



EUROPEAN WOMEN'S  
**LOBBY**  
EUROPEEN DES FEMMES

## Ending Gender-Based Violence in Europe: *Implementing Strategies for Protection and Prevention*

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**Thank you for the invitation** to this interesting conference on EU strategies to end male violence against women.

I am going to give a short presentation on behalf of the European Women's Lobby, the biggest coalition of women's rights NGOs in Europe, about the dynamics of violence against women, the situation in Europe and comprehensive strategies for prevention.

Let me first start by trying to capture the situation today: did you ever hear someone say around you:

- "She keeps provoking her husband with her attitude. What can she expect?"
- "It looks like she has an affair and he just can't handle it"
- "If it is so bad, why doesn't she leave?"
- "Aren't you exaggerating? He might just have had a bad day", "He is jealous"
- "Wearing such a revealing clothes, she is asking for it"
- "She didn't fight back", "She shouldn't drunk"

Today, 1 in 5 persons in Europe blame the victim as the latest Eurobarometer has shown. 1 in 5 persons in Europe think that male violence is provoked by the victim or that women often make up or exaggerate claims of abuse or rape. 27% of Europeans think that rape can be justified in some circumstances. This figures goes up to 40-50% in countries like Belgium and Romania. This is extremely worrying since **public perceptions and societal attitudes shape the climate in which male violence against women takes place**. This also shows how deep gender stereotypes are still rooted in the society, affecting also to key social players in combating violence, like professionals in the law enforcement and judiciary sectors or health system.

Violence against women and girls continues to be the most pervasive violation of women's human rights in Europe and worldwide, and affects the lives of millions of women and girls and leads to long-term psychological and physical consequences, when it's not purely to the death of women. Male Violence against women cannot be considered as a private matter, it is a human rights issue. It is a structural historical phenomenon resulting from patriarchal societies and "*a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women*", as defined in the The Beijing Platform for Action.

The European Women's Lobby, together with our members and our Observatory on violence against women, we have been working for years **to raise awareness on the reality and the persistence of violence against women and girls and its impact on all women**. Already in 1999, the EWL had found out that 1 out of 5 women experience domestic violence in Europe. It is dramatic to say that the figures haven't changed 18 years later!

Today, 50 women are murdered every week as a result of male domestic violence in Europe. The facts and figures shown by the 2014 European wide survey carried out by the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) also give evidence for the urgency to act. Nearly half of all women experience psychological violence, 33% have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15, every second woman has been confronted with one or more forms of sexual harassment and new forms of violence are developing, like

stalking, which touches nearly 1 out of 5 women. 4 out of 5 women did not seek assistance or report the crime after suffering violence.

**Violence against women and girls has a deep impact on all women** in Europe. As Elizabeth Stanko says: “Learning strategies for survival is a continuous lesson about what it means to be a woman”. And this is still the reality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

However, despite all the data we have, **violence against women is still shrouded in silence**: it remains trivialised, invisible and it is still not being considered as a political priority. Due to the lack of sensitisation and adequate public policies, women victims of violence in Europe are not being sufficiently protected: they suffer from second victimisation (as mentioned before, they are blamed for the violence they face); they suffer from lack of protection services where they can turn to; and we see a high rate of impunity of the perpetrators. For example, in Denmark 70% of reported cases of sexual violence end up without a conviction. Women need protection and justice!

How much more evidence do we need before we take action? How many more women should be beaten, raped, prostituted, trafficked, killed, before Europe finds it unacceptable?

The 33 experts of our Observatory on violence against women keep on denouncing the reality that women are **still protected unequally in the European Union**: national legislations and policies on violence against women vary greatly from one country to the other. All the important Resolutions that the European Parliament has adopted over the years on violence against women have come to the same conclusion: depending on where a woman lives, she might not get access to justice or be even listened to. As an example: there is no hotline 24/7 for victims of violence against women in many countries in the EU and there are still EU Member States which do not include domestic violence in the criminal code.

Even worse, several countries are taking alarming initiatives like Poland – where a Minister announced that they are considering to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention - or Russia - Russian lawmakers voted overwhelmingly in favour of a bill that will downgrade domestic violence from a criminal offense to a mere administrative offense.

