

Council adopts first-ever EU law combating violence against women

The Council has given the green light to an EU directive to combat violence against women and domestic violence. Taking decisive action against these acts of violence is essential to ensure the values and fundamental rights of equality between women and men and of non-discrimination. The law requires all EU countries to criminalise female genital mutilation, forced marriage and cyber violence such as the non-consensual sharing of intimate images.

The new law also contains measures to prevent violence against women and domestic violence and sets standards for the protection of victims of these crimes.

Violence against women and domestic violence is a persisting crime. This law will guarantee EU-wide that its perpetrators will be strongly sanctioned and that its victims will receive all the support they need.

Paul Van Tigchelt, Belgian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Justice and the North Sea

This is a groundbreaking moment in boosting women's rights. Real equality can only happen when women can live without fear of being harassed, violently attacked or physically harmed. This law is an important step to make this happen.

Marie-Colline Leroy, Belgian Secretary of State for Gender Equality

Main elements

The law that was adopted today criminalises the following offences across the EU: female genital mutilation, forced marriage, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, cyber stalking, cyber harassment and cyber incitement to hatred or violence.

Committing these crimes will be punishable by prison sentences ranging from at least one to five years. The directive also comes with an extensive list of aggravating circumstances, such as committing the offence against a child, a former or current spouse or partner or a public representative, a journalist or a human rights defender, which carry more severe penalties.

The directive also contains detailed rules on the measures of assistance and protection that member states should provide to victims.

It will become easier for victims of violence against women and domestic violence to report a crime. As a minimum, it will be possible to report cybercrimes online. EU countries must also put measures in place to ensure that children are assisted by professionals. When children report a crime committed by someone with parental responsibility, authorities will have to take measures to protect the safety of the child before informing the alleged perpetrator.

In order to protect a victim's privacy and prevent repeat victimisation, member states must furthermore ensure that evidence relating to the victim's past sexual conduct should only be permitted in criminal proceedings when it is relevant and necessary.

With the idea of building a safer future, preventive measures aim to increase awareness on the root causes of violence against

women and domestic violence and to promote the central role of consent in sexual relationships.

Next steps

Member states have three years from the entry into force of the directive to transpose it into national law.

Background

The Commission (Vice-President for Values and Transparency, Vera Jourová and Commissioner for Equality, Helena Dalli) submitted the proposal for a directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence on 8 March 2022. Frances Fitzgerald and Evin Incir were the European Parliament's rapporteurs for this file and the agreement between Council and Parliament was reached on 6 February 2024.

- [Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence](#)
- [EU measures to end violence against women \(background information\)](#)

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