

Administrative data collection on violence against women: issues at stake and main challenges

Violence against women (VAW) is a violation of human rights. Its very nature deprives women of their ability to enjoy fundamental freedoms.

In this context, European Union institutions have committed to the development of tools to measure the extent of VAW and to increase knowledge about its consequences ⁽¹⁾. Furthermore, the Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, the Directive 2011/99/EU on the European protection order, and the Istanbul Convention of the Council of Europe ⁽²⁾ require the collection of relevant data on VAW to monitor the implementation of these legal instruments in the Member States.

To make administrative data useful, researchers, policymakers and service providers must address the following gaps and challenges in the collection and analysis of administrative data:

- the need for harmonised definitions;
- the need for comparable data at EU level;
- the need to address all forms of VAW in administrative data collection;
- the need to address gaps and challenges with service-based data on VAW;
- the need to address under-reporting.

Furthermore, a number of elements can improve data collection processes and systems as follows:

- comprehensive legal framework on VAW;
- political commitment to combat VAW with sufficient allocation of financial resources;
- centralised body regulating administrative data collection to enable the coordination, control and supervision of data collection on VAW and to promote the production of harmonised and comparable data;
- multi-agency structures and procedures to support the production and dissemination of more reliable and comparable data on VAW, leading to the coordination of data collection among different systems, the agreement on common definitions and standardised and systematic methodologies;
- systematic consultation with women's services and civil society organisations (CSOs) allowing direct knowledge of the main issues that should be covered by administrative data collection based on the needs of the victims.

National systems for administrative data collection on violence against women

Administrative data collection can be used as a tool for policy formulation and evaluation and for developing effective strategies on preventing and combating VAW. The usefulness and relevance of this depends on the quality and reliability of the data collection system and the contents. For example, administrative data can be collected in order to address capacity issues: how many women engage with public and civil society agencies and their services?

Secondly, administrative data systems can be used for assessing the adequacy of existing provisions. What kind of help do survivors need and what kind of assistance can agencies offer? Third, administrative data can be used to assess the quality of victim support services. This can provide information needed to improve the adequacy and effectiveness of service provision. Also, data on service use can provide a basis for estimating the administrative cost of VAW.

The main sources for collecting data on VAW are administrative institutions that collect and deal with reported cases.

At national level, there is often a diversity of administrative organisations rather than one main national institution to regulate administrative data collection related to VAW. However, in most Member States, the responsibility lies with the government ministries and/or services, with indications specified in internal rules and/or national plans rather than in legislation.

In most cases regulations are focused on specific sectors. The lack of a centralised body regulating administrative data collection means that multiple institutions are collecting data on VAW using different definitions and methodologies.

Table 1 provides an overview of national regulatory frameworks for administrative data by Member State.

⁽¹⁾ Council conclusions adopted during the Greek Presidency (2014), the Cypriot Presidency (2012) and the Spanish Presidency (2010) of the Council of the European Union, and by the European Parliament resolutions (2009, 2011 and 2014).

⁽²⁾ Council of Europe, *Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence — Explanatory report*, 2011.



Table 1 — National regulatory framework and main institution regulating administrative data collection on gender-based violence in EU Member States

| Country | Presence of national regulatory framework | Main institution regulating administrative data collection on gender-based violence | | | | | |
|---------|---|---|-------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| | | National gender-based violence strategy/action plan | Harmonised system | Government/relevant ministry | Police/prosecutor office | Statistical office | Data protection agency |
| AT | | | | X | X | | |
| BE | | X | | X | X | | |
| BG | | | | X | | | |
| CY | | X | | X | X | | |
| CZ | | X | | X | | | |
| DE | | | | X | X | | |
| DK | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| EE | | | | | X | | |
| EL | | X | | X | | | X |
| ES | X | X | X | X | X | X | |
| FI | | | | X | X | | |
| FR | X | | | X | X | | |
| HR | X | X | | X | X | | |
| HU | | | | X | X | | |
| IE | | | | | X | | |
| IT | | X | | X | X | | |
| LT | | | | X | X | | |
| LU | X | X | | X | | | |
| LV | | | | X | | | |
| MT | | | | X | | | |
| NL | X | | | X | | | |
| PL | | | | X | X | | |
| PT | X | | | X | | | |
| RO | | | | X | X | | |
| SE | | | | X | | X | |
| SI | | | | X | X | X | X |
| SK | X | X | | X | | | |
| UK | | | | X | | | |

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Female genital mutilation data and statistics

In the EU-28 there are no ongoing, systematic, representative surveys that use a harmonised approach to gather data on the prevalence of female genital mutilation (FGM). It is estimated, however, that hundreds of thousands of women living in Europe have been subjected to genital mutilation and thousands of girls are at risk. The European Parliament resolution of 24 March 2009 on FGM indicates that an estimated 500 000 women living in the EU have been subjected to it, and that 180 000 girls and women are at risk of undergoing FGM every year ⁽³⁾.

