

Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men

Opinion on data collection on violence against women

The Opinion of the Advisory Committee does not necessarily reflect the positions of the Member States and does not bind the Member States

Final version

Introduction

The EU is committed to combatting gender-based violence, as affirmed in the European Commission's Women's Charter (2010), the European Pact for Gender Equality 2011–2020, the European Commission's Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010–15, and the Stockholm Programme for 2010–14. Furthermore, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union¹ guarantees the right to the integrity of the person (Article 3) and prohibits inhuman or degrading treatment (Article 4).

In March 2014, the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) published the results of the first-ever European survey on violence against women, which shows violence happens everywhere, in every society and EU country, regardless of social background, whether at home, at work, at school, in the street or online. According to the survey, one in three women has experienced some form of physical and/or sexual assault since the age of 15. Moreover, 55% of women experience some forms of sexual harassment. These forms of physical, sexual and psychological violence affect women's health and well-being; they can hamper women's access to employment, thereby negatively affecting their financial independence and the economy in general.

The EU protects women and children from gender-based violence through legislation and practical measures on victims' rights. It raises awareness, by co-funding campaigns run by national governments, and supports transnational projects run by non-governmental organisations combatting violence against women, children and young people. It also facilitates finding common solutions among EU countries, by organising exchanges of good practice

Getting more and better evidence on violence against women is essential for the development, implementation and monitoring of policies to combat the issue. The EU Council and the EU Parliament have repeatedly called on the European Commission and Member States to make data on violence against women available:

- The Council Conclusions of 21 October 2002², of 8 March 2010³ and of 6 December 2012⁴ draw attention to the need for a better understanding of the phenomenon, calling for intensified efforts to collect and compile data. In the European Pact for Gender Equality 2011-2020, the Council encouraged the Member States and the Commission, in particular through Eurostat, to further develop existing statistics and sex-disaggregated indicators.

¹ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2010:083:0389:0403:en:PDF>

² on "the Review of the implementation by the Member States and the EU institutions of the Beijing Platform for Action" and establishing a set of seven indicators concerning domestic violence against women (14578/02)

³ on "the Eradication of Violence Against Women in the European Union" (6585/10)

⁴ on "Combating Violence Against Women, and the Provision of Support Services for Victims of Domestic Violence"

- The European Parliament, in its resolutions of 26 November 2009⁵ and of 5 April 2011⁶, called on the Commission and Member States to develop accurate and comparable statistics on the phenomenon of violence against women, including FGM.

- The own-initiative legislative report by MEP Parvanova⁷ requests the Commission to submit a revised proposal for a regulation that would allow collection of statistics on gender-based violence in the member states. The Resolution on the Commission communication entitled 'Towards the elimination of female genital mutilation'⁸ also calls for a harmonised approach to gathering data on female genital mutilation (FGM).

In this context, the Advisory Committee decided to prepare an opinion aimed at issuing recommendations on how to improve the collection of reliable and comparable EU data on all forms of violence against women.

The efforts in this field should concentrate on the indicators and data necessary for policy formulation and evaluation at the EU level. Comparable data will also support mutual learning on how to tackle VAW at the national level. Finally, data collection at EU level could steer progress toward more and better data at national level.

Member States have developed different types of data, which come from different sources: national representative surveys (such as VAW prevalence studies, crime surveys) and administrative data (based on service records, such as police, health services etc.). However, the latter source might underestimate VAW, which is still regrettably under-reported. Only between one in three victims of partner violence and one in four victims of non-partner violence report their most recent serious incident to the police or some other service. Moreover, national administrative data have restricted comparability due to the differing legal systems and recording methods in the Member States. The potential for overcoming these difficulties is limited but advanced standardization is possible and necessary. European surveys with sound methodology can also overcome these difficulties, and provide an alternative source of information to complement the data available from administrative sources such as police records.

Improving data collection on VAW at EU level will require an orchestrated effort, from all relevant actors at national and European levels. These actors are listed in the first section, while the second section recommends concrete measures to improve data collection. The third section concludes with a set of recommendations to set up a comprehensive and coherent framework for data collection.

⁵ on the elimination of violence against women

⁶ on priorities and outline of a new EU policy framework to fight violence against women (2010/2209(INI))

⁷ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=%2f%2fEP%2f%2fNONSGML%2bCOMPARL%2bPE-522.850%2b01%2bDOC%2bPDF%2bV0%2f%2fEN>

⁸ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=MOTION&reference=B7-2014-0091&language=EN>

1. Who are the most relevant actors at national and European level?

At national level:

Data collection on violence against women (VAW) needs to be developed in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. This will necessitate multisectoral, interagency coordination for the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of data collection initiatives.

The main national actors are:

- National statistical offices (in particular through the national crime statistics).
- Relevant ministries such as health, gender equality, children, justice, home affairs and/or social affairs, which have an important role to play in setting standards, ensuring consistency of concepts, ensuring regular frequency of data collection, and ensuring that data are widely disseminated in a timely fashion.
- The police, public prosecutor, the judiciary, health institutions/services, child protection agencies and social support services, including hotlines, shelters, counselling services and homeless services.
- National machineries for equality between women and men which serve as the central policy-coordinating unit on gender equality at government level should be closely associated with such efforts.
- National Equality bodies and National Human Rights Institutions.
- Civil society organisations.
- Research institutes.
- Coordinating bodies on gender-based violence policies.

At EU-level

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) and other relevant EU bodies such as the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) should continue to play a role by gathering information and evidence on violence against women and highlighting gaps and good practices.

Eurostat plays a key role at the EU level in data collection. Based on Eurostat's mandate, to gather and produce comparable EU statistics, cooperation between Eurostat, FRA and EIGE on developing approaches for harmonising statistics for advancing gender analysis and research is crucial.

2. Recommendations

Policy measures

Adopt an EU-strategy

Data collection on violence against women should be part of an EU-wide Strategy to combat all forms of violence against women and girls, as foreseen in 2010 in the Action plan implementing the Stockholm programme⁹ and in the Commission Strategy for equality between women and men 2010-2015¹⁰.

EU Year on violence against women and girls

An EU Year dedicated to end violence against women, preferably in 2016, would also be an important opportunity to mobilise all actors for more action and progress in preventing and combating violence against women and girls. During this year Member States would have an opportunity to address this issue at national level and raise awareness about the importance of collecting and disseminating data on violence against women.

Implement Council Conclusions

The EU should call for the implementation of the Council Conclusions agreed on during the Greek Presidency (2014)¹¹, the Cypriot Presidency (2012)¹² and the Spanish Presidency¹³ (2010) of the Council of the European Union, as they express a strong political engagement of all EU Member States and constitute a base for the European Commission to move forward.

Establish an EU coordinator on violence against women¹⁴

The tasks of the EU coordinator would be supported by a network representing national authorities. This network, preferably based in official coordinating bodies on VAW, would have the task notably to disseminate data on VAW and report regularly on the progress regarding data collection on VAW. Member States must support at the highest level the tasks of coordinating bodies. To avoid duplication of work, this network should consist of the same national coordinating bodies required by Article 10 of the Istanbul Convention, as their tasks will include the coordination of the collection, analysis and dissemination of data under the Convention.

Monitor progress

To gather in one place information on the implementation by Member States of existing legally-binding instruments, such as the Directive on sexual harassment at work and the Victims' Rights Directive¹⁵, collecting information and fostering its full implementation. The collection of this information should take into account the questionnaire that will be used in the monitoring process of the Istanbul Convention.

⁹ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0171:FIN:en:PDF>

¹⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/index_en.htm

¹¹ http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/jha_violence_girls_council_conclusions_2014_en.pdf

¹² http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/134081.pdf

¹³ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/113226.pdf

¹⁴ After assessing the added-value and necessity of such a position

¹⁵ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32006L0054> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2012:315:0057:0073:EN:PDF>

Legislative measures

References to data on VAW in the Istanbul Convention

Many European countries have signed and/or ratified the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention)¹⁶, which entered into force on 1 August 2014. Article 11 of the Convention concerns Parties' obligations regarding data collection and research, thereby establishing a legal obligation to make efforts to meet the obligations in this regard for the EU member states that have ratified the Convention¹⁷. Ratification of the Convention by the EU and EU activities to encourage EU-Member States to ratify the convention could mobilize the national governments to improve their data collection on VAW.

Collect standardised and harmonised data

Systematic and adequate data collection on VAW is crucial to ensure effective policy making in the field both at central and at regional and local levels, and to monitor the implementation of legislation. In the field of preventing and combating VAW, both types of data are essential:

- Administrative data from all relevant sectors;
- Population-based surveys conducted at regular intervals.

