What is economic violence?

Economic violence is a common form of violence against women statistically defined as ‘any act or behaviour which causes economic harm to an individual’ (1). Economic violence is rooted in gender inequality and reinforced by traditional gender norms (2).

Perpetrators of economic violence control the victim's ability to ‘acquire, use, and maintain economic resources, threatening their economic security and potential for self-sufficiency’ (3).

Economic violence often occurs in the context of intimate relationships. Notably, control over economic resources is one of the main reasons that constrains women’s possibilities of leaving abusive relationships (3). Economic violence does not need physical proximity to perpetrate, meaning that it can continue or start post-separation, for example, perpetrators may refuse to pay alimony or coerce victims into agreeing to unfair financial settlements (4) (5).

Economic violence in intimate relationships often co-occurs with other forms of intimate partner violence (physical, psychological and sexual), coercing and controlling behaviours (6).

Perpetrators of economic violence use economic control, economic exploitation and economic sabotage against their victims (Figure 1). Notably, digital technologies can further facilitate this form of violence (e.g., controlling/exploiting the finances of a victim through internet banking) (7).

Figure 1. Types of economic violence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic control</th>
<th>Economic exploitation</th>
<th>Economic (8) sabotage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preventing, limiting, or</td>
<td>Using the economic resources of a</td>
<td>Preventing a victim from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>controlling a victim’s</td>
<td>victim to the abuser’s advantage (8).</td>
<td>pursuing, obtaining, or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>finances and related</td>
<td>Examples of economic exploitation</td>
<td>maintaining employment and/or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>decision-making (8).</td>
<td>• Opening a line of credit in their</td>
<td>education (8).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>partners’ name without consent,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>building up debt under the victim’s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>name.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Stealing or damaging a victim’s</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>property or resources or selling them</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>without permission.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Taking wages, pensions, or other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>forms of financial aid from a victim</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>without permission.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Preventing a victim from attending</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>employment and educational activities</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>without permission.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interfering with a victim’s work or</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>education.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Refusing to contribute towards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>childcare responsibilities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) European Institute for Gender Equality (2017), Glossary of definitions of rape, femicide and intimate partner violence.
Beyond categories: other forms of economic violence

It is important to note that some forms of economic violence may not fit into the types presented above or they may represent more than one type simultaneously. Other forms of economic violence are yet to be identified and categorised. For instance, economic violence can manifest differently among certain contexts (e.g., cultural, social and institutional):

- victims may suffer from coercion or violence associated with giving or receiving a dowry (10);
- institutions can limit women’s access to credit, employment or property rights (11).

Who is most at risk of experiencing economic violence?

Women in heterosexual relationships are disproportionately affected by economic violence (5) (12). Findings from an EU-wide survey on violence against women reveal that an average of 12% of women in the EU have experienced abuse which involved economic violence by a partner since the age of 15 (13).

Poverty, disabilities and belonging to other disadvantaged and marginalised groups make it more difficult for victims to achieve economic independence (5) (14). Recognising the gendered and intersectional nature of economic violence, and the heightened vulnerability of victims based on factors of race, ethnicity, age, socio-economic status, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability and immigration status, is necessary to effectively tackle the phenomenon.

How does economic violence impact victims?

Victims experience various short-term and long-term consequences to their sense of stability and overall well-being because of economic violence. The detrimental effects of this form of violence are heightened for victims experiencing multiple forms of violence simultaneously.

Therefore, it may be difficult to disentangle these consequences from other forms of abuse. Some negative consequences of economic violence experienced by victims are presented below, in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Impacts of economic violence on victims

| Personal and professional development and independence |
| Economic (in)security |
| Physical health |
| Emotional and psychological well-being |

Personal and professional development and independence

Victims become economically dependent on their current or former abusive partners as they are prevented from pursuing professional and educational careers and restricted from taking part in any financial decision-making (10) (14).

Economic (in)security

Economic violence may expose victims to indebtedness, unemployment, homelessness and not having the financial resources necessary for daily survival (10). Victims with an immediate need for money may resort to criminal activities that could negatively affect their future (12).