The issue is also relevant considering the increase of immigrant women arriving in the EU from FGM-practising countries. It is estimated that around 16 000 women and girls out of those seeking asylum could potentially have already been affected by FGM at the time of their arrival in the EU in 2013 ⁽⁴⁾.

However, the methods used for this estimate are different. Generally, FGM is not practised in the EU, but women and girls have undergone FGM in their countries of origin before moving to the EU, or are subjected to FGM while travelling outside the EU.

⁽³⁾ European Parliament resolution of 24 March 2009 on combating FGM in the EU (2008/2071(INI)).

⁽⁴⁾ UNHCR, *Female genital mutilation & asylum in the European Union — A statistical update (March 2014)*, <http://www.unhcr.org/53187f379.html>

⁽⁵⁾ EIGE, *Female genital mutilation in the European Union and Croatia, 2013*, <http://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/eige-report-fgm-in-the-eu-and-croatia.pdf>

That is why estimation studies on the prevalence of FGM in the EU have utilised the ‘extrapolation of African prevalence data’ method, whereby statistical data from the general population census and national statistical offices are used, containing the number of female migrants from FGM-practising countries residing in an EU country ⁽⁵⁾.

In the absence or unavailability of national FGM prevalence figures, it is possible to estimate the prevalence of FGM by collating information from administrative records. The administrative records that could be used to provide information on FGM include hospital and/or medical records, child protection records, asylum records and prosecution records. Data from these records could act as a proxy indicator of prevalence and incidence of FGM at both regional and national levels, and also indicate whether states have adequately responded to the practice.

Collecting prevalence data on FGM is more complicated than on other gender-based violence data. Namely, there are a number of limitations with regard to the accepted method of using the ‘extrapolation of country of origin prevalence data’ method as well as the limitations of census data.

Table 2 provides information on administrative data for FGM per different source of information. In a few Member States, administrative data are regularly collected. Data are mainly collected by the health system.

Table 2 — Administrative data sources for FGM by type of source

| Country | Police | Justice | Health | Social protection and support services | CSOs |
|---------|--------|---------|-------------|--|------|
| AT | | | | | |
| BE | X | X | X | X | |
| BG | | | | | |
| CY | | | | | |
| CZ | | | | | |
| DE | | | | | |
| DK | | | X | | |
| EE | | | | | |
| EL | | | | | |
| ES | | | | | |
| FI | | | | | X |
| FR | | | | | |
| HR | X | | | | |
| HU | | | | | |
| IE | | | | | |
| IT | | | | | |
| LT | | | | | |
| LU | | | | | |
| LV | | | | | |
| MT | | | X | | |
| NL | | | X | | |
| PL | | | X | | |
| PT | | | | | |
| RO | | | | | |
| SE | | | | | |
| SI | | | | | |
| SK | | | | | |
| UK | | | X (England) | | |

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Although health professionals deal with women who have undergone FGM, very few Member States’ hospital and medical records contain information on FGM. Health professionals’ lack of knowledge and expertise in relation to FGM, and the reluctance of the affected population to disclose their status, contribute to the lack of health data.

General criteria for good practices with regard to administrative data collection

Within the context of the European Institute for Gender Equality's (EIGE) approach to identify good practices, the following general criteria related to administrative data sources on VAW have been identified.

- A political and institutional commitment and will to collect administrative data on VAW, supported by a legal framework, a strategy, institutional mechanisms and financial resources, are in place.
- A systematic, centralised and multidimensional approach to administrative data collection on VAW, combining different sources of data, is in place.
- A systematic engagement with CSOs and specialised women's services involved in VAW in all data collection phases, including feedback to the involved institutions, is in place.
- Collaboration with the designers of administrative systems and joint work with data suppliers is in place.
- A quality assessment and improvement of data and statistics through systematic monitoring and evaluation is in place.
- Data collection systems are rooted in and reflect the context under which each administrative organisation created its own administrative system.
- Definitions of different forms of VAW are harmonised with international/common definitions.
- There is an integration of data and information on the different forms of VAW.
- Data collected is reported both internally and externally, where appropriate.
- Data are made visible to increase awareness of VAW in the society and to feed policymaking.