Improve data collection

- Eurostat should discuss with Member States how the planned breakdown of intentional homicide by demographic variables (sex, age group) and situational context (relationship between victim and perpetrator) to be implemented in 2014 could be extended to other violent offences, and include, whenever possible, other situational contexts (notably the location of crime).
- Demographic variables related to violence against women would ideally include other relevant information on ethnic background, sexual orientation or gender identity, in order to ascertain also aggravating circumstances, such as racism, xenophobia, transphobia, etc.
- The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) should ensure that in the next edition of the European Working Conditions Surveys (EWCS) of 2015 the questions about violence and harassment in the workplace of the last 2010 survey¹⁸ are also included.
- Future surveys and other work by the FRA on hate crime could usefully address the question of violence against women in the FRA's work on violence motivated by racism, xenophobia, religious intolerance or by a person's disability, sexual orientation or gender identity.

¹⁶ <http://www.coe.int/violence>

¹⁷ As of 1 November 2014, 14 EU member states have signed the Istanbul Convention and the following eight have also ratified it: Austria, Denmark, France, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain and Sweden.

¹⁸ *Fifth European working conditions survey, overview report*, Eurofound, Dublin, 2012
(<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/ewcs/2010/index.htm>)

- Specific questions on violence against women could be included in relevant surveys at EU level (survey on well-being, safety, the European Health Interview Survey (EHIS), etc.) if possible.

Carry out specific surveys

- The Commission should propose a new regulation for a victimisation survey in the EU taking into account the reasons why the Proposed Regulation on European statistics on safety from crime (SASU)¹⁹ was rejected by the European Parliament. The survey would notably provide statistics on the prevalence of different types of violence against women, including violence that was not reported to the police and the victim's reasons for not reporting the incident to the police. Such a survey would include both men and women, taking into account the significant differences between the settings of violence against women and violence against men. This survey could cover a broad range of crimes and violence (and not only violence against women).
- Surveys, like the FRA survey on violence against women presented in March 2014, are important instruments to collect EU-wide data. A similar survey should be conducted at regular intervals, for example every 5 years, to be able to follow the development over time and to be able to detect new trends. The time interval between two waves should be well thought-through. Such a survey could include both men and women.
- While the different results for each country cannot be interpreted easily and nailed down to single reasons, additional research could be undertaken to better understand the actual differences between countries, their causes, and therefore their meaning from a policy perspective.
- The Commission and/or EIGE should carry out complementary research in order to improve knowledge about the experience of different groups of women who may be particularly vulnerable to violence, such as migrant and undocumented migrant women, women with disabilities, women from minority ethnic and religious backgrounds, women in poverty, LGBT women, women in prostitution, women with drug or alcohol dependencies, homeless women, and elderly women who face violence by their partners, children or other family members or by professional care takers.
- The Commission and/or EIGE should engage in surveys that look into the reasons why violence against women continues, despite all conventions and good intentions. Research on the core reasons for violence against women in clusters of Member States would be very useful. There also is a need for surveys that reveal how violence is perceived in different Member States/parts of the EU. Knowing the core reasons for, and attitudes towards, VAW is of the utmost importance in order to intervene with effective measures.

Develop and implement standards, indicators, methods and guidelines

- Member States should use the proposed UNODC International Classification of Crimes for Statistical Purposes (ICCS)²⁰ as the basis for providing statistics at a national and EU level on violent offences, broken down at a minimum by sex, age group and victim-offender relationship.

¹⁹ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0335:FIN:EN:PDF>

²⁰ <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/doc13/2013-11-CrimeStats-E.pdf>

- The European Commission/EUROSTAT should initiate consultations followed by formal dialogues with Member States/their national statistical offices to reach an agreement on which data has to be provided and which methodologies should be developed and used. Efforts could also be made to ensure linkages to the internationally agreed global VAW indicators, such as those of the Post 2015 agenda. This could be done through a new specific working group or through existing experts and working groups. The Commission's Expert Group on the Policy Needs for Data on Crime²¹ is responsible for assisting the Commission in developing common indicators to address policy needs for data on crime. The Eurostat Working Group is responsible for discussing with Member States the development, production and dissemination of annual statistics on crime, including statistics on VAW, in line with the Commission's statistical requirements, and includes researchers and other experts on crime statistics.
 - Statistics on violence against women should be a fixed point on the agendas of both the Expert Group and Eurostat Working Group on Statistics on Crime and Criminal Justice. The cooperation within the Eurostat working group should enable Member States to collect high-quality, comparable and consistent data on VAW. Particular attention should be given to how data is consistently collected at the level of police reporting, and that police and the judiciary are given adequate training on relevant legal definitions and data protection issues.
 - The Eurostat working group should continue to cooperate with relevant United Nations agencies on guidelines and methodologies for data collection on VAW.
 - Methodological guidelines on minimum standards of administrative data collection can be developed, taking into account the work of EUROSTAT and UNODC questionnaire on data on certain crimes. The guidelines should draw on the work already done by the European Union²² and other international organisations working in this field, such as Council of Europe²³ and United Nations²⁴. Member States should implement the guidelines on improving administrative data collection on VAW prepared by Eurostat.

