

DIGNITY



# Violence against women: an EU-wide survey

## Results at a glance



**FRA**

EUROPEAN UNION AGENCY FOR FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS



This report addresses matters related to, in particular, the right to human dignity (Article 1), the right to the integrity of the person (Article 3), the principle of non-discrimination, including on the ground of sex (Article 21), the right to equality between women and men (Article 23), the right to an effective remedy and to a fair trial (Article 47) falling under Titles I 'Dignity', III 'Equality' and IV 'Justice' of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

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# **Violence against women: an EU-wide survey**

Results at a glance



# Foreword

This report is based on interviews with 42,000 women across the 28 Member States of the European Union (EU). It shows that violence against women, and specifically gender-based violence that disproportionately affects women, is an extensive human rights abuse that the EU cannot afford to overlook.

The survey asked women about their experiences of physical, sexual and psychological violence, including incidents of intimate partner violence ('domestic violence'), and also asked about stalking, sexual harassment, and the role played by new technologies in women's experiences of abuse. In addition, it asked about their experiences of violence in childhood. What emerges is a picture of extensive abuse that affects many women's lives, but is systematically under-reported to the authorities. For example, one in 10 women has experienced some form of sexual violence since the age of 15, and one in 20 has been raped. Just over one in five women has experienced physical and/or sexual violence from either a current or previous partner, and just over one in 10 women indicates that they have experienced some form of sexual violence by an adult before they were 15 years old. Yet, as an illustration, only 14 % of women reported their most serious incident of intimate partner violence to the police, and 13 % reported their most serious incident of non-partner violence to the police.

There have been repeated calls over several years from different quarters for comprehensive data on violence against women – including various Presidencies of the Council of the EU, monitoring bodies such as the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, and the Council of Europe. It is clear, with the publication of these results, that the time is now ripe to address violence against women on the basis of the evidence supplied by the survey for 28 countries. Future EU strategies on equality between women and men could build on the survey's findings to address key areas of concern about women's experiences of violence. The survey results also provide ample support for EU Member States to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), and for the EU to explore the possibility of accession to the convention. The findings further reinforce the need to ensure implementation of existing EU measures for victims of crime, most notably through the EU Victims' Directive. They also serve to underline the importance of targeted EU legislation and policies addressing violence against women, such as the European Protection Order and the Regulation on Mutual Recognition of Protection Measures in Civil Matters, which need to be applied in practice if they are to be effective.

Alongside responses to violence against women at the level of EU institutions and Member States, action to combat violence against women needs to come from different quarters, including employers, health professionals and internet service providers – to name just a few. This is particularly important because many women do not report their experiences of abuse to the authorities, so that the majority of violence against women continues to be hidden and, as a result, perpetrators are not confronted. Therefore, different avenues for highlighting and combating violence against women need to be explored further. With the publication of the survey and the necessary follow-up measures by politicians and policy makers, women who have been a victim of violence and have remained silent can be encouraged to speak up. This is crucial in those countries, and among certain groups, where it is not yet widespread to openly talk about personal experiences of violence, where reporting of incidents to the authorities is low, and where violence against women is not addressed as a mainstream policy issue.

In sum, this report presents the first results from the most comprehensive survey to date at the level of the EU (and worldwide) on women's diverse experiences of violence. It is hoped that the report's findings – read alongside the online data explorer tool – are taken up by those women and men who can advocate and initiate change to address violence against women.

Finally, the results presented in this report were only made possible by the participation of women in the survey who gave their time to talk about very personal and difficult experiences. It was the first time many of them had spoken to anyone about their abuse. For this, the FRA would like to thank them.

**Morten Kjaerum**  
*Director*

# Country codes

Country code	Country
AT	Austria
BE	Belgium
BG	Bulgaria
CY	Cyprus
CZ	Czech Republic
DE	Germany
DK	Denmark
EE	Estonia
EL	Greece
ES	Spain
FI	Finland
FR	France
HR	Croatia
HU	Hungary
IE	Ireland
IT	Italy
LT	Lithuania
LU	Luxembourg
LV	Latvia
MT	Malta
NL	Netherlands
PL	Poland
PT	Portugal
RO	Romania
SE	Sweden
SI	Slovenia
SK	Slovakia
UK	United Kingdom



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# Why is this survey needed?

## Highlighting violence against women as a fundamental rights abuse in the EU

Violence against women, which encompasses crimes that disproportionately impact on women such as sexual assault, rape and 'domestic violence', is a violation of women's fundamental rights with respect to dignity, equality and access to justice. Its impact stretches beyond those women who are themselves victims of violence, since it affects families, friends and society as a whole. They call for a critical look at how society and the state respond to this abuse.

Civil society actors and inter-governmental organisations, including the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Council of Europe, have sought in recent decades to highlight the extent and nature of violence against women. Initiatives at the level of individual EU Member States have supported this process. The publication of the FRA survey data demonstrates that violence against women is as an extensive and wide-ranging fundamental rights abuse which touches on many women's lives in the EU.

## Responding to the need for data

Given the significant impact of violence against women, policy makers and practitioners in many EU Member States still have to grapple with a lack of comprehensive data on the scale and nature of the problem. Since most women do not report violence and do not feel encouraged to do so by systems that are often seen as unsupportive, official criminal justice data are only able to record those few cases that are reported. This means that policy and practical responses to address violence against women are not always informed by comprehensive evidence. While some EU Member States and research institutions have undertaken surveys and other research on violence against women, a lack of comprehensive and comparable data remains in this field across the EU, compared with other areas, such as employment, where a number of Member States collect data in relation to gender.

The FRA EU-wide survey responds to a request for data on violence against women from the European Parliament, which the Council of the EU reiterated in its Conclusions on the eradication of violence against

women in the EU. FRA has undertaken 42,000 in-person interviews with a random sample of women across the 28 EU Member States. The results from these interviews can be looked at alongside existing data and gaps in knowledge at EU and Member State level.

