



Questions & Answers: International Day for the elimination of violence against women

Brussels, 24 November 2017

What is the Commission doing to tackle sexual harassment?

[STATEMENT/17/4848](#)

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The Commission has [dedicated 2017 to the fight against violence against women](#) across the EU and is running a social media campaign to raise awareness and take a clear stand against violence against women.

The Commission is [funding concrete projects](#) to work on prevention, awareness raising and concrete actions, such as making sure that all professionals involved in helping these women are well trained with 15 million euros. Women should be able to trust that their voice will be taken seriously; which in turn will make them more likely to report harassment or sexual violence.

In May 2017, the Council adopted a decision on signing [the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention](#), following [a proposal](#) by the Commission (see [statement](#)). The Istanbul Convention is a legally-binding treaty that aims at combatting violence against women and girls, at preventing violence, at protecting victims and at ending impunity of perpetrators. The Commission have taken the first important step in committing the European Union as a full-fledged Party to the Convention under international law. Negotiations on the conclusion decision, which will allow for the ratification of the Convention by the EU, are ongoing. The European Parliament needs to consent to the conclusion of the agreement by the EU prior to the adoption of the conclusion decision by the Council.

In other areas, funding is also available. [Erasmus+](#) supports projects and partnerships between education institutions aimed at tackling discrimination based on gender, as well as projects tackling gender-based violence in sport such as the [VOICE](#) project (Voices for truth and dignity – combatting sexual violence in European Sport through the voices of those affected).

What is the Commission doing internally to protect its staff?

The Commission has a zero tolerance policy for any form of harassment. Our internal rules require all our staff to behave with integrity and forbid any form of harassment.

Since 2006, we have measures in place to prevent all forms of harassment in the European Commission. The recently adopted [diversity and inclusion strategy](#) reinforces these measures and includes further preventive measures

In case of inappropriate behaviour, we have strong rules and procedures in place which encourage people to speak out – either via informal or via formal channels.

A team of colleagues within our Human Resources department is tasked with looking at any complaints and carrying out investigations if necessary.

Recent events around the world have sparked questions about sexual harassment cases in Europe, too – including in the European institutions. Is the Commission doing enough?

We lead by example and therefore commit to further improvement. We will review our internal rules, notably to codify the new case law. Our ambition is to have a new, updated anti-harassment policy in place during the course of 2018.

Let's be clear: even a single case of harassment will always be one case too many. The Commission will therefore continue its preventive actions and carry on promoting a respectful working environment. Formal investigations and sanctions will continue to apply whenever necessary.

How are victims of violence protected and supported?

Since November 2015, the [Victims' Rights Directive](#) lays out a set of binding rights for victims of crime, as well as clear obligations for EU Member States to guarantee these rights in practice. These rules recognise that victims of gender-based violence and domestic violence are particularly vulnerable.

Victims have the right to protection and to access support services according to their needs. (see [IP/15/6095](#) and [factsheet](#)).

Thanks to [EU rules on the recognition of protection orders](#), victims of domestic violence also benefit from extra protection when travelling between EU countries. These rules consist of a [Directive](#) and a [Regulation](#).

There are also rules on compensation for victims of crime. According to the [Compensation Directive](#), individuals who are victims of intentional and violent crime in another EU Member State can receive fair compensation from the country where the crime took place.

What is done at EU-level to eradicate trafficking?

The large majority of victims of trafficking registered in the EU are women and girls (80%). The EU recognises that trafficking of females is a form of violence against women and has adopted comprehensive legal and policy frameworks to eradicate it. The [Anti-trafficking Directive](#) has provisions for protecting victims and for preventing more people from becoming victims. The [EU Strategy towards the Eradication of Trafficking in Human Beings 2012-2016](#) complements this legislation with a series of actions, including actions which focus on the gender dimension of human trafficking. As part of this strategy, the Commission published the [Study on the Gender Dimension of Trafficking in Human Beings](#) in March 2016. Also in 2016, the Commission issued the [First Report on Progress Made in the Fight Against Trafficking in Human Beings](#), which included findings about women and girls.

The Commission will shortly publish its priority actions to address trafficking in human beings. These will build on the ongoing work, taking stock of the achievements of the EU strategy 2012-2016 and ensuring the continuation of efforts, including taking gender into consideration, coordination with stakeholders and increasing the knowledge base.

What data is collected to better understand the phenomenon?

Effective policy making requires accurate and comparable data on gender-based violence.

The [first EU-wide survey on women's experiences of various forms of violence](#), carried out by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), shows that violence against women in Europe is still widespread. The survey found that one in three women has been a victim of physical and/or sexual violence during her lifetime, and that 55% of women have experienced sexual harassment.

To build on the Fundamental Rights Agency survey, the Commission has launched the development of a new EU-wide prevalence survey on gender-based violence, coordinated by Eurostat with the involvement of national statistical institutes. After a pilot phase in 2018, the survey will be carried out in 2019-20. Eurostat is also collecting crime statistics on the number of reported incidents of intentional homicide, rape and sexual assault, for both men and women. The [data](#) shows that in many Member States over half of all female murder victims are killed by an intimate partner, relative or family member.

The European Institute for Gender Equality has developed [methods and a set of indicators](#) for estimating the risk of female genital mutilation. The agency has also developed a way to measure the phenomenon of gender-based violence, as part of its [Gender Equality Index](#).

The European Commission also published a [study](#) on "Gender-based violence in Sport". The study provides a mapping and overview of the legal and policy frameworks in Member States. It identifies several best practices in combatting gender-based violence in sport and makes recommendations to the Commission, Member States and sport organisations for future actions, including a recommendation that sport staff with a history of offences should be prevented from taking up any roles in sporting environments in the European Union.

