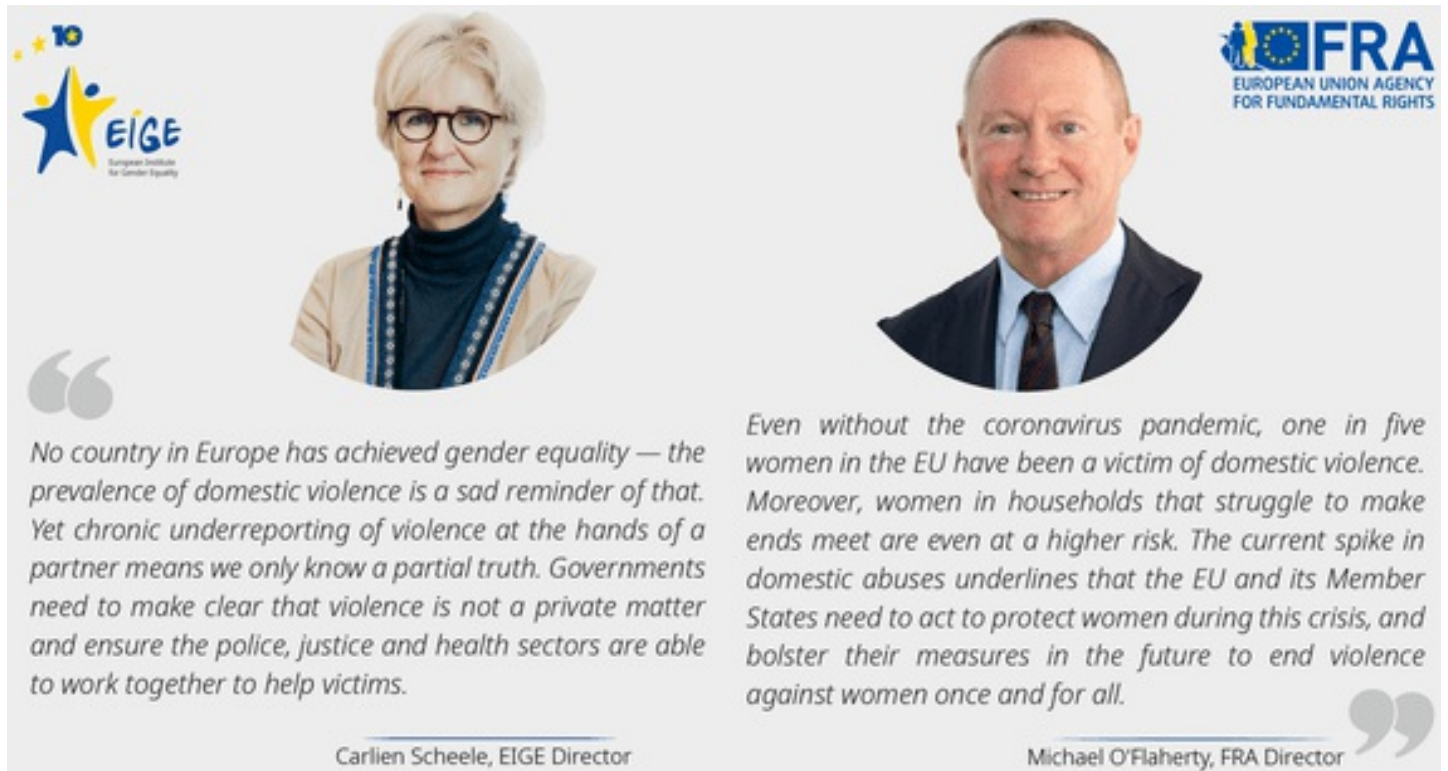


EU rights and equality agency heads: Let's step up our efforts to end domestic violence



No country in Europe has achieved gender equality — the prevalence of domestic violence is a sad reminder of that. Yet chronic underreporting of violence at the hands of a partner means we only know a partial truth. Governments need to make clear that violence is not a private matter and ensure the police, justice and health sectors are able to work together to help victims.

