

**NON.  
NO.  
NEIN.**

Say No!  
Stop  
**violence**  
against  
women

**Violence against women** is rooted in women's unequal status in society, and that status reflects the unbalanced distribution of social, political, and economic power among women and men in society. It is one of the most pervasive human rights violations of our time and a form of discrimination that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women (1). Violence against women undermines women's dignity and integrity and imposes serious harms on families, communities and societies. In the EU, estimates suggest that 1 in 3 women (or 61 million out of 185 million) have experienced physical or sexual violence, or both, since the age of 15 (2).

The full extent of violence against women is difficult to estimate, as it continues to be under-reported and stigmatised, meaning that what actually gets reported is only a fraction of the reality. In Belgium, 77 % of the population tend to trust the police (3).

In EIGE's Gender Equality Index 2015 it was found that where people tend to have more trust in justice institutions, levels of disclosed violence are higher (4). It is estimated that in Belgium, 36 % of women have experienced violence, which is 3 % higher than in the EU overall (5).

The European Institute for Gender Equality has estimated that the cost of intimate partner violence against women in Belgium could amount to EUR 2.4 billion per year. This figure was calculated according to the methodology used in EIGE's 2014 study (6), which Member States can replicate, as done by Estonia in 2016 (7).



## What are the facts?

- The 2014 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights survey data results showed that:
  - since the age of 15, 36 % of women in Belgium have experienced physical and/or sexual violence and 24 % of women have experienced sexual harassment and stalking <sup>(8)</sup>;
  - 43 % of people in Belgium said they knew a woman within their circle of friends and family who has been a victim of domestic violence <sup>(9)</sup>.
- EIGE has estimated that 6 260 women in Belgium have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM) and a further 1 975 are at risk <sup>(10)</sup>.
- 24.9 % of women in Belgium have been forced into sex by a partner or spouse <sup>(11)</sup>.

When trust in police is low, victims are less likely to report violence.



## Is violence against women a crime in Belgium?

Although there is no specific law on violence against women in Belgium, many forms of violence against women are criminalised, including intimate partner violence, sexual assault and rape. Stalking is also criminalised (including through electronic communication) and forced marriage and FGM are also illegal.

## What is being done to eliminate violence against women in Belgium?

Since 2001, Belgium has pursued its policy to combat gender-based violence through several national action plans coordinated by the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men. The national action plan to combat all forms of gender-based violence (2015—2019) <sup>(12)</sup> constitutes an integrated approach to gender-based violence and covers intimate partner violence, FGM, forced marriage, honour-based violence, sexual violence and prostitution. Its priorities include the collection of qualitative and quantitative data on gender-based violence, prevention through awareness raising and education, measures to support and protect victims, and strengthening protection measures.

Other forms of gender-based violence are included in other national action plans, such as the national action plan 'women, peace and security' (2013—2016) <sup>(13)</sup>, as well as the action plan in the fight against human trafficking (2015—2019), which incorporates a gender equality perspective <sup>(14)</sup>.

## Good practices show the way

In 2011 and 2012, a pioneering campaign on psychological violence was conducted in Belgium by the Federation Wallonia-Brussels, the Walloon Region and the Commission Communautaire Française. Two short films, broadcast on national television, described the decline of a relationship and the underhand violence attached to it. The campaign had a tremendous impact on Belgian society and received almost 2 million views on YouTube. The films showed that domestic violence is not only limited to physical violence, but can take many other forms. The campaign also publicised the free and anonymous helpline for victims of domestic violence, which received an increased number of calls following the campaign.

<http://www.fredetmarie.be>

## How are women and girls protected?

Women victims of violence in Belgium have legal access to protection measures. In 2013, a short-term barring order was introduced for victims of domestic violence, which allows for the removal of the perpetrator from the family home and the immediate residential environment, and prohibits contact with the victim <sup>(15)</sup>.

Other protection measures include civil protection orders such as a street or contact restraining order for victims of stalking, domestic violence, or during divorce proceedings <sup>(16)</sup>. Furthermore, the law provides for family housing for victims of physical violence perpetrated by their spouse or partner <sup>(17)</sup>.

Belgium ratified the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) on 14 March 2016. The Istanbul Convention is the most far-reaching international treaty to tackle this serious violation of human rights.



**There are 23 women's shelters across Belgium offering support for women and children victims of violence.**

### What help is available in Belgium?

There is no national women's helpline in Belgium but each region has its own helpline.

For the Flemish-speaking part there is one helpline (1712), which covers all forms of violence including violence against women. The helpline is free of charge <sup>(18)</sup>.

For the French-speaking part, the existing helpline is Ecoute Violences Conjugales (0800 30 030), which covers domestic violence and is free of charge <sup>(19)</sup>.

People experiencing sexual violence in the French-speaking part of Belgium can call the helpline SOS Viol (02/534 36 36) <sup>(20)</sup>.

