledge about the regional situation, applicable laws and rights, and all relevant provisions. They should also be equipped to provide referrals to other relevant services.
- Innovations and improvements to national women's helplines that have been made during the COVID-19 pandemic such as chat services and increased resources should be maintained and extended.

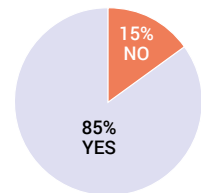


Figure 1: European countries with at least one national women's helpline

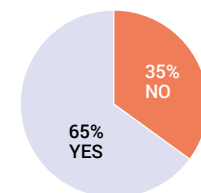


Figure 2: European countries meeting the IC standards for the provision of a national women's helpline



Shelters accessible to women

Women's shelters are specialist support services for survivors of VAW (most commonly domestic violence by a partner or ex-partner) **and their children** (if any). **They provide safe accommodation and empowering support, based on a gender-specific understanding of violence and the centrality of survivors' safety and human rights.** Shelters respond to immediate crises and also the longer-term need for the availability of safe, non-judgmental support throughout the often complex process of leaving a violent relationship. Article 23 of the Istanbul Convention calls for the provision of appropriate, easily accessible shelters for survivors of domestic violence (and their children) in sufficient numbers and recommends that safe accommodation should be available in every region. The WAVE Country Report 2021 distinguishes between shelters accessible to women and women-only shelters, to stress the importance of women-only services while acknowledging the existence of other support services as well, as long as they comply with the aforementioned standards.

Overview of findings on shelters accessible to women in Europe

	Women-only shelters	Shelters accessible to women	Number of bed spaces needed	Number of existing bed spaces	Number of beds missing	No. of countries which meet IC minimum standards
Europe (46)	1,573	2,112	84,479	37,791	46,688 (55%)	9
EU Member States (27)	1,035	1,307	44,732	25,558	19,174 (43%)	6
European countries outside the EU (19)	538	805	39,747	12,233	27,514 (69%)	3

Recommendations

- Women's shelters must preserve their independence and autonomy so that they can provide support to women survivors by taking a survivor-centred, human rights-based, gender-specific approach.
- There is an urgent need to provide sustainable funding to women's shelters to ensure the continuity of their work. Governments must guarantee long-term funding for women-only and women accessible shelters so that the service can be provided free of charge to all survivors.
- Laws regulating funding for women's shelters should ensure these services can provide accommodation and specialist support to all women survivors of VAW and their children, irrespective of whether they are undocumented migrants or have a precarious migration status.
- Women's shelters must be staffed by professionals who have received adequate training on how to prevent and respond to VAW and must put the survivor and her needs at the centre of all interventions.



Women's centres

Women's centres provide non-residential specialist support to women survivors of violence and their children. They work within a **gender-specific and culturally-sensitive framework** of non-residential service provision – whether in response to immediate crises, short-term, or long-term support – for any woman who is a survivor of VAW and her children, if any. The services available may include information, advocacy, counselling, material help (e.g. food, clothing), practical advice in connection with education, employment, housing, legal rights, court accompaniment, etc. They may also engage in wider community education, awareness-raising, and violence prevention.

Overview of findings on women's centres in Europe

	Total number of women's centres	Number of women's centres needed	Number of women's centres missing	Percentage of women's centres missing
Europe (46)	3,210	8,709	5,499	63%
EU Member States (27)	1,925	4,575	2,650	58%
European countries outside the EU (19)	1,285	4,134	2,849	69%

Recommendations

- Continuous efforts must be made by the states to secure sufficient provision of women's centres providing specialist and gender-specific support for women survivors of violence and their children, if any. This is particularly urgent in countries which currently have no such centres, or only in certain cities or regions.
- States should allocate funding to specialist women's centres, especially in countries that don't have centres or allocate very limited resources to women's centres.
- Provision of specialist support services, e.g. for victims of forced marriage, 'honour-based' violence, female genital mutilation, human trafficking, and for refugee, migrant and undocumented women are non-existent or very limited in many countries. Sufficient resources need to be allocated to ensure adequate coverage of such services for ALL women.

	Total population	Total female population
Europe (46)	844,772,036	435,473,984
EU Member States (27)	447,319,916	228,763,757
European countries outside the EU (19)	397,452,120	206,710,227





Specialist services for survivors of sexualised violence

Support services for survivors of sexualised violence may include rape crisis centres (RCC), offering long-term support including counselling and therapy, support groups and support in contact with other services, and sexual violence referral centres (SVRC), specialised in immediate medical care, high-quality forensic practice and crisis intervention, as well as other services for women survivors of sexualised violence. The recommendation is that at least one such centre should be available for every 200,000 inhabitants. Although some women's centres do offer support for SV survivors, the need for dedicated and specialist centres is required to provide specific and critical services in the immediate aftermath of a rape or other assault, in relation to any legal proceedings, and to address the longer-term impacts.

Overview of findings on specialist services for survivors of sexualised violence

	Number of services required to meet IC standard	Number of rape crisis centres/sexual violence referral centres	Number of services missing
Europe (46)	4,224	462	3,862 (91%)
EU Member States (27)	2,237	296	1,941 (87%)
European countries outside the EU (19)	1,987	176	1,811 (91%)

Recommendations

- European states must prioritise the establishment of sufficient rape crisis and sexual violence referral centres to meet the needs of survivors in every region, according to the Istanbul Convention standard of one such service per 200,000 inhabitants.
- States must invest in regular, strategic public awareness and prevention campaigns to address pernicious myths and women-blaming stereotypes associated with sexualised violence with a focus on men's collective responsibility to challenge the norms and cultures which create enabling environments for such violence.
- A systematic programme of initial and continuing training and professional development for key sectors (including police, judiciary, health services and education) should be established. This should take a gender-specific approach towards sexualised violence to build a competent workforce with role-appropriate knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Definitions and legislation on sexualised violence that emphasise voluntary and meaningful consent as decisive should be developed and implemented by states, with the collaboration of specialists who have developed expertise in women's support services.

Femicide



Femicide is a term that refers to the **gender-related killing of women by men, because they are women**. It draws an important distinction between the killing of women as a fatal manifestation of VAW and killings where the gender of the victim is random or incidental. The collection of data is vital but fraught with challenges at national and international levels. To compare and analyse such data meaningfully, clarity is required. States should collect and publish accurate data on the number of femicides occurring in a given country, disaggregated by age and sex of victims and perpetrators, and indicating the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim.

	Estimated number of femicide victims in Europe
Europe (46)	3,762
EU Member States (27)	1,225
European countries outside the EU (19)	2,537

These figures should be treated with caution and should be regarded as estimates based on the best available sources. There is no Europe-wide data collection system or agreed use of the term femicide, so the true number will certainly be higher. Figures from nine countries were not available, so the total number represents the situation in 37 countries.

Recommendations

- It is of great importance that a basic level of vital information is recorded in the official homicide statistics of all European countries. The minimum requirement is the disaggregation by sex of victims and perpetrators, and that the relationship, if any, of victim and perpetrator is recorded.
- Countries are urged to comply with the recommendation of the UN Special Rapporteur that a femicide watch initiative should be established (where it does not already exist) to monitor and highlight femicides, as a resource to improve policies, and to raise awareness of gender-based women killing as fatal manifestations on the continuum of violence against women. Current examples of good practice could be adapted to ensure the development of appropriate and useful models in different national contexts.
- The work of the European Observatory on Femicide should be supported to facilitate effective international collaboration.
- Femicide should be named and integrated into national strategies and policies to address violence against women, with actions identified to minimise and prevent such deaths.