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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Domestic violence remains a critical challenge in Europe, affecting a large portion of the population and producing serious social, economic, and health consequences. This thesis explores the scale and dynamics of domestic violence across European countries, reviews legal and policy frameworks (including the Istanbul Convention and recent EU-level legislation), examines obstacles to protection and reporting, and proposes evidence-based recommendations for prevention, support, and enforcement.

Domestic violence defined as physical, sexual, psychological, or economic abuse within intimate or household relationships is not confined to any single country in Europe. It is a pervasive issue that undermines human rights, endangers public health, and imposes heavy socioeconomic costs. Even as awareness and legal standards have improved, many victims remain invisible, and national responses vary. This thesis aims to synthesize current data and policy efforts, to highlight both achievements and remaining gaps, and to suggest a way forward.

According to a recent EU-wide survey by the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), about one in three women aged 18–74 in the EU has experienced physical violence, sexual violence, or threats during their lifetime [1].

Around 18% of women reported physical or sexual violence from a partner or household member. Eurostat data also show that, per 100,000 population, 64.2 women reported being victims of sexual assault in 2022, while the number for men was significantly lower (10.9 per 100,000) [2]. Despite high prevalence, many incidents go unreported: only a small fraction of victims contact formal services or authorities. Rates of domestic violence differ widely across European countries. These variations reflect not only real differences in violence but also how willing people are to report, cultural norms, and the strength of state institutions.

The Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention provides a comprehensive legal framework for preventing violence, protecting victims, prosecuting offenders, and coordinating policies. Signatory countries are expected to align their national laws with its standards. In 2024, the European Parliament and Council adopted the first-ever EU-level directive on domestic violence and violence against women. This directive criminalizes female genital mutilation, forced marriage, and various forms of cyberviolence (such as non-consensual sharing of intimate images). It also mandates measures for victim protection, support services, prevention campaigns, and better reporting and evidence-gathering protocols. Member States have three years to transpose these rules into their national systems.

Domestic violence in Europe is a deeply rooted and widespread issue with severe individual and social consequences. While new EU legislation (2024) [2] and international frameworks like the Istanbul Convention mark major progress, significant gaps remain in prevention, service provision, and consistent enforcement. Strengthening data systems, deepening interagency cooperation, and ensuring that victims across Europe have access to robust, culturally sensitive support are critical next steps. Only sustained political commitment and adequate resources will turn legal standards into real protection.

References:

1. European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). One in three women in the EU have experienced violence. Press release, November 25, 2024.
2. Eurostat. Every third woman in the EU experienced gender-based violence. News release, November 25, 2024.