## Data to inform and support legislation and policy

Measures at European level that can serve to address violence against women include the EU Victims' Directive (2012/29/EU) and the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). The EU Victims' Directive, adopted in 2012, establishes minimum standards on the rights, protection and support of victims of crime in the EU, and makes specific reference to victims of gender-based violence, victims of sexual violence and victims of violence in a close relationship. The Istanbul Convention, which was adopted in 2011, is the first legally binding regional instrument that comprehensively addresses different forms of violence against women, such as psychological violence, stalking, physical violence, sexual violence and sexual harassment. The convention is due to come into force after 10 ratifications.

Alongside these encouraging legal developments, evidence from FRA's EU-wide survey on violence against women indicates that the majority of women who are victims of violence do not report their experiences to either the police or any victim support organisation. This is a particular problem in those EU Member States where discussion about and revelation of personal experiences of violence are not yet the norm. As a result, most women who are victims of violence do not come into contact with the justice system and other services, which is exacerbated in those Member States where violence against women is not mainstreamed as an area for policy intervention. It is therefore clear that the needs and the rights of women in the EU are currently not being met in practice.

Hence, there is a need to review how the law in the books compares with the law in practice to encourage reporting, improve responses to women as victims, and ensure there are sufficient resources for targeted victim support. Evidence from the survey shows patterns in reporting abuse and reasons for women not reporting, which can be examined with respect to the situation in individual Member States.

## FRA opinions – ways forward

Based on the detailed survey findings, FRA has drafted a number of opinions that suggest different ways in which violence against women can be recognised and responded to. This includes action outside the narrow confines of the criminal law, ranging from the employment and health sectors, through to the medium of new technologies, and encompassing targeted awareness-raising initiatives that can encourage reporting.

These opinions build on earlier calls by bodies such as the UN and the Council of Europe to take action to combat violence against women. Uniquely, FRA's opinions

and suggestions for possible ways forward draw on evidence gathered from face-to-face interviews with 42,000 women across all 28 EU Member States.

In sum, inter-governmental organisations and civil society have called for years for robust and comprehensive data on violence against women to formulate policy and steer courses of action to address this fundamental rights abuse. The publication of the FRA survey results on violence against women makes these data now available for use with respect to the 28 EU Member States.



# 1

## FRA opinions based on key findings



The survey findings show that violence against women is an extensive but widely under-reported human rights abuse across the EU. In response, FRA has formulated the following opinions. These aim to support EU and national policy makers to introduce and implement comprehensive measures to prevent and respond to gender-based violence against women, particularly in those Member States where these abuses are insufficiently discussed and addressed.

The following presents a summary of opinions, which are elaborated further at the end of each chapter in the survey's main results report.

### 1.1. Overall extent and nature of violence against women, including intimate partner violence

#### Responding to the scale and specific nature of physical and sexual violence against women

- The scale of physical and sexual violence experienced by women across the EU calls for renewed policy attention. Some 8 % of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence in the last 12 months before the survey interview, and one in three women has experienced some form of physical and/or sexual assault since the age of 15.
- Specifically, sexual violence is a pervasive crime that calls for concerted action to address attitudes towards sexual violence against women. One in 10 women has experienced some form of sexual violence since

the age of 15, and one in 20 women has been raped since the age of 15.

- Of those women in the survey who say they have experienced sexual violence by a non-partner (since the age of 15), almost one in 10 indicates that more than one perpetrator was involved in the most serious incident. There is a need for enhanced specialist support for victims of sexual violence, which can include incidents involving more than one perpetrator.
- The survey results indicate that young women, as a group, are particularly vulnerable to victimisation. Therefore, young women need targeted prevention and awareness raising on violence against women.
- Violence against women can be addressed as a public issue of general concern. Campaigns on and responses to violence against women must be directed at men as well as women. Men need to be positively engaged in initiatives that confront how some men use violence against women.
- The Council of Europe Istanbul Convention and the EU Victims' Directive both set new standards for responding to victims of gender-based violence. EU Member States can be encouraged to ratify the convention. As a minimum, EU Member States need to review their legislation to ensure that it is in line with the convention and the directive.

#### Responding to the scale and specific nature of violence against women by intimate partners

- The scale of intimate partner violence requires a renewed policy focus at the level of the EU and its Member States. Of women who are or have been in a relationship with a man, 22 % have experienced

physical and/or sexual violence. To effectively respond to abuse in relationships, the state must respond to intimate partner violence as a public matter rather than a private one.

- Of women in the survey who indicate they have been raped by their current partner, about one third (31 %) say they have experienced six or more incidents of rape by their partner. Marital rape is a reality for a number of women, and many have experienced multiple incidents. This demands that the law in all EU Member States responds to married women as victims of rape on an equal footing with unmarried women.
- Evidence shows that a significant number of women continue to be vulnerable to abuse in the aftermath of violent relationships. Protection needs to be offered to them. The European Protection Order and the Regulation on mutual recognition of civil law protection measures need to be reviewed in due course with respect to their impact on women's safety.
- The FRA survey results show a relationship between a woman's partner's heavy alcohol use and increased violence. Heavy alcohol use needs to be highlighted and addressed as a factor contributing to men's violence against women in intimate relationships. National violence prevention measures should consider addressing heavy alcohol use. The alcoholic drinks industry could support such measures when promoting responsible drinking. At the same time, consideration could be given to the systematic collection of data by the police on alcohol abuse with respect to incidents of domestic violence.
- The characteristics and behaviour of perpetrators need to be looked at to explore possible risk factors contributing to violence in intimate partnerships. For example, the survey shows the impact of some men's controlling behaviour in a relationship, such as placing restrictions on a woman's use of finances or on seeing friends and family. By asking about the characteristics and behaviour of perpetrators, practitioners can be alerted to factors that may be a warning sign for violence.
- Many women who are victims of intimate partner violence experience repeat incidents of violence in a relationship. EU Member States should be encouraged to review their legislation for its capacity to recognise and effectively respond to the impact of repeat victimisation on many women's lives, with repeat victimisation being a particular characteristic of intimate partner violence.