Specific criteria for good practices with regard to FGM

- The understanding of the cultural and social factors for performing FGM is taken into consideration, together with the language and cultural specificities of the communities affected.
- Work with local actors through direct community engagement, empowerment, advocacy and strategic partnerships is envisaged.
- Guidelines, training and policy are envisaged to ensure that health professionals can provide medical care and counselling to girls and women living with FGM.
- Professionals including medical staff, social operators, police and the judiciary are trained in administrative data collection.
- Resources and expertise are available for the training of professionals in administrative data collection.
- Linkages between administrative data collection, prevention and care provision services are present.

Examples of good practices on administrative data collection on FGM

Model protocol medical care for women and girls with FGM (the Netherlands)

The model protocol medical care for women and girls with FGM is a joint initiative of several medical professional organisations for the registering and reporting of (potential) cases of FGM.

It provides recommendations on how professionals can deliver medical, psychosocial and sexual care to girls and women who are victims of FGM following a multidimensional approach.

The protocol is not only aimed at prevention, but also at urgent aid and long-term care following the Dutch chain approach from prevention to treatment.

Registration of FGM in hospitals (Belgium)

Hospitals in Belgium have to register medical acts in a mandatory registration system.

Through this system, clinical data on each patient are collected. In this way, data on FGM are linked with general health data which, in the future, will be accessible to all health care providers.

Data entered by doctors in the patient file are standardised using the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) system of the World Health Organisation. The ICD is the standard diagnostic tool for epidemiology, health management and clinical purposes. It is used to monitor the incidence and prevalence of diseases and other health problems, providing a picture of the general health situation of a country and its population.



Portugal action programmes — health database on FGM (Portugal)

In order to characterise, understand and act against FGM, the Ministry of Health has created a health database on this specific type of gender-based violence, which is a registration system of cases identified by health professionals. The database is implemented by an intersectoral group composed of representatives of several government and CSOs (public entities from the most relevant ministries, international organisations, etc.) and coordinated by the Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality.

The database is embedded in specific action programmes (three at present) for the elimination of FGM showing a strong commitment at governmental level.

It adopts a multisectoral approach complementing data from the public health system with data from studies on FGM.

FGM-enhanced dataset (England)

The FGM-enhanced dataset is embedded in a governmental initiative with specific allocated funding: the Department of Health's FGM prevention programme. This is a national GBP 3 million change programme to improve the way in which the National Health Service responds to the health needs of girls and women who have undergone FGM, and to actively support prevention.

The dataset helps to record and share administrative data and information on FGM appropriately and to take the necessary action to safeguard girls against risk. In this way, it follows a comprehensive approach, linking data collection on FGM to prevention and care systems.

It allows a non-discriminative profile of women to be obtained.

About the study

Within the framework of its strategy for combating gender-based violence and to support the institutions and experts engaged in preventing and combating gender-based violence in the EU and beyond, EIGE provides access to existing statistical data and information on gender-based violence. In this context, EIGE has commissioned the study 'Collection of good practices on administrative data collection on violence against women'. The objective of this study is to identify effective approaches and mechanisms implemented in EU Member States to collect administrative data on gender-based violence. Specific focus is on data from police, justice, health and social services and the 'other' administrative systems (e.g. related ministries). The study assesses those mechanisms that facilitate a systematic collection of comparable data. This enables reporting the number of reported cases and supporting the monitoring of actions taken to eradicate VAW. The project contributes to the establishment of a systematic collection of robust, reliable and comparable administrative data on VAW in the EU. It builds on previous work by EIGE on VAW, in particular the EIGE study 'Mapping the current status and potential of administrative data sources on gender-based violence in the EU' (). The study was carried out by the Istituto per la ricerca sociale (IRS). Country information was collected by the IRS and its network of national experts.

More information about the study is available at: <http://eige.europa.eu>

(⁶) <http://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence/eiges-studies-gender-based-violence/mapping-current-status-and-potential-administrative-data-sources-gender-based-violence-eu>

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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