- The EU should develop specific indicators in order to facilitate the evaluation of the implementation of the Directive 2012/29/EU, on minimum standards on the rights,

²¹ <http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regexpert/index.cfm?do=groupDetail.groupDetail&groupID=2837>

²² For instance, the project European Homicide Monitor Data funded by the European Commission through the Funding programme on Prevention of and Fight against Crime (ISEC). The first study of the project, prepared jointly by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, the Finnish National Research Institute of Legal Policy, and the Dutch Institute for Criminal Law and Criminology at Leiden University, was published in 2011. The study developed a proposal of database structure for collecting data on homicides in a harmonised way in the European Union. Source: Ganpat, Soenita [et al.]. *Homicide in Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden: A First Study on the European Homicide Monitor Data* [on line]. Stockholm: The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, 2011. [Consulted: 14 November 2013]. Collections: Research Report 259/Finland; Research Report 2011:15/Sweden. Available at: http://www.bra.se/download/18.656e38431321e85c24d80007748/1330943480501/2011_15_homicide_finland_netherlands_sweden.pdf

²³ See, for instance, *Administrative data collection on domestic violence in Council of Europe member countries*, Council of Europe, 2008 (http://coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/convention-violence/documentation_studies_publications_en.asp) and the *Analytical Study of the results of the fourth round of monitoring implementation of Council of Europe Recommendation (2002)5 on the protection of women against violence*, Council of Europe, 2014 (<http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/convention-violence/Docs/Analytical%20Study%20ENG.pdf>). See in particular the chapter on data collection in 46 member states of the Council of Europe (which includes the EU-28).

²⁴ i.e. the Manual for the Development of a System of Criminal Justice Statistics. Available at: http://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/SeriesF/SeriesF_89e.pdf

support and protection of victims of crime ²⁵, including indicators on violence against women.

- The EU should review and update the 10 quantitative and qualitative indicators adopted since 1999 by the presidencies of the Council of the European Union to supervise the progress towards the achievement of the objectives of Beijing at EU level regarding the critical area of concern D “Violence against Women”, and take into account agreement reached at global level regarding VAW indicators. This review and update should take into account the indicators proposed by the Statistical Commission of the United Nations as well as those that might be proposed for the evaluation of the Istanbul Convention. The member states should be asked to report on such indicators at regular intervals in the framework of the monitoring of the Beijing Platform for Action. Efforts should also be made to work toward using globally comparable violence indicators.
- In cooperation with national authorities, Eurostat could consider collecting data on VAW through national health systems. This would require the development of guidelines and a common coding/classification system to be adopted by national health systems and social services for an accurate register of VAW incidents and cooperation with the WHO to update international classification of diseases by including codes on data on specific forms of violence, like FGM.

Provide funding

Improving comparable and harmonised data collection on VAW at EU level should be a priority area in the “Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme” for the period 2014-2020²⁶. This would allow funding for research and implementation of policies on comparable data collection on VAW, as well as the exchange of knowledge and good practices among EU Member States, and ensure the participation of NGOs in the discussion and improvement of data collection on VAW in the EU and its MS.

Support multidisciplinary research on VAW through Horizon 2020 - the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation to find the gaps to be filled in order to provide wide, comparable and harmonized data on VAW at EU level, and to analyse existing and new data, to interpret it, and to draw policy conclusions on how to stop VAW.

Given the VAW data expertise in the EU countries, it could also be considered to support capacity building of selected developing countries in order to enable them to collect and analyse the much needed VAW data (technical assistance to national statistical offices in developing countries, as part of the EU development assistance) This could be supported in line with the post 2015 agenda process.

²⁵ Article 28 of the directive. Available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32012L0029&from=EN>

²⁶ Available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:354:0062:0072:en:PDF>

3. Towards a coherent and comprehensive framework of data collection on VAW at EU level

Taking into account all the issues mentioned above, the following steps should be taken in order to make progress towards a coherent and comprehensive framework of data collection on VAW:

- EIGE should draft a roadmap/strategic plan to improve data collection on VAW in line with the recommendations of this opinion.
- Agreement on the key indicators required to address VAW policy requirements.
- Agreement on how the existing EU data collection structures can be further developed using appropriate methodological techniques to collect relevant data from administrative sources and through special surveys, such as the FRA survey. The consultation can take place within existing working groups or through the setting-up of a fully operational working group on data collection on VAW in the EU.