## **Making sure that policies are based on evidence**

- Comprehensive data on women's experiences of violence are essential for the development and monitoring of policies to combat violence against women.
- Awareness-raising campaigns on violence against women need to be based on accurate data to ensure that they target their messages at the right audience. At the same time, these campaigns can encourage open discussions about violence against women. Such discussions can ultimately enhance reporting to the authorities and victim support services.
- There is a clear need to improve and harmonise data collection on violence against women, both in and between EU Member States, to use data more effectively to address this EU-wide abuse. Within the scope of EU competence, efforts should be made to collect data in key areas where women experience violence, for example, with Eurostat taking the lead and drawing on good practices established in Member States for data collection on violence against women.

## 1.2. Consequences of physical and sexual violence against women, including intimate partner violence

### **Addressing under-reporting to the police and other services**

- Reporting rates of incidents of violence against women to the police and other services are low and need to be increased. Between one in three victims of partner violence and one in four victims of non-partner violence report their most recent serious incident to the police or some other service. Higher rates for reporting partner violence reflect the fact that women often experience several incidents of abuse by a partner before they decide to report, whereas non-partner violence is more likely to be a one-off incident.
- In particular, a victim's lack of satisfaction with the police needs to be addressed by applying and monitoring in practice the provisions set out for victims under the Istanbul Convention and the EU Victims' Directive. Different models of police intervention to protect victims need to be reviewed to see the extent to which they protect victims and meet their needs in practice.



## The role of healthcare

- Healthcare professionals can play an enhanced role in identifying and helping to prevent cases of violence against women. For example, the survey indicates that pregnant women are vulnerable to violence; of those women who experienced violence by a previous partner and were pregnant during this relationship, 42 % experienced violence by this partner while pregnant.
- Confidentiality rules should be clarified so that health professionals can address and report abuse. In support of this, the survey shows that 87 % of women would find it acceptable if doctors routinely ask about violence if patients exhibit certain injuries or characteristics. At the same time, the development of routine questioning by health practitioners concerning signs of violence must also ensure that appropriate checks are in place to identify the potential for any abuse by health practitioners themselves.

## The role of specialist victim support services

- Compared with the number of women who contacted healthcare services as a result of violence, few women contacted victim support organisations or women's shelters as a result of the most serious incident of physical and/or sexual violence. For example, whereas one third of women contacted a doctor, a health centre or a hospital with respect to the most serious incident of sexual violence by a partner, only 6 % contacted a women's shelter and 4 % contacted a victim support organisation. This finding suggests that a number of factors come into play when women report: awareness of these services, which can depend on where a woman lives in a country and the availability of such services in her area; the resources these organisations have, which affects their ability to deliver a service; and women's most immediate needs, which may focus on healthcare. In line with the EU Victims' Directive and the Istanbul Convention, there is a pressing need across the EU to enhance resources for specialist victim support services that are able to respond to the needs of women who are victims of violence.
- About one in four victims of sexual assault, by either a partner or a non-partner, did not contact the police or any other organisation after the most serious incident because of feelings of shame and embarrassment. Responses to women's victimisation that reinforce negative cultures of 'victim blaming' need to be vigorously counteracted. Hence, specialist support services are required to address the needs of victims who suffer from negative feelings in the aftermath of victimisation, which can include self-blame and a sense of shame.

- Data are essential to measure whether victims' needs are being met in practice by different services, and to determine where it would be most efficient to spend resources to assist victims.

## Joined-up responses to violence against women

- The effectiveness of current legislation, policy initiatives and practitioner interventions can be judged by looking at the evidence on the ground with respect to women's willingness to report abuse, and their satisfaction with the service they receive. As there is under-reporting in many EU Member States, multi-agency responses to violence against women are needed to effectively address the needs – and rights – of women.
- Interinstitutional cooperation is essential for harmonised and efficient collection and exchange of data concerning cases of violence against women.

## 1.3. Psychological partner violence against women

### Recognising the scale and specific nature of psychological partner violence, and responding to it

- Psychological violence by partners is widespread and needs to be recognised for the impact it has. For example, the survey results show that two in five women (43 %) have experienced some form of psychological violence by either a current or a previous partner. To give just a few examples, this includes 25 % of women who have been belittled or humiliated in private by a partner, 14 % whose partner has threatened to hurt them physically and 5 % whose partner has forbidden them to leave the house, taken away their car keys or locked them up.
- Of women who are currently in a relationship, 7 % have experienced four or more different forms of psychological violence. Multiple and repetitive forms of psychological violence by intimate partners need to be recognised as undermining a woman's autonomy, which equates to the loss of an autonomous private and family life.
- Employers and trade unions should consider adopting awareness-raising and related training activities for responsible personnel, to help them identify and respond to the needs of employees who are suffering from psychologically controlling behaviour by a partner.

- The police and other relevant government services should be trained to recognise and understand the impact of psychological abuse on victims.
- Controlling and abusive behaviour by offenders may require that the police intervene directly to protect victims and to refer them to victim support services, rather than wait for a victim to seek assistance herself. In parallel, there is a need for services to engage with perpetrators to address their psychologically abusive behaviour, alongside addressing any violent behaviour.
- At EU Member State level, legislation should be reviewed to assess whether it encompasses the various forms and impact of repetitive psychological abuse on victims, which – as the survey results show – often goes hand in hand with physical and/or sexual abuse in relationships.

## 1.4. Experiences of stalking

### Improving responses to stalking in law and practice

- The survey results show that one in five women have experienced some form of stalking since the age of 15, with 5 % having experienced it in the 12 months preceding the survey. However, three out of four stalking cases reported in the survey never come to the attention of the police. Where stalking is recognised in law at the national level, women should be encouraged to report it when it occurs. At the same time, the use and effectiveness of legal provisions on stalking should be reviewed at Member State level. Those EU Member States that lack comprehensive legislation on stalking should be encouraged to put in place legislation that serves the needs of victims.
- Victims of stalking should receive adequate protection by the state, building on the type of protection developed in response to cases of domestic violence.
- As one woman in 10 has been stalked by a previous partner, support services should be alerted to the realities of stalking in the aftermath of relationships so that these patterns of behaviour are not overlooked.
- One in five women who have experienced stalking indicates that it lasted for more than two years. As with physical and sexual violence, the emotional and psychological consequences of stalking can be long-lasting and deep-seated. Therefore, specialist victim support services need to be available that can assist victims of stalking.

