

No more victims: stop femicide in Europe

The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (The Istanbul Convention) and the EU 2024 Gender Based Violence Directive condemn all forms of violence against women and call for special measures and legislation to prevent and protect women from gender-based violence. Even though the term femicide is not mentioned in the Convention, the European Greens emphasize that gender-related killings are covered under the criminalisation of physical violence (Article 50). We therefore call upon European governments to combat femicide as the most brutal and extreme manifestation of violence against women and girls and to take urgent actions on prevention, protection and reporting.

Further we propose to explore the adoption of an additional protocol to the Istanbul Convention specifically on enhancing fight against femicide. This approach would allow us to strengthen the Convention's framework without reopening or renegotiating its existing provisions. It also follows a long-established practice within the Council of Europe, where many core treaties have been supplemented by targeted protocols to address emerging issues.

Femicide is one of the most dramatic and poignant problems in our societies. Between 2012 and 2022, 14,000 intentional homicides of women took place in the European Union alone. In most cases, women and girls were murdered by (ex)-partners or family members.

The gruesome statistics show high incidences of femicide in our countries. In 2022, women were killed by (ex) partners or family members 120 times in Italy, 118 times in France and 113 times in Germany. The actual figures are probably higher since femicide cases are underreported as not all murder cases of women are recognised as such due to inconsistencies in femicide-related statistics.

Femicide was recognised for the first time at United Nations level in 2013 through the Declaration of Vienna. The declaration identifies a long list of different types of femicide such as killing of women and girls in the name of "honour", because of sexual orientation, as targets in armed conflicts, or due to accusation of witchcraft, to name a few. Femicide is driven by discrimination against women and girls, unequal power relations, stereotypes and harmful social norms. Numbers are rising worldwide. Women in the public eye, such as politicians, activists and journalists, are often targets of online and offline Violence. Women from specific communities often face additional socio-political disadvantages; including because of their age, race, association with a minority, disability, sexual orientation, disability or socio-economic status are at an even higher risk of gender-based violence.

Unfortunately, there is no standard definition of femicide agreed between member states of the Council of Europe. The lack of a uniform definition is an obstacle to measuring femicide, which therefore risks becoming invisible in general homicide data.

Femicide is predictable in most cases and could be prevented if early signs are detected and measures taken. Femicide is often preceded by other forms of violence by a partner or former

partner such as physical abuse, controlling behaviour, coercion, and stalking. We urge the Council of Europe Member States to implement adequate measures against (potential) perpetrators and provide safety measures for potential and actual victims as well as children and other family members or persons in their care.

Gender-based violence underscores the disparities faced by women, particularly in terms of their safety and psychological and physical integrity. These disparities are linked to the discrimination and violence that women suffer for being women and them being often considered as “second-class citizens”. In order to prevent femicide, we must always keep in mind its root causes that stem from gender inequality. Progress to reach gender equality in Europe is slow. The European Union’s knowledge centre on Gender Equality (EIGE) estimates that at the current pace, gender equality – as per gender equality index – will not be reached before 2080!

Efforts to eradicate gender-based violence are too often undermined by disinformation and false narratives, including the deliberate distortion of the relationship between the Convention and tradition, culture, and religion. Fundamentalist, populist, and far-right actors frequently spread misleading claims that misrepresent the aims of the Istanbul Convention, creating confusion and fuelling unfounded fears.

The European Greens are deeply concerned that the Convention’s core mission—to protect women and girls from violence—is being manipulated for political purposes. We strongly regret decisions influenced by such disinformation, including the Bulgarian Constitutional Court’s rejection of ratification in 2018, Türkiye’s withdrawal in 2021, and the recent vote in the Latvian Parliament to initiate withdrawal.

The European Greens stand in full solidarity with women and girls, affected by gender-based violence and killings, and we recognise the agency and resilience of all survivors. We urge European Commission and national Parliaments and institutions to adopt clear, inclusive definitions of femicide and all forms of gender-based violence, recognise trans, gender-nonconforming, intersex, disabled survivors and collateral victims, including children and ensure that justice systems and support services respect everyone’s rights, dignity, identity, and access needs. We will seek full implementation of the Istanbul Convention and actively invite countries worldwide to join.

The European Greens call upon the governments of the Council of Europe member states to develop action plans to stop femicide, which should include:

- a clear, inclusive and uniform minimum definition of femicide in the legislation;
- mechanisms for anonymous reporting of gender-based violence, in order to lower barriers to reporting and protect victims who fear retaliation;
- safety measures to create inclusive, safe, and accessible public spaces for women and girls through community-based prevention, urban planning, and social infrastructure, without relying on police state measures;
- ensure adequate and sustainable funding and resources for shelters and other support services of victims of gender-based violence, and organisations providing those services, including shelters, counselling centres, and specialised helplines, as well as for programs working with men and perpetrators to prevent re-offending and to address the root causes

of violent behaviour. The European Countries must promote rapid access to safe accommodation and housing for victims of gender-based violence and their families. Awareness of diversity and inclusion should also be promoted among organisations providing shelter and other services;

- strengthening prevention, active engagement and participation of young people throughout the development and investment in quality comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) programmes facing challenges such as rising of gender-based violence, hate speech and misogynist views among younger generations;
- special training programmes for police officers, prosecutors, judges, legal practitioners and health care providers/professions, including paramedics and emergency medical staff, to effectively identify, document and respond to cases of gender-based violence. European countries should also promote and facilitate cooperation between relevant authorities and other providers of services for victims of gender-based violence to facilitate easy access to support services, judicial proceedings, and other relevant processes, and ensuring that these processes run smoothly;
- developing early warning systems and provide safety and protection for potential victims;
- setting-up 24/7 community centres at an accessible distance that provides a safe-space for victims of sexual assault, where they can go to for support and filing complaints;
- the establishment or integration of violence intervention units into the healthcare system where professionals can conduct victim-sensitive examinations, document forensic evidence which can be used in court to convict perpetrators and refer victims to specialist services providing medical treatment as well as short- and long-term psychological counselling and support;
- making sure that financially disadvantaged victims have the means, through state interventions, to leave an abusive household without running the risk of poverty;
- taking preventive measures in at-risk situations, including measures to prevent repeated or aggravated offences, such as wearing electronic monitoring devices and escalation analysis;
- strengthening community-based prevention approaches by involving potential witnesses as well as social and neighbourhood networks in early detection and prevention;
- collection of disaggregated data, in accordance with the Convention and consistent reporting on femicide cases in the European countries (for instance by using the UN framework for measuring femicide);
- dedicated support measures for children who have witnessed gender-based violence, recognising the long-term psychological impacts upon them,
- establishing rehabilitation programs for those who commit sexual and sexist violence, such as social assistance and psychological support,
- increasing efforts to combat all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls including coercive control in criminal law, an intersectional approach and full

implementation of the EU Gender-Based Violence Directive ensuring femicide is included as a criminal offence in national law and is covered by the definition of violence against women;

- The European Greens urge all Council of Europe members, namely Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Lithuania, and Slovakia, to ratify the Istanbul Convention, as the other members of the Council of Europe have already done;
- The European Greens also urge those that have already ratified it with reservations to withdraw those reservations;
- The European Greens furthermore call upon the Council of Europe to request the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) to establish a concrete follow-up policy to ensure that femicide is properly incorporated into the legislation of countries that have ratified the Convention, as well as to develop specific recommendations on data collection, prevention, and protection;
- The European Greens call on the EU and the Council of Europe to facilitate exchange of best practices between member states in prevention of gender-based violence and femicide, and in guaranteeing protection and support services for victims.

[1] Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence