

EIGE-2021 Gender Equality Index 2021 Report: Health

A dearth of evidence hampers true assessment of violence against women

The domain of violence cannot be updated regularly because of the serious lack of up-to-date prevalence data, even for the most severe forms of violence against women. Of all the indicators used to gauge the extent of this violence, the only regularly available data is for femicide. EIGE defines femicide as '[the] killing of a woman by an intimate partner and the death of a woman as a result of a practice that is harmful to women'^[1].

The challenge is to capture the gendered nature of femicide, as no Member State recognises it as a separate criminal offence. The killing of women falls under the legal term 'homicide'. Currently, EIGE is using a proxy indicator and data on intentional homicide by an intimate partner or family member provided by Eurostat (Figure 23). In 2018, more than 600 murders of women by an intimate partner or family member/relative were recorded in 14 Member States.

The highest rates – calculated per 100 000 women – are recorded in Finland, Malta and Latvia. Intentional homicide by an intimate partner is also relatively high in Sweden. Owing to differences in the definitions of criminal offences and data collection processes at national level, the comparability and accuracy of data must be considered with caution.

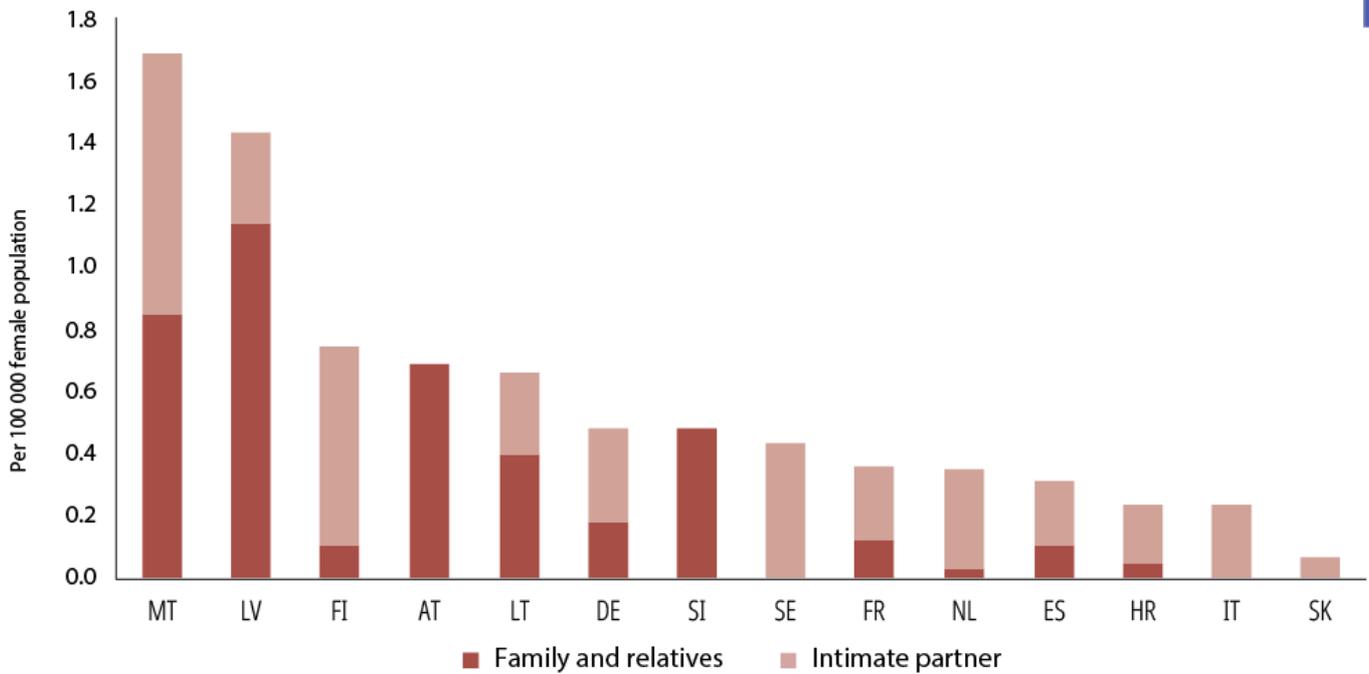


Figure 23. Women victims of intentional homicide by an intimate partner or family member/relative by EU Member State (by 100 000 female population, 2018)

NB: Data related to the number of women victims of intentional homicide by family and relatives in 2018 is not available for Czechia, Greece, Italy, Cyprus, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia or Sweden. Data related to the number of women victims of intentional homicide by intimate partners in 2018 is not available for Czechia, Greece, Cyprus, Hungary, Austria or Romania. Slovenia recorded zero women killed by intimate partners in 2018.

Source: Eurostat, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/crim_hom_vrel.