## The role of the internet and social media

- Of victims of stalking, 23 % indicate in the survey that they had to change their email address or phone number in response to the most serious case of stalking. The internet and social media platforms should take steps to proactively assist victims of stalking to report abuse, and should also be encouraged to proactively address perpetrators' behaviour. In parallel, the police can be encouraged to routinely recognise and investigate cases where cyberstalking plays a role.

## 1.5. Experiences of sexual harassment

### Encouraging awareness and reporting of sexual harassment

- Sexual harassment is a pervasive and common experience for many women in the EU. For example, one in five women have experienced unwelcome touching, hugging or kissing since the age of 15, and 6 % of all women have experienced this type of harassment at least six times since they were 15. Of those women who have experienced sexual harassment at least once since the age of 15, 32 % indicated a colleague, a boss or a customer as the perpetrator(s). In response, employers' organisations and trade unions should promote awareness of sexual harassment and encourage women to report incidents.
- The survey results indicate that sexual harassment against women involves a range of different perpetrators and can include the use of 'new' technologies. One in 10 women (11 %) has experienced inappropriate advances on social websites or have been subjected to sexually explicit emails or text (SMS) messages. These modes of sexual harassment disproportionately affect younger women. EU Member States need to review the existing scope of legislative and policy responses to sexual harassment, recognising that it can occur in various settings and can use different mediums, such as the internet or mobile phones. As with cyberstalking, the police can be encouraged to routinely recognise and investigate cases where cyberharassment plays a role.

### Vulnerabilities of professional women alongside other women

- Between 74 % and 75 % of women in a professional capacity or in top management jobs have experienced sexual harassment in their lifetime, and one in four of these women have been confronted with sexual harassment in the 12 months prior to the



survey. Recognition needs to be given to the fact that professional women in management and other top positions are at risk of sexual harassment. This could be for a variety of reasons, such as their exposure to work environments and situations where they are at increased risk of abuse, as well as the possibility that professional women are more alert to what constitutes sexual harassment. Employers and other organisations need to raise awareness and take practical initiatives to recognise and address the reality of sexual harassment experienced by women with diverse occupational and educational backgrounds, and in different work settings.

### Provision of evidence to highlight and combat sexual harassment

- Administrative data and existing surveys on work and education should be enhanced to include regular and detailed questions about sexual harassment. Data from these can be used to inform policy and action to address this abuse.

## 1.6. Experiences of violence in childhood

### The scale of childhood abuse and under-reporting

- Just over one in 10 women (12 %) has experienced some form of sexual abuse or incident by an adult before the age of 15. These forms of abuse typically involve an adult exposing their genitals (8 %) or touching the child's genitals or breasts (5 %). At the extreme, 1 % of women indicate that they were forced to have sexual intercourse with an adult when they were a child.
- Some 27 % of women have experienced some form of physical abuse in childhood (before the age of 15) at the hands of an adult.
- The EU needs to focus anew on the widespread and under-reported abuse that women have experienced when they were children. This evidence can be used to address both current and past abuse of children.

### The characteristics of abuse

- In 97 % of cases of sexual violence in childhood, the perpetrator was male, whereas in cases of physical violence only slightly more cases were attributed to men than to women.
- Detailed data on abuse in childhood, including surveys that can capture unreported abuse, are needed

to identify and corroborate evidence about the characteristics of abuse, which can be used to target interventions to prevent abuse, protect victims and punish offenders.

### Responding to abuse in childhood

- The results show that 30 % of women who have experienced sexual victimisation by a former or current partner also experienced sexual violence in childhood, whereas 10 % of women who have not experienced sexual victimisation in their current or former relationship indicate experiences of sexual violence in childhood. At the same time, 73 % of mothers who have been victims of physical and/or sexual violence by a partner indicate that at least one of their children has become aware of such violence taking place. Programmes should target children and families at risk of violence in order to stop the cycle of abuse.
- In line with the Istanbul Convention, EU Member States should be encouraged to review their legislation to reassess the justification of time limits, where these exist, on reporting abuse that occurred in childhood.
- Evidence based on children's own experiences of abuse is essential to formulate policies and courses of action to prevent and protect children from abuse.

## 1.7. Fear of victimisation and its impact

### Fear of gender-based violence affects women's freedom of movement

- The survey indicates that half of all women avoid certain situations or places, at least sometimes, for fear of being physically or sexually assaulted. In comparison, as shown by existing general population surveys on crime and victimisation, men's fear of crime, and its impact on their lives, is generally lower than women's. Women's fear of crime – specifically their fear of gender-based violence – needs to be recognised and responded to at the level of the EU and Member States, and at the local level because of the negative impact it has on women's everyday freedom of movement.

### Heightened levels of fear can indicate abuse

- Many women who indicate heightened levels of fear of assault tend to have experienced high levels of physical or sexual violence. Given that heightened levels of fear can reflect experiences of abuse,



healthcare professionals and other relevant practitioners can be encouraged, as appropriate, to ask about and collect information on fear of victimisation in an effort to identify possible abuse.

## 1.8. Attitudes towards and awareness about violence against women

### Enhancing awareness of violence against women

- Women perceive violence against women as common or rare in their country depending on their personal experiences of partner and/or non-partner violence, their awareness of other women who are victims of violence and their awareness of campaigns addressing violence against women. The interplay between these factors needs to be taken into account when devising policies to raise awareness of violence against women in different settings and among different groups of women.

- Targeted campaigns at EU Member State level are essential to enhance women's (and men's) knowledge about gender-based violence, to encourage reporting, protect victims and work towards prevention.

