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New EU law to combat gender-based violence

The EU directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence is historic and a victory for gender equality, says Nora Mehsen, policy expert at the EEA and Norway Grants.

BY TOMINE BARSTAD SOLVANG, FRILANSER@KILDEN.FORSKNINGSRADET.NO | PUBLISHED 4 NOV 2024



The first ever EU rules on combating violence against women and domestic violence. “It will help support efforts against this type of violence during the next period of the EEA and Norway Grants by providing further legitimacy to such work," says Nora Mehsen. (Photo: iStockphoto)

The EU law, passed in May this year, is considered historic as its aim is to combat violence against women.

The law came into force on 7 May. The directive seeks to combat violence against women, including online violence, and puts pressure on member states to actively combat such violence through strategic preventative measures and legislation. The Istanbul Convention has played a significant role in the creation of the directive (see fact box).

A victory for gender equality

Nora Mehsen, a policy expert on transnational cooperation, gender equality, justice and decent work at the EEA and Norway Grants, stated in a comment to eeagender.org that the EU directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence is historic and a victory for gender equality.



The new directive will help support efforts against this type of violence during the next period of the EEA and Norway Grants, says Nora Mehsen.

“Numerous stakeholders – including women’s organisations and gender equality organisations from across Europe – have worked long and hard to establish this crucial legal instrument,” Mehsen states.

Mehsen also explains that the criminalisation of gender-based violence in the directive sends a clear signal.

“It will help support efforts against this type of violence during the next period of the EEA and Norway Grants by providing further legitimacy to such work.”

The policy expert goes on to explain that Liechtenstein, Iceland and Norway have all clarified their intentions to continue using the EEA and Norway Grants strategically to promote work on gender equality and to combat gender-based violence. An important element in the current period has been the focus on the SYNERGY Network against Gender-Based and Domestic Violence.

“The network regularly convenes a diverse group of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders from both the donor and beneficiary sides of the EEA and Norway Grants, as well as representatives from the Council of Europe, These gatherings facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experience, and enhance the impact and value of collective efforts in this field. In a Europe in which women’s and LGBTIQ+ rights often face resistance, such forums are particularly important,” Mehsen notes.

The law’s content and impact

Lisa Collste, Legal Officer at the Gender Equality Unit at DG JUST, elaborates on the law’s content and impact to eeagender.org:



"This directive doesn’t just set new standards – it demands action", says Lisa Collste from the European Commission.

“In May 2024, after nearly two years of negotiations, the EU adopted the Directive on Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence – a historic milestone. This directive is the first of its kind at the EU level and provides a comprehensive legal framework to address these atrocious crimes.”

Collste explains that the directive aims to protect victims’ rights and to reduce the prevalence of violence in the long term.

“This directive doesn’t just set new standards – it demands action. By establishing clear legal frameworks and comprehensive measures, it empowers member states to prevent violence, protect survivors and hold perpetrators accountable. The directive also defines certain crimes at an EU level, such as female genital mutilation, forced marriage and the most widespread forms of cyberviolence. It ensures that all victims across the EU will have access to the same robust measures of prevention, protection, support and justice.”

“With this directive, the EU is setting a powerful precedent for a coordinated and cohesive response to gender-based violence. Member states now have three years to incorporate these essential provisions into their domestic legislation, marking a pivotal moment in the fight for gender equality and justice in Europe,” Collste states.

Where will the directive have impact?

Wanja J. Sæther, Manager of the Crisis Centre in Salten, believes that the directive sends a clear signal.

“The directive demonstrates that the fight against gender-based violence has become a global movement. Although the law does not directly apply to Norway, its effect will also be felt here.”



Wanja J. Sæther, Manager of the Crisis Centre in Salten.

Sæther believes that Norway generally has relatively good regulations for combating gender-based violence but lacks focus on psychological violence.

“One thing we are not very good at in Norway is taking psychological violence seriously, and that means both understanding the phenomena and working on shifting attitudes. I don’t believe the EU directive will make a significant impact in that area.”

The Crisis Centre in Salten has previously collaborated with Romania on the implementation of the Istanbul Convention in their crisis shelters. This autumn, they are embarking on new projects with their partner country, such as comparing methods, models and regulations. Sæther believes the directive will help support Romania’s work against gender-based violence.

Read: *Can tools from a small crisis centre in Norway improve shelters and support services in Romania?*

“I believe the directive will impact and support the National Agency for Equal Opportunities (ANES) in Romania. It will be exciting to follow the developments.”

Facts about the origin of the directive

The EU has a strategy called **“The EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025**”, which reaffirms the EU’s commitments to combating gender-based violence. “The EU signed the Convention (the ‘Istanbul Convention’) in 2017, and the accession process was concluded in June 2023 with the deposit of the instrument of accession to the Council of Europe. The Convention entered into force on 1 October 2023, binding the EU,” according to europa.eu.

Eurostat conducts surveys on gender-based violence for the EU. According to europe.eu, the EU’s first survey on violence against women was published in March 2014 by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA).

In addition to its own data, Eurostat also collects data from national authorities in EU member states, similarly to the UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime). Eurostat also measures attitudes toward gender-based violence.

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