Physical health

Poverty associated with economic violence leads to adverse health outcomes (1). Economic deprivation can hinder the capacity of victims to seek out and afford healthcare services. Women may also resort to alcohol and drugs to cope with the violence or be encouraged to do so by their perpetrators (11).

Emotional and psychological well-being


References:

(1) Australian Government: Department of Social Services (2019), Dowry abuse factsheet.
How is economic violence criminalised?

Globally, 1.4 billion women live in countries which do not recognise economic violence in their legal system or provide legal protection to victims of this form of violence (1). Failure to legally recognise the harms caused by economic violence limits victims’ access to justice.

Member States that have ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), are obliged to adopt legislative measures to prevent and combat economic violence (2). State parties to the Istanbul Convention are also required to produce and disseminate disaggregated data on violence against women, which includes economic violence.

However, national laws against economic violence rarely criminalise perpetrators’ actions in intimate partner relationships (3). Overt forms of economic violence are more likely to be prosecuted under criminal law, whereas covert forms are less likely to be considered as a criminal offense.

For example, in 2021, only nine EU Member States explicitly criminalised forms of economic violence in their laws on domestic violence (Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia) (4). However, in other Member States, offences against property (i.e. theft) can often be applied in intimate partner or domestic relationships as well.

At the EU level, the Victims’ Rights Directive (2012/29/EU) recognises that violence can manifest in different forms, including economic. The directive establishes minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime (5).

Under these measures, Member States are to ensure that victims receive proper protection, support, access to justice and free specialist support services, counselling and shelters in emergency scenarios.

In 2022, the European Commission adopted the proposal for a directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence (COM/2022/105) which recognises economic violence as a form of violence against women and lays down comprehensive measures to combat it (6).

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(2) EIGE’s data requirements involve components such as type of offences included, counting units, disaggregation by sex of the victim and/or perpetrator and by the nature of the victim–perpetrator relationship. See: European Institute for Gender Equality (2021), EIGE’s indicators on intimate partner violence, rape and femicide: EU state of play.

(3) European Commission (2021), Criminalisation of gender-based violence against women in European States, including ICT-facilitated violence.


EIGE’s data collection on economic violence in the EU.

EIGE has developed 13 indicators to measure intimate partner violence (IPV) in the EU. EIGE’s measurement framework includes an indicator that specifically measures the number of women victims of economic violence (22).

Between 2018 and 2020, EIGE used the 13 indicators to try to collect comparable EU-wide data on IPV (23). Findings from the data collection exercise show that only one country (Latvia) had ‘comparable’ data on the number of women victims of economic violence, aligned with EIGE’s data requirements (18).

In 12 countries, available data on economic violence was deemed ‘non-comparable’ because it did not meet the requirements set by EIGE’s indicator. In these countries, data was available on the number of victims of economic violence, but data on the sex of the victim and perpetrator and/or the victim–perpetrator relationship was not collected hampering the assessment of the gender-dimension of this violence form.

Findings from EIGE’s data collection exercise highlight the following two main challenges with collecting comparable administrative data on economic violence in the EU.

The data collection practices of Member States are diverse. Many countries do not collect sufficient data on the characteristics of victims, perpetrators or their relationship.

There is a lack of common definitions for economic violence in the EU. Many Member States do not recognise (criminalise or legally sanction) forms of economic control and employment sabotage that affect women in intimate partner relationships.

What hampers the collection of data on economic violence?

There are several sociocultural and institutional barriers preventing administrative data collection on economic violence in the EU.

For victims, fear of retaliation from perpetrators and a lack of awareness about economic violence, among other reasons, can lead to under-reporting, which affects the data collected. For institutions, failure to recognise forms of economic violence against women and different data recording rules limits data collection on covert acts and behaviours.

EIGE’s consultations with national data providers suggest that there is a general lack of awareness and understanding of what constitutes economic violence and the gendered nature of the phenomenon in the EU.

Analysing search engine data can provide insights into the extent to which online users are aware of and discuss the phenomenon of economic violence. Ultimately, the types of searches being performed online can be a proxy for public interests, concerns or intentions.