### Ensuring that expectations of service provision can be met in practice

- Women who are victims of violence seldom report it to specialist services. If campaigns to raise awareness about violence against women and to encourage reporting of it are to be successful, specialist services need to be in place and adequately resourced to meet victims' needs.

### Ensuring that campaigns are based on existing evidence about violence against women

- In the absence of data at EU Member State level, results from the FRA survey on violence against women can be used to enhance awareness raising and action by EU Member States concerning such violence.



# 2

## What do the results show?



The following section outlines a selection of key findings from the survey, which reflect the main areas that were covered in the questionnaire.

The survey's main results report and the online data explorer tool present the survey findings in detail, with the possibility for the user to extract data in different ways through the online tool.

### Asking about experiences since the age of 15, before 15, and in the 12 months before the survey interview

Women aged 18 to 74 years took part in the survey. To distinguish incidents that took place in childhood, and based on established survey practice, the survey questions gave the age of 15 years around which women were asked to think about incidents that had occurred before and after this age.

Different surveys select different cut-off ages for framing survey questions. In this regard, the FRA survey is in line the World Health Organization (WHO) survey on women's health and domestic violence which also selected 15 years as the cut-off age.

The FRA survey asked women to distinguish between incidents that have occurred since the age of 15 (covering a lifetime period) and in the twelve months before the survey interview. Asking women to think about the last 12 months helps them to distinguish between recent and possibly distant events. It also provides data that are of direct policy relevance with respect to current practice, such as policing responses to victims.

## 2.1. Physical and sexual violence

### ► Physical violence:

An estimated 13 million women in the EU have experienced physical violence in the course of 12 months before the survey interviews. This corresponds to 7% of women aged 18–74 years in the EU.<sup>1</sup>

### ► Sexual violence:

An estimated 3.7 million women in the EU have experienced sexual violence in the course of 12 months before the survey interviews – corresponding to 2% of women aged 18–74 years in the EU.

### Overall prevalence of physical and sexual violence

- One in three women (33 %) has experienced physical and/or sexual violence since she was 15 years old.
- Some 8 % of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence in the 12 months before the survey interview (Figure 1 a).
- Out of all women who have a (current or previous) partner, 22 % have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a partner since the age of 15 (Table 1).

<sup>1</sup> According to the Eurostat online database, 186,590,848 women aged 18-74 years lived in the EU-28 on 1 January, see: [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/statistics/search\\_database](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/statistics/search_database) (data code demo\_pjan, extracted on 16 August 2013).

## READING THE RESULTS

Levels of violence reported vary between Member States. More detail is in the online 'data explorer' accompanying this report. Here are some possible explanations for these differences.

### Recognising differences between countries

Just as official criminal justice data on recorded crime vary significantly between countries, there are often large differences between countries in levels of reported victimisation when people are interviewed for a victimisation survey. This applies to crime in general, and in particular to incidents of violence against women, which are particularly sensitive topics to talk about in a survey.

Variations between countries in the prevalence of violence reported in the FRA survey need to be looked at in relation to a number of factors. For example, official crime data show significant differences between countries in levels of overall violence, including levels of violence against women where this data are available. General crime survey data, and also surveys specifically on violence against women, always show differences between countries in rates of violence. On the other hand, the FRA survey shows less variation between EU Member States in rates of domestic violence than the World Health Organization's (WHO's) 10-country study on women's health and domestic violence (data collected in 2000–2003). When comparing the FRA survey results on the prevalence of rape with those of the United States' national intimate partner violence and sexual violence survey, which covers all 50 US states (data collected in 2010), there is less variation between EU Member States than between the US states. The FRA survey results are also broadly in line with results from existing national surveys on violence against women in the EU Member States, where these are available.

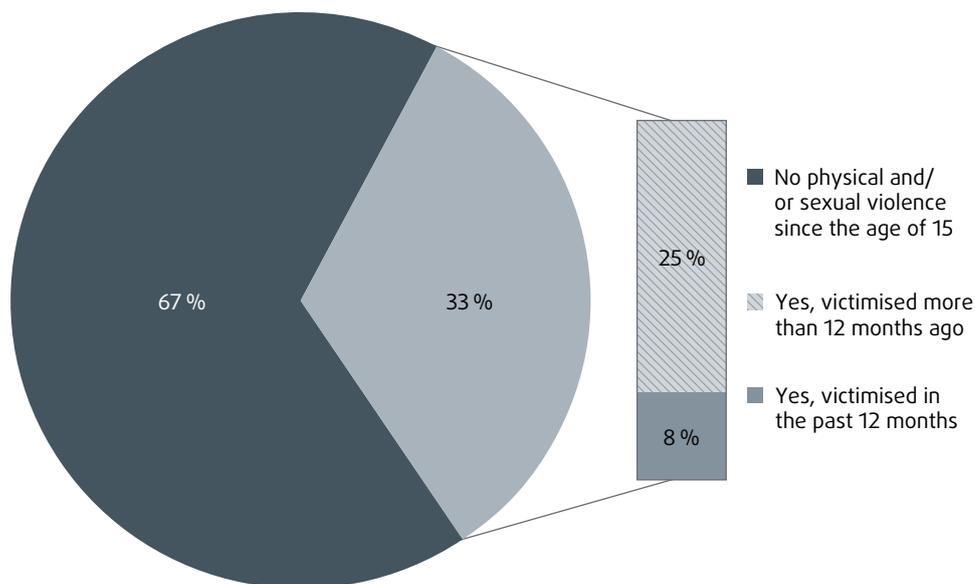
### Possible explanations for differences between countries

Although differences between countries in the survey results on rates of violence against women are to be expected, in line with other survey findings, it is harder to explain and generalise from these differences across 28 diverse countries. Here are five possible explanations of observed differences between countries in prevalence rates for violence against women. They require further exploration for corroboration and can be looked at with respect to other possible explanations at the country level.