The killing of older women is a prevalent form of femicide as a result of the specific vulnerability of this group. Women aged over 65 years can become victims of their intimate partner, but also of men outside a partnership. A study by Dobash and Dobash (2015) shows that most murders of older women are committed by men from the neighbourhood. Perpetrators are often unemployed and chronically intoxicated. Women victims appear to be selected because of their 'extra' vulnerability – being a woman and older. The same research revealed that more than three quarters of homicide–suicides – in which a man kills a woman and then himself – involved an older woman being murdered by a male partner. In many of these cases, jealousy, possessiveness and the inability to cope with separation were apparent (Dobash and Dobash, 2015).

Since EIGE's composite measure of the extent of violence was first released in 2017, no new EU-wide comparable data has been available for other forms of violence included in it. FRA's 2019 Fundamental Rights Survey (FRA, 2021) provides some EU-wide data on experiences of physical violence and harassment among women and men. Owing to differences in survey aims and methodology, this data is not comparable to FRA's 2012 violence against women survey^[2].

Data from the WHO Regional Office for Europe (2021b) shows that intimate partner violence affects a significant share of women at one point in their lives. In EU countries, prevalence estimates for 2018 range from 13 % of women aged 15–49 years in Croatia and Poland to 25 % of women of the same age in Latvia saying they have experienced violence from an intimate partner at one point in their lives (WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2021b).

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According to the Fundamental Rights Survey, 8 % of women in the EU-27 experienced physical violence (excluding sexual violence) in the 5 years before the survey, and 5 % of women experienced physical violence in the preceding 12 months. However, 13 % of women experiencing violence in the preceding 5 years indicated that it was sexual. Incidents were mostly perpetrated in a woman's own home (37 %) by a family member or a relative (32 %), and, in most cases, by men. This confirms the significant role of intimate partner violence or domestic violence in women's experiences of violence.

The prevalence of physical violence against women differs across countries. Experience of violence in the previous 5 years ranges from 16 % in Finland and Estonia to 3 % in Malta and 2 % in Italy. Physical sexual violence is most prevalent in Greece (26 %), Portugal (22 %) and Spain (20 %)^[3]. For violence against women at home, rates are as high as 68 % in Portugal, 64 % in Estonia, 55 % in Croatia and 53 % in Austria.

The survey also revealed that 39 % of women across all age groups experienced harassment in the previous 5 years and 28 % of women experienced harassment in the preceding 12 months. For women aged 16–29 years, these rates were 61 % and 46 % for the preceding 5 years and 12 months, respectively. France (60 %), the Netherlands (59 %), Finland (57 %) and Germany (57 %) recorded the highest levels of harassment of women over the 5-year period.

Of the women who experienced harassment in the preceding 5 years, 18 % said that the most recent incident was sexual in nature, with this figure rising to 30 % for women aged 16–29 years. Sexual harassment by strangers in a public setting is experienced disproportionately by women, who, as a result, often report that they avoid certain places and situations for fear of potential assault or harassment. Such worries reduce women’s opportunities for engaging in public life.

Most incidents of physical violence and harassment are not reported to the police, particularly when the perpetrator is a family member or a relative. According to the Fundamental Rights Survey, only 22 % of such incidents are reported, which implies significant under-reporting of domestic and/or intimate partner violence.

FRA’s violence against women survey (FRA, 2014) results support this finding, as they showed that many women victims of physical and sexual violence contact doctors and health services, rather than the police.

Data recorded by authorities often underestimates the scope of gender-based violence. Pre-existing legal shortcomings in addressing various forms of violence against women are additional barriers to reporting. This includes not recognising psychological and economic abuse as a type of gender-based violence, or coercion-based rather than consent-based definitions of rape.

As data-recording systems are rarely operated by specialists on gender-based violence, incidents are not always categorised and recorded comparably (EIGE, 2019f).

To redress the situation, EIGE developed 13 indicators to help Member States meet the minimum requirements of the victims’ rights directive and the Istanbul Convention, and to guide EU-wide administrative data collection by police and justice sectors on intimate partner violence and rape (EIGE, 2018a).

Footnotes

[1] <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1128>

[2] According to FRA (2021), the results of the violence against women survey should be considered a better reflection of women's experiences of violence – including intimate partner violence – whereas the Fundamental Rights Survey provides data on women's and men's experiences of selected forms of violence. Although respondents in the Fundamental Rights Survey could disclose experiences of violence irrespective of the type of perpetrator, the survey did not include specific measures used in the violence against women survey to support the disclosure of intimate partner violence, such as prevalence of sexual violence against women (FRA, 2021).

[3] The results relating to prevalence of physical violence of a sexual nature in these three countries are flagged by FRA as statistically less reliable, because they are based on a small number of responses.