This really shows that violence against women is a political issue. Everybody knows it. Everyone in this room knows it since we care about this issue, but also the worst misogynists know it. When some countries take proactive steps to backtrack on women’s safety and integrity, it means that they deliberately want to build societies where women’s rights are not respected, where women and girls are considered inferior and their bodily integrity is not protected. **As feminists have been saying for decades, the personal is political, and it is time to take political action.**

It is also extremely important to understand how certain women face greater risk of violence because of motives fuelled by sexism coupled with racism, xenophobia, homophobia as well as discrimination based on age, disability or ethnic minority. Intersecting forms of discrimination are preventing many women from accessing justice and support and protection services, and from enjoying their fundamental rights.

Women’s diversity of needs is still denied in public policies. Women are not a homogenous group. Women with disabilities are four times more likely to experience sexual violence and to face forced sterilisation or abortion. Policies should ensure that they do not leave any woman or girl behind.

**Let’s talk about prevention now.** What does prevention mean? It of course means providing education measures to ensure that the principles of respect for women’s rights and gender equality are largely embraced. We need a long term change of attitudes, and educational programmes must be implemented at all ages, in all spheres of society, towards both girls and boys, women and men. It also

means informing women of their rights, empowering them to free themselves from the patriarchal structures they live in. Ending violence against women is closely linked to ensuring women's economic independence and women's access to decision-making.

But how can we implement effective prevention if we live in an environment where violence against women and degrading images of women are normalised in the media, in movies and video clips? where women and girls' bodies are commodified and hypersexualised in advertising and in reality through prostitution? **Prevention is directly linked to legislation:** we need norms and respect for these norms. We need all forms of male violence to be recognised as crimes, and impunity to prevail. Only at this condition will prevention measures work.

The Istanbul Convention is the first legally binding treaty in Europe that criminalises different forms of violence against women and sets a comprehensive set of standards to prevent violence and to guarantee the right for every woman to live free from violence .

2017 year has been marked by the European Commission as the EU year to combat violence against women and girls. Today, the EU has a unique opportunity to "walk the talk" about equality between women and men. The EU must ratify the Istanbul Convention, in order to show its commitment. Coupled with the Victims' Rights Directive, the Istanbul Convention will be transformed into concrete protection measures for women and girls. **When it comes to prevention and protection,** the Istanbul Convention will play a key role if the EU and all Member States ratify and implement it.

As you know, last November, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the EU accession to the Istanbul Convention which was voted by an overwhelming majority of MEPs from a wide cross-party political spectrum. The European Parliament calls as well for an EU strategy on combatting violence against women and for further comprehensive legislative action at EU level to prevent and combat violence against women. In February 2017 three European Institutions (European Parliament, European Commission and the Council Presidency) have made a joint call for action to the Member States, asking them to ratify and fully implement the Istanbul Convention and to approve the EU's accession in a meaningful way.

More than 25 European wide civil society organisations have joined our proposal to form a **European Coalition to end violence against women and girls:** whether they are the voice of homeless people, of Roma people, of elderly persons, they all call the EU for more action to end violence against women and girls! Together, we urge the Member States in the Council of the European Union to ensure that the EU ratifies the Istanbul Convention in the next months, in the most meaningful way, and within the broadest scope of EU competence as possible. Please read the factsheet that we produced together and sign the online petition that we have launched together with WeMove.EU, which has been signed already more than 61.000 citizens who demand the EU action to rise up to end violence against women.

The European Women's Lobby is the voice of many women in Europe, and this is what they tell us: women want to live a life free from violence and fear. They want access to justice, access to support services.

While we speak today, thousands of women are being beaten, raped, harassed, prostituted, psychologically abused and even killed. If we were courageous enough, we would say: while we speak today, thousands of men are beating, raping, harassing, prostituting, psychologically abusing and even killing women.

It is time to shift the blame, it is time to be courageous, to open our eyes and make real politics.

Now is the perfect, timely, and very much expected opportunity to make history. To make HERstory.

Thank you for your attention.