- 1) In different countries, it may be more or less culturally acceptable to talk with other people about experiences of violence against women. When looking at the survey results, consideration needs to be given to the possibility that, in societies in which intimate partner violence is considered largely a private matter, incidents of violence against women are unlikely to be shared with family and friends and are also rarely reported to the police. Such reticence may inhibit talking to survey interviewers.
- 2) Gender equality could lead to higher levels of disclosure about violence against women. Incidents of violence against women are more likely to be openly addressed and challenged in societies with greater equality.
- 3) Women's exposure to risk factors for violence can be examined at the Member State level with respect to factors that might increase exposure to violence. These include patterns in employment (working outside the home), as well as socialisation and lifestyle patterns (going out and dating).
- 4) Differences between countries in overall levels of violent crime need to be looked at alongside findings on violence against women. For example, more urbanisation in a Member State is generally related to higher crime rates.
- 5) The survey revealed evidence of the relationship between perpetrators' drinking habits and women's experiences of intimate partner violence ('domestic violence'). Different drinking patterns in Member States may help to explain certain aspects of violence against women, which, in turn, need to be looked at alongside patterns in individual perpetrators' violent behaviour, which may not be limited to violence against women.

These and other factors need to be explored further when looking at findings at the level of individual Member States.

Figure 1 a: Women experiencing physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15 and in the 12 months before the interview, EU-28 (%)



Note: Based on all respondents (N = 42,002).  
 Source: FRA gender-based violence against women survey data set, 2012

### Box 1: What the survey asked – physical and sexual violence

#### Physical violence

Since you were 15 years old until now/in the past 12 months, how often has someone:

- Pushed you or shoved you?
- Slapped you?
- Threw a hard object at you?
- Grabbed you or pulled your hair?
- Beat you with a fist or a hard object, or kicked you?
- Burned you?
- Tried to suffocate you or strangle you?
- Cut or stabbed you, or shot at you?
- Beat your head against something?

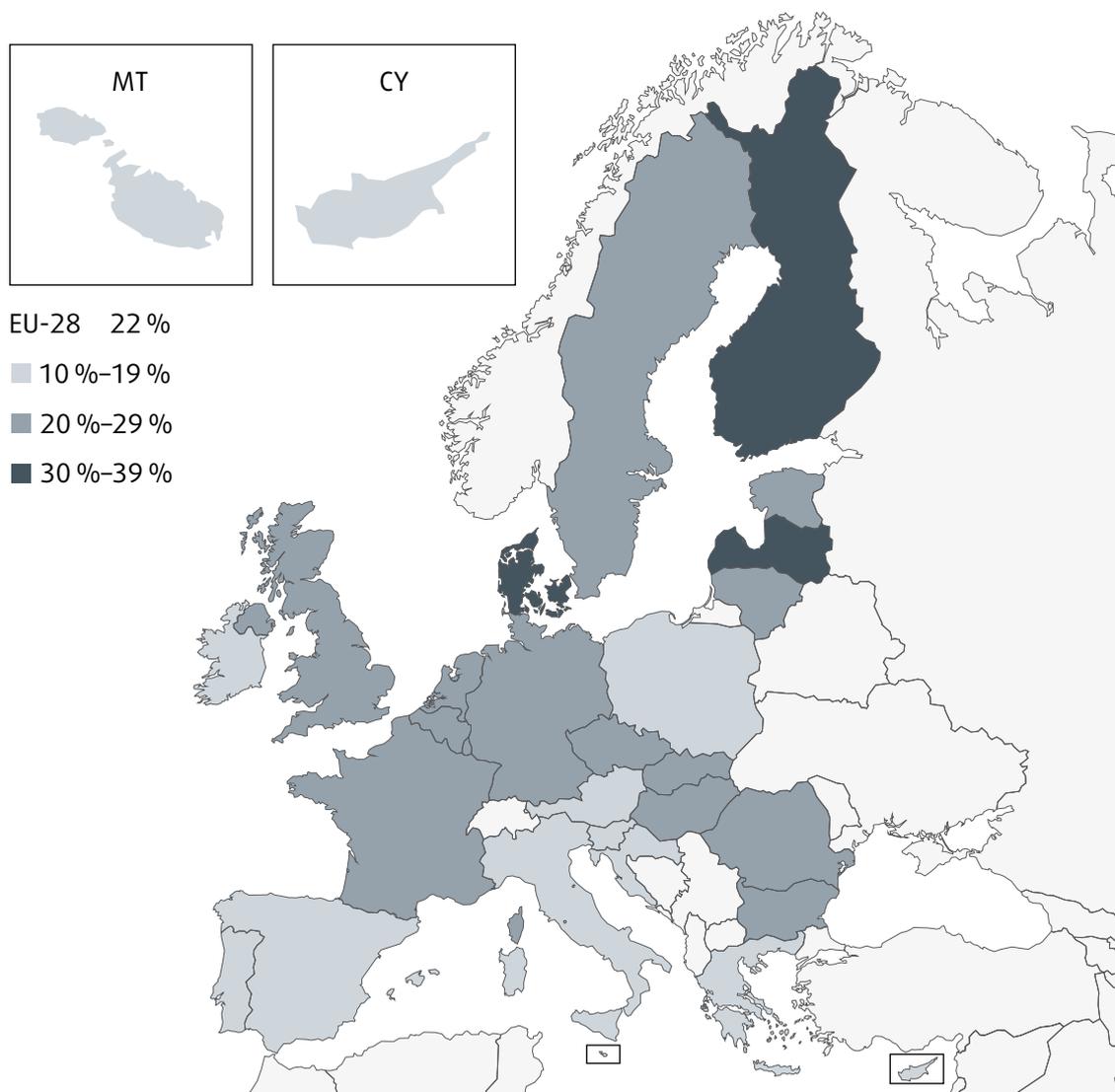
#### Sexual violence

Since you were 15 years old until now/in the past 12 months, how often has someone:

- Forced you into sexual intercourse by holding you down or hurting you in some way? [IF NEEDED: By sexual intercourse we mean here forced oral sex, forced anal or vaginal penetration]
- Apart from this, attempted to force you into sexual intercourse by holding you down or hurting you in some way? [IF NEEDED: By sexual intercourse we mean here forced oral sex, forced anal or vaginal penetration]
- Apart from this, made you take part in any form of sexual activity when you did not want to or you were unable to refuse?
- Or have you consented to sexual activity because you were afraid of what might happen if you refused?