Carlien Scheele, EIGE Director

Even without the coronavirus pandemic, one in five women in the EU have been a victim of domestic violence. Moreover, women in households that struggle to make ends meet are even at a higher risk. The current spike in domestic abuses underlines that the EU and its Member States need to act to protect women during this crisis, and bolster their measures in the future to end violence against women once and for all.

Michael O'Flaherty, FRA Director

Since the beginning of Coronavirus lockdowns, police, women shelters and NGOs have reported a surge in domestic violence, especially violence targeting women. The pandemic has exposed how common this serious human rights abuse is and how insufficient the measures to fight it still are. The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) and the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) call on the EU and its Member States to use the coronavirus pandemic as an opportunity to step up their efforts to effectively protect women's rights.

“No country in Europe has achieved gender equality — the prevalence of domestic violence is a sad reminder of that,” says EIGE Director **Carlien Scheele**. “Yet chronic underreporting of violence at the hands of a partner means we only know a partial truth. Governments need to make clear that violence is not a private matter and ensure the police, justice and health sectors are able to work together to help victims.”

“Even without the coronavirus pandemic, one in five women in the EU have been a victim of domestic violence. Moreover, women in households that struggle to make ends meet are even at a higher risk,” says FRA Director **Michael O’Flaherty** pointing to an earlier FRA [survey](#). “The current spike in domestic abuses underlines that the EU and its Member States need to act to protect women during this crisis, and bolster their measures in the future to end violence against women once and for all.”

As lockdowns and quarantines continue in most of Europe, women face a higher risk of domestic violence.

The danger is real. Globally, 64 % of women who are killed die at the hands of an intimate partner or family member, a [study on homicides](#) finds.

Many EU countries reacted swiftly, putting in place counselling support, providing refuge for victims in hotel rooms, launching awareness campaigns or promoting hotline numbers.

EIGE and FRA welcome these measures. Yet, the extent of action needed to safeguard victims has exposed how insufficient the support measures are even during normal times. For example, the number of beds in women’s shelters is only about half that required under the [Istanbul Convention](#), which 21 EU countries have signed and the EU has committed to accede to.

The end of lockdowns will also bring new challenges. Financial insecurity in view of income and job losses, as well as a looming recession, can present additional triggers for violence and may make it more difficult for victims to leave an abusive relationship. FRA’s earlier [survey](#) shows that 30% of women who find it difficult to make ends meet have experienced intimate partner violence, compared with 18% of women who do not struggle to get by.

This underlines that the EU needs to put in place lasting structures to end violence against women. The covid-19 crisis provides an opportunity to step up our efforts – we must seize it.

EIGE and FRA call on the EU and its Member States to consider the following action:

- EU countries that have not yet ratified the Istanbul Convention or not fully aligned their national laws with its requirements should do so swiftly. This would, for example, facilitate the use of emergency barring orders. In countries where legislation already provides for these orders, police should use them more often.
- The police, justice and health sectors in EU Member States should work together to manage the risk of violence against women. Professionals in these sectors should be properly resourced and trained to respond to such cases.
- Data collection on violence against women should be harmonised between EU member states to ensure the phenomenon can be adequately measured and addressed.

- In light of the many positive measures to eliminate violence against women at the national level, the EU should coordinate the exchange of good practices between member states.
- Many EU countries have legal definitions of hate crimes (against ethnic and sexual minorities for example). A workable legal definition of femicide to denote the killing of women and girls because of their gender should be considered.
- We support the European Commission's proposal to add violence against women on the list of EU crimes defined in the EU Treaty. This would recognise the structural nature of violence against women and propel joint efforts to eliminate it.

As long as women face violence, gender equality will be impossible. And as long as we do not have gender equality, violence against women will continue.

Let's work together to end violence against women once and for all.

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