How does the EU address gender-based violence in its asylum policy?

In the context of the ongoing reform of the Common European Asylum System the European Commission has proposed to [strengthen the provisions for vulnerable applicants](#). This involves more ambitious provisions for assessing vulnerability and an obligation for Member States to take the specific needs of women applicants into account who have experienced gender-based harm. The strengthened provisions also aim to ensure that asylum applicants have access to medical care, legal support, appropriate trauma counselling and psycho-social care. The proposal for the new [Asylum Procedure Regulation](#) advocates gender-sensitive international protection. Women for instance should be given an effective opportunity to have a private interview, separate from their spouse or other family members. Where possible they should be assisted by female interpreters and female medical practitioners, especially if they may have been a victim of gender-based violence.

The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) has furthermore developed [several tools](#) in order to ensure an effective implementation of legal provisions for gender-related issues.

What is the EU doing to help promote gender equality outside the European Union?

The European Union puts women's human rights and gender equality at the core of all its external policies. It makes every possible effort to empower and strengthen the voice of women and girls, and to assert their political, social, economic rights around the world.

The [2016-2020 EU Gender Action Plan](#), the Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality (2016-2019) and the EU Global Strategy form the guiding framework for EU actions and cooperation with partner countries, international and civil society organisations, and the private sector. The EU's Gender Action Plan 2016-2020 has set an ambitious target to mainstream gender actions across 85% of all new EU initiatives by 2020. Progress is undeniable: 92% of all new initiatives adopted in area of the EU's foreign policy and around 60% of all new initiatives adopted in the EU's International cooperation and development work have been marked as mainly or significantly aimed at promoting gender equality and/or women empowerment. In 2016, the European Commission committed €419 million for specific actions for gender equality and women's empowerment.

As gender equality cuts across the whole [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and is vital for achieving all sustainable development goals, [the EU will contribute to this key driver of development](#) by also focusing on concrete actions that counter and prevent any form of violence against women and girls, by shifting the institutional culture of the EU and its Member States to deliver on commitments and by supporting partner countries to create a more enabling environment for the fulfilment of all girls' and women's rights. The recently adopted [European Consensus on Development](#) is part of the overall response to the 2030 Agenda, reaffirming the EU's commitment to promote gender equality, women and girls' rights and their empowerment as a priority across all areas of action, and by ensuring a gender perspective across all of our policies and programmes.

We will in particular be investing in women and girls whose rights are violated across the world as they are excluded from education, from the labour market, and from political life while facing unequal rules and laws on inheritance, citizenship or land-ownership. In 2017, we will provide specific support to victims of violence in the most remote and fragile areas. To this end, the EU launched together with the UN a €500 million "[Spotlight Initiative](#)" to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls.

The EU is also at the forefront in fighting for gender equality and women's empowerment in conflict situations, as part of the EU's implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. We are taking action in the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and its seven follow-up resolutions.

We are closely interacting with the UN and all relevant stakeholders worldwide, on the need for proper inclusion of women in prevention of conflict and post-conflict situations, including their participation in peace processes, and in efforts to combat all forms of violence against women, including gender-based violence and sexual-violence in conflict.

The EU is actively engaged with partner countries in multilateral fora to consistently contribute to advancing the gender agenda, notably at annual sessions of UN Commission on the status of women and quarterly sessions of UN Human Rights Council as the key policy-making UN fora.

We systematically raise gender issues in political dialogues, human rights dialogues/sub-committees, informal working groups and human rights-related discussions with partner countries. The new human rights and democracy country strategies for the period 2016-2020 included gender equality as one of the main priorities. Moreover, the EU carries out political demarches, takes political positions and funds actions addressing inequalities and discrimination of women and girls. Gender issues are largely covered in our policies and programmes on election observation, transitional justice, human rights defenders, and the International Criminal Court.

What is the EU doing to protect women in humanitarian crises?

Conflicts and natural disasters affect women, girls, boys and men differently. A key example is the EU-funded humanitarian aid projects across the world, which are adapted to the different needs of boys, men, women and girls. All projects take into account gender to ensure maximum impact so aid reaches those that need it most. In order to ensure that humanitarian responses address the specific needs of women and girls taking their perspective into account is promoted in all EU funded humanitarian projects.

The European Commission's approach to gender and gender-based violence in humanitarian aid is outlined in the policy document [Gender in Humanitarian Aid – Different Needs, Adapted Assistance](#). This approach is further developed in the document [Humanitarian Protection: Improving Protection Outcomes to Reduce Risks for People in Humanitarian Crises](#). The EU also introduced a [Gender-Age Marker](#) tool to assess how much EU-funded humanitarian actions take gender and age into consideration.

The EU responds to gender-based violence in humanitarian crises through targeted actions and

capacity building. In 2016, the EU supported 62 humanitarian projects related to gender-based violence. These projects are financed with a total of almost €24.5 million and will reach 3.4 million women, girls, boys and men around the world. Since 2014, the EU has spent more than €1 million per year on projects that contribute to building the capacity of the humanitarian system to deal with gender and gender-based violence. The EU is an active member of the global initiative [Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence](#).

The EU also supports the implementation of the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women \(CEDAW\)](#) and the [Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action](#), as well as the Programme of Action on the International Conference on Population and Development (ICDP).

It is essential for the EU to also get non-governmental actors involved. We work closely with civil society actors, in particular women's organisations, private foundations, the private sector and advocates for their cause. This will help to address the root causes of gender inequality: a lack of access to financial and material resources, unequal power relations, discrimination, stigma, gender stereotypes and violence.

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