The questions on physical and sexual violence were asked separately regarding the current partner, previous partner and other persons.

Figure 1 b: Physical and/or sexual partner violence since the age of 15, EU-28 (%)



Source: FRA gender-based violence against women survey data set, 2012

Table 1: Women who have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a current or previous partner, or by any other person since the age of 15, by EU Member State (%)<sup>a,b,c</sup>

EU Member State	Any partner (current and/or previous) <sup>b</sup>	Non-partner <sup>c</sup>	Any partner and/or non-partner <sup>c</sup>
AT	13	12	20
BE	24	25	36
BG	23	14	28
CY	15	12	22
CZ	21	21	32
DE	22	24	35
DK	32	40	52
EE	20	22	33
EL	19	10	25

EU Member State	Any partner (current and/or previous) <sup>b</sup>	Non-partner <sup>c</sup>	Any partner and/or non-partner <sup>c</sup>
ES	13	16	22
FI	30	33	47
FR	26	33	44
HR	13	13	21
HU	21	14	28
IE	15	19	26
IT	19	17	27
LT	24	16	31
LU	22	25	38
LV	32	17	39
MT	15	15	22
NL	25	35	45
PL	13	11	19
PT	19	10	24
RO	24	14	30
SE	28	34	46
SI	13	15	22
SK	23	22	34
UK	29	30	44
<b>EU-28</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>33</b>

Notes: a The results in the first two columns of the Table do not sum up to the results in the third column due to the different computational base of the results (results on partner violence are based on respondents who have or have had a partner, as opposed to all women) and the fact that some respondents have experienced violence by both their partners and non-partners.

b Out of all women who were either married, living together with someone without being married, or involved in a relationship (without living together) at the time of the interview, or at any time in the past (n = 40,192).

c Out of all respondents (N = 42,002).

Source: FRA gender-based violence against women survey data set, 2012

## Characteristics of physical violence

- Some 31 % of women have experienced one or more acts of *physical* violence (see Box 1) since the age of 15 (Table 2). While women are most likely to indicate that they were pushed or shoved, excluding this form of violence has only a limited effect on the overall prevalence of physical violence, bringing it down from 31 % to 25 %. This result reflects the fact that many women who say they have been pushed or shoved have also experienced other forms of physical violence.

- The most common forms of physical violence involve pushing or shoving, slapping or grabbing, or pulling a woman's hair.

## Characteristics of sexual violence

- In total, 11 % of women have experienced some form of *sexual* violence (see Box 1) since they were 15 years old, either by a partner or some other person. While some women indicate they have experienced one form of sexual violence, other women indicate they have experienced multiple forms of sexual violence.

**Table 2: Women who have experienced various forms of physical violence by a partner or by other persons since the age of 15, EU-28 (%)<sup>a,b,c</sup>**

Type of physical violence	Current partner <sup>a</sup>	Previous partner <sup>b</sup>	Non-partner <sup>c</sup>	Any partner and/or non-partner <sup>c</sup>
Pushed or shoved	5	19	13	23
Slapped	4	15	8	17
Hard object thrown at them	2	8	4	9
Grabbed or pulled by the hair	2	10	7	13
Beat with a fist or a hard object, or kicked	1	9	5	10
Burned	0	1	0	1
Tried to suffocate or strangle	1	5	1	4
Cut, stabbed or shot	0	1	1	1
Beat head against something	1	5	2	4
Any of the above	7	24	20	31
Any of the above, excluding 'pushed or shoved'	5	20	15	25

Notes: *a* Out of all women who were either married, living together with someone without being married, or involved in a relationship (without living together) at the time of the interview (n = 30,675).

*b* Out of all women who had, in the past, either been married, living together with someone without being married, or involved in a relationship (without living together) at least once (n = 25,870).

*c* Out of all respondents (N = 42,002).

Source: FRA gender-based violence against women survey data set, 2012

### The extent of rape

One in 20 women (5 %) has been raped since the age of 15. This figure is based on responses to the question: "Since you were 15 years old until now, how often has someone forced you into sexual intercourse by holding you down or hurting you in some way?"

In a number of EU jurisdictions, the legal definition of rape extends beyond the requirement that the perpetrator uses physical force. In this regard, the extent of rape in the EU could be in excess of 5 %. Some incidents of rape may also have been encompassed within women's responses to another survey question: "Since you were 15 years old until now, how often has someone made you take part in any form of sexual activity when you did not want to or you were unable to refuse?"

experienced, if any. The following describes the results of women's experiences since the age of 15:

- ▶ 5 % of women have been forced into sexual intercourse;
  - ▶ 6 % of women indicate that somebody has attempted to force them into sexual intercourse;
  - ▶ 6 % of women say that somebody has made them take part in sexual activity when they did not want to or when they were unable to refuse;
  - ▶ 6 % of women have agreed to sexual activity because they were afraid what would happen if they did not.
- ▶ Of those women who indicate they have been victims of sexual violence by a non-partner, almost one in 10 women indicates that more than one perpetrator was involved in the incident when describing the details of the *most serious* incident of sexual violence they have experienced.

The survey results for rape need to be looked at alongside findings to other survey questions on sexual violence. The FRA survey asked women about their experiences with regard to four forms of sexual violence. Women could indicate which of the forms they have



**Table 3: Sex of the perpetrators of physical and sexual violence since the age of 15 when perpetrator was other than a current or previous partner, EU-28 (%)**

	Physical violence	Sexual violence
Male	67	97
Female	26	2
Both	7	0
No answer	1	0
n	7,207	2,296

Source: FRA gender-based violence against women survey data set, 2012

### Repeated incidents of sexual violence

Over half of the women who have been raped by their current partner, or whose current partner has attempted to rape them or to make them take part in sexual activity when they were unable to refuse, has experienced more than one incident of sexual violence. In the case of rape, about one third of victims (31 %) has experienced six or more incidents by their current partner.