(22) In EIGE’s 2018–2020 data collection exercise, Indicator 7 measured the ‘Annual number of women victims of economic intimate partner violence (aged 18 and over) committed by men (aged 18 and over) as recorded by police’.

(23) A new data collection exercise, covering 2014–2022, will be conducted in 2023.
Google Trends data suggests that online discourses relating to more covert forms of violence (i.e. economic and psychological violence) are less frequent than discourses relating to more overt forms of violence (i.e. physical and sexual violence.).

Figure 4 highlights the relative frequency of search terms relating to various forms of violence and abuse between January 1 and December 31, 2022.

**Figure 4.** Worldwide Google searches of forms of violence (A) and abuse (B) in 2022

As illustrated in Figure 4, in 2022, searches on Google for ‘sexual violence/abuse’ worldwide were the highest of all of the search terms in every month that was monitored. Conversely, searches for ‘economic violence/abuse’, and searches for the terms ‘psychological violence/abuse’ were the lowest.

Overall, these findings suggest that online discourses relating to economic violence are less frequent than discussions relating to more overt forms of violence.

Findings from EIGE’s administrative data collection exercise on IPV and Google Trends data above illustrate the need to raise awareness on the frequency and gendered nature of economic violence.

Ensuring that there is adequate awareness of violence against women is essential for effective policy planning, implementation and evaluation.

**Understanding Google Trends data**

The results from Google Trends describe the relative frequency of a search term over time, in (almost) real time. The figures on the graph do not represent absolute search volume numbers. Instead, the figures represent how many searches have been made for a term relative to the total number of searches conducted on Google in the selected geographic region and timeframe. All numbers are normalised using a 1-100 scale. A value of 100 is the peak popularity for the term within the timeframe, a value of 50 means that the term is half as popular and a score of 0 indicates that there was not enough data for the term.
How can the EU and its Member States combat economic violence?

Proactive and harmonised measures must be adopted at the EU and Member State levels to effectively prevent and combat economic violence and monitor its prevalence in the EU. The following recommendations can be adopted at the EU and Member State levels to improve data collection and tackle economic violence against women more broadly.

**Figure 5. EIGE’s recommendations to combat and prevent economic violence in the EU**

**Recommendations at the EU level**

1. **Implement the legal standards** of the Istanbul Convention within the EU competences to further develop a comprehensive framework on violence against women.

2. **Adopt an EU directive** on all forms of violence against women and domestic violence to complement the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, further improve data collection across the EU and ensure equal and targeted measures of prevention and protection.

3. **Dedicate funding** for measures that are designed to prevent and tackle economic violence. Monitoring and evaluation should form an integral component of EU-funded activities relating to economic violence against women.

4. **Facilitate the exchange of promising practices and information-sharing** between national authorities, policymakers and non-governmental organisations.

**Recommendations at the Member State level**

1. **Adopt, implement and monitor primary and secondary prevention measures** aimed at addressing gender inequality as a root cause of violence against women.

2. **Introduce or amend existing legislative measures** to criminalise economic violence, hold perpetrators accountable and protect victims.

3. **Collect, analyse and share administrative data on economic violence in line with EIGE’s requirements**, at a minimum disaggregated by sex of the victim and the perpetrator and by their relationship.

4. **Regularly conduct population-based surveys** of economic violence and the behaviours outlined in this factsheet to examine prevalence, causes and consequences through an intersectional approach.

5. **Allocate dedicated funding to institutions** to ensure the continuity of data collection and the delivery of regular training sessions to data providers to enhance their understanding of the phenomenon.

6. **Improve coordination between institutions when recording, processing and sharing administrative and survey data on economic violence.**

All data is published in EIGE’s **Gender Statistics Database**, which provides a one-stop source for all gender statistics at the Member State and European Union levels.

European Institute for Gender Equality

We are an independent centre and the primary source for information on gender equality in the European Union. We contribute to making the European Union become a Union of Equality, where women and men, girls and boys in all their diversity are free to pursue their chosen path in life, have equal opportunities to thrive, and can equally participate in and lead our societies.

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