

Gender-based violence against women – an EU-wide survey

Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union recognises the right to be free from discrimination, including on the basis of sex.

Policy context

Both the European Parliament Resolution on the elimination of violence against women (26 November 2009) and the Council of the European Union's Conclusions on the Eradication of Violence Against Women (8 March 2010) highlight the lack of regular and comparable data on violence against women in the European Union (EU). While a number of EU Member States have conducted relevant surveys, the results are either not comparable or they are dated.

The European Parliament Resolution on the Stockholm Programme (25 November 2009) therefore called upon the FRA to "compile and publish reliable and comparable statistics on all grounds of discrimination, including comparative data on violence against women in the European Union".

Such reliable and comparable data are crucial to assessing the extent of the phenomenon and to finding appropriate solutions.

Key issues

Violence against women and the EU

Violence against women continues to be a pressing problem across EU Member States, undermining women's core fundamental rights, such as dignity, access to justice and gender equality. The impact of violence against women reaches far beyond the individuals immediately involved – victim(s) and perpetrator(s) – to affect families, communities and society at large.

Equality between women and men is a core EU principle. It is recognised in the EU treaties and in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Violence against women can be linked to several Charter articles – such as human dignity (Article 1) and the right to life (Article 2) and integrity of the person (Article 3), the prohibition of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (Article 4), right to liberty and security (Article 6) and non-discrimination (Article 21). The European Commission reaffirms the EU's determination to combat gender-based violence in its 'Strategy for equality between women and men 2010–2015' (21 September 2010).

The FRA violence against women survey

In 2011–2012, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) will conduct an EU-wide survey on violence against women. This is the first survey of its kind to randomly sample and interview 40,000 women across the 27 EU Member States and Croatia. It will therefore furnish the robust, comparable data that policy makers need to shape informed, targeted policies to combat such violence.

The specific objectives of the survey are to:

- provide evidence needed by key stakeholders such as policy makers, practitioners and non-governmental organisations for the development of policies and other measures to combat violence against women;
- supply, for the first time, EU-wide comparable data on the extent and nature of women's experiences of physical, sexual and psychological violence and harassment – including whether they report these experiences and what the response is when they do;
- contribute to the collection of data for the development of indicators that will be used to monitor violence against women and responses to it.

Measuring violence against women

This survey aims to capture women's 'everyday' experiences of violence – **including physical, sexual and psychological violence**, harassment and stalking, by current and former partners and non-partners, in the past 12 months and since the age of 15. The survey also aims to measure **experiences of violence before the age of 15**, in order to have a comprehensive picture of women's experiences over their lifetime.

The survey will look in particular at experiences of violence in different settings, such as the home or workplace, as well as forms of violence/harassment carried out with the use of new communication technologies, such as text messaging or internet-based networking sites. The survey will also include questions regarding the frequency and severity of violence, the physical, emotional and psychological consequences of violence, use of healthcare and other services, satisfaction with the services received, as well as questions on women's experiences in contacting the police and feelings of safety.

Methodology

The FRA violence against women survey will be a large-scale quantitative data collection exercise, based on a detailed survey questionnaire. The survey will involve standardised face-to-face interviews with a random sample of 1,500 women per country, amounting to interviews with **40,000 women** across the EU. The results will provide representative data of violence against women at EU and national levels.

Given the variety of forms of violence against women and the inherent limitations of any particular research methodology, it is important to acknowledge that the survey will not be able to measure all types of violence against women. For example, relatively rare forms of violence or those which mainly affect specific sub-populations – such as trafficking in women and girls or female genital mutilation – would be inadequately captured in a random sample.

Preparatory work for full-scale survey

Since 2010, the FRA has engaged in stakeholder and expert consultations to develop its violence against women survey project, focusing on the survey's scope

and aims, the needs of policy makers at EU and national level and the technical aspects of the survey methodology.

The FRA carried out in 2010–2011 a violence against women pre-test study in six EU Member States: Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland and Spain. The pre-test was designed to assist the FRA in developing survey questions which can produce comparable results on women's experiences of violence in the EU. The pre-test explored the understanding that different women have of key concepts which will be examined in the survey: relating to experiences of physical, sexual and psychological violence in the 'domestic' sphere and at the workplace, as well as in new settings, such as internet-based social networks.

Evidence-based advice

Outputs

The survey's results, which will be made public in 2013, will help inform on-going debates on EU-level action to combat violence against women – for example, through new legislation, harmonisation of existing laws or programmes to raise awareness among EU citizens. In each country, the survey will provide information relevant to the work of the police, those in the health and social care sectors and civil society organisations, helping allocate resources efficiently and improve services. For example, estimates of the number of cases of violence, the needs of victims and their perceptions of the quality of the help received may prompt reassessments of the resources available at governmental and non-governmental victim support services.

Further information:

Please visit the FRA website: www.fra.europa.eu, and specifically at:

http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/research/projects/proj_eu_survey_vaw_en.htm.

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