According to the Council of Europe, there are seven women's shelters in Flanders with a total of 113 beds for women and children <sup>(21)</sup>. In the region of Brussels there is one women's shelter and 15 in the Walloon Region; 34 beds are available in Brussels <sup>(22)</sup> and 678 in Wallonia <sup>(23)</sup>.



**Violence and Abuse Helpline (1712)  
Ecoute Violences Conjugales (0800 30 030)  
SOS Viol (02/534 36 36)**



## Endnotes

- (<sup>1</sup>) Council of Europe (2011). *Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, and its explanatory report*. Council of Europe Treaty Series No 10. Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/210>.
- (<sup>2</sup>) European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014). *Violence against women: an EU-wide survey — Main results*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.
- (<sup>3</sup>) European Commission (2016). *Eurobarometer*. Available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/PublicOpinion/index.cfm/Chart/getChart/themeki/18/groupKy/88>
- (<sup>4</sup>) European Institute for Gender Equality (2013). *Gender Equality Index — Report*. Available at: <http://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/Gender-Equality-Index-Report.pdf>
- (<sup>5</sup>) Ibid. The level of disclosed violence in the EU overall is 33 %.
- (<sup>6</sup>) European Institute for Gender Equality (2014). *Estimating the costs of gender-based violence in the European Union — Report*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. Available at: <http://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/MH0414745EN2.pdf>
- (<sup>7</sup>) *The cost of domestic violence in Estonia*. Available at: [https://www.sm.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Sotsiaal/Norra/vagivalla\\_hind.pdf](https://www.sm.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Sotsiaal/Norra/vagivalla_hind.pdf)
- (<sup>8</sup>) European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014). *Violence against women: an EU-wide survey — Main results*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.
- (<sup>9</sup>) Ibid.
- (<sup>10</sup>) <http://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence/resources/belgium/estimating-number-women-fgm-belgium>
- (<sup>11</sup>) <http://www.amnesty.be/je-veux-m-informer/actualites/article/une-femme-sur-quatre-violee-par?lang=fr>
- (<sup>12</sup>) [http://igvm-iefh.belgium.be/sites/default/files/88\\_-\\_stop\\_violence.\\_nap\\_2015—2019.pdf](http://igvm-iefh.belgium.be/sites/default/files/88_-_stop_violence._nap_2015—2019.pdf)
- (<sup>13</sup>) <http://igvm-iefh.belgium.be/sites/default/files/downloads/BE%20NAP%201325%202013—2016%20EN.pdf>
- (<sup>14</sup>) [http://ecpat.be/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/ACTIEPLAN\\_MH\\_2015\\_2019-FRp\\_EN-2.pdf](http://ecpat.be/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/ACTIEPLAN_MH_2015_2019-FRp_EN-2.pdf)
- (<sup>15</sup>) <http://poems-project.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Belgium.pdf>
- (<sup>16</sup>) Ibid.
- (<sup>17</sup>) [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2010/425620/IPOL-FEMM\\_NT\(2010\)425620\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2010/425620/IPOL-FEMM_NT(2010)425620_EN.pdf)
- (<sup>18</sup>) WAVE (2015). *WAVE report on the role of specialist women's support services in Europe* (Belgium country information — Flanders). Available at: [http://files.wave-network.org/researchreports/WAVEReport2015\\_Compilation\\_Country\\_Profiles.pdf](http://files.wave-network.org/researchreports/WAVEReport2015_Compilation_Country_Profiles.pdf)
- (<sup>19</sup>) WAVE (2015). *WAVE report on the role of specialist women's support services in Europe* (Belgium country information — Brussels and Wallonia). Available at: [http://files.wave-network.org/researchreports/WAVEReport2015\\_Compilation\\_Country\\_Profiles.pdf](http://files.wave-network.org/researchreports/WAVEReport2015_Compilation_Country_Profiles.pdf)
- (<sup>20</sup>) Ibid.
- (<sup>21</sup>) Council of Europe (Gender Equality Commission), *Analytical study of the results of the 4th round of monitoring the implementation of Recommendation Rec(2002)5 on the protection of women against violence in Council of Europe member states*, p. 64. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016805915e9>
- (<sup>22</sup>) In 2014, the Brussels shelter opened a new site with 10 additional places.
- (<sup>23</sup>) Council of Europe (Gender Equality Commission), *Analytical study of the results of the 4th round of monitoring the implementation of Recommendation Rec(2002)5 on the protection of women against violence in Council of Europe member states*, p. 67. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016805915e9>




## European Institute for Gender Equality

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) is the EU knowledge centre on gender equality. EIGE supports policymakers and all relevant institutions in their efforts to make equality between women and men a reality for all Europeans by providing them with specific expertise and comparable and reliable data on gender equality in Europe.



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