The results concerning sexual violence by previous partners show a similar pattern. Depending on the type of sexual violence, one third to one quarter of victims has experienced more than one incident.

### Details of non-partner violence

- ▶ One in five women (22 %) has experienced physical violence by someone other than their partner since the age of 15.
- ▶ Out of those women who have experienced *physical* violence by someone other than their partner, 67 % say that the perpetrator was male and a further 7 % say they have experienced physical violence by both male and female perpetrators. In the case of sexual violence, 97 % of women say that the perpetrator was male (Table 3).

## 2.2. Consequences of violence

### Details of intimate partner violence

- ▶ One third of victims (34 %) of physical violence by a previous partner experienced four or more different forms of physical violence.
- ▶ Whereas in most cases violence by a previous partner occurred during the relationship, one in six women (16 %) who has been victimised by a previous partner experienced violence after the relationship had broken up.

### Violence during pregnancy

Of those women who experienced violence by a previous partner and were pregnant during this relationship, 42 % experienced violence by this previous partner while pregnant. In comparison, of those women who experienced violence by their current partner, 20 % experienced violence by their current partner while pregnant. The difference in these figures could reflect the fact that women are less able or willing to report violence by current partners when interviewed – although this assumption requires further exploration.

### Effects of violence on the victim

- ▶ When talking about the most serious incident of sexual violence, women say that their emotional responses at the time were mostly those of fear, anger and shame about what has happened to them. Women who experienced sexual violence by someone who was not their partner also indicated high levels of shock.
- ▶ With respect to the long-term psychological consequences of violence (see Table 4), victimisation by partners or other persons made victims suffer from a loss of self-confidence, and it left them feeling vulnerable and anxious.
- ▶ Victims of sexual violence indicate that they often suffer from a higher number of psychological consequences.
- ▶ Women are more likely to experience various long-term psychological consequences as a result of partner violence than those who experience violence by a perpetrator who was not a partner. This may reflect not only reactions to the most serious incident of violence by a partner, as asked about in

the survey, but also the fact that violence by a partner is more likely to have involved several incidents over a long period of time.

### Contact with police and other services

- ▶ One third of victims of partner violence (33 %) and one quarter of victims of non-partner violence (26 %) contacted either the police or some other organisation, such as a victim support organisation, following the most serious incident of violence. The higher reporting rate for partner violence may reflect a common situation where women have experienced several incidents of violence in a relationship before they decide to report the most serious incident in an effort to stop the violence from recurring or escalating, whereas non-partner
- ▶ In total, victims reported the most serious incident of partner violence to the police in 14 % of cases and the most serious incident of non-partner violence in 13 % of cases.
- ▶ For about one quarter of victims, feeling ashamed or embarrassed about what has happened was the reason for not reporting the most serious incident of sexual violence by a partner or a non-partner to the police or any other organisation.

violence is more likely to involve isolated incidents with less risk of reoccurrence. Table 5 provides a breakdown of information concerning contact and non-contact with services by perpetrator and type of violence.

**Table 4: Long-term psychological consequences of the most serious incident of violence since the age of 15, by type of violence and perpetrator (%)<sup>a,b</sup>**

Type of psychological consequence	Any partner (current and/or previous)		Non-partner	
	Physical violence	Sexual violence	Physical violence	Sexual violence
Depression	20	35	8	23
Anxiety	32	45	23	37
Panic attacks	12	21	8	19
Loss of self-confidence	31	50	17	40
Feeling vulnerable	30	48	24	47
Difficulty in sleeping	23	41	13	29
Concentration difficulties	12	21	7	16
Difficulties in relationships	24	43	9	31
Other	3	5	4	4
<b>Number of categories selected</b>				
None	28	9	43	16
1	26	21	28	25
2-3	27	31	19	35
4 or more	17	38	8	24
No answer	2	(1)	2	1
n	5,415	1,863	4,237	1,847

Notes: a Respondents were able to give more than one answer, so categories may total to more than 100 %.

b Results based on a small number of responses are statistically less reliable, so observations based on fewer than 30 responses are put in brackets and observations based on fewer than five responses are suppressed (denoted with '-').

Source: FRA gender-based violence against women survey data set, 2012



## Unmet needs of victims

- ▶ When asked which type of help would have been useful, women indicate that, as a result of the most serious incident of violence, first and foremost they wanted to have someone to talk to and support them (33 %–54 %) depending on the type of violence and perpetrator), followed by protection (12 %–25 %) and other practical help (13 %–21 %).

## Overcoming the violence

- ▶ Most victims (57 %–60 % depending on the perpetrator and type of violence) have shared their experiences with someone concerning the most serious incident that they have experienced (Table 5). About one third of victims of partner violence (35 %) credited the support of their family and friends in helping them to overcome the violence.

**Table 5: Contacting services and talking to other people about the most serious incident since the age of 15, by type of violence and perpetrator (%)<sup>a</sup>**

	Any partner (current and/or previous)		Non-partner	
	Physical violence	Sexual violence	Physical violence	Sexual violence
Respondent contacted the police or other services	31	39	24	30
Talked to somebody else	36	28	44	37
Did not talk to anyone	32	32	31	33
No answer	1	(0)	1	1
n	5,415	1,863	4,237	1,847

Note: <sup>a</sup> Results based on a small number of responses are statistically less reliable, so observations based on fewer than 30 responses are put in brackets and observations based on fewer than five responses are suppressed (denoted with '-').

Source: FRA gender-based violence against women survey data set, 2012

## 2.3. Psychological partner violence

- ▶ One in three women (32 %) has experienced psychologically abusive behaviour by an intimate partner, either by her current partner or a previous partner. This includes behaviour such as belittling or humiliating the respondent in public or private; forbidding her to leave the house or locking her up; making her watch pornographic material against her wishes; scaring or intimidating her on purpose; and threatening her with violence or threatening to hurt someone else the respondent cares about.
- ▶ Overall, 43 % of women have experienced some form of psychological violence by an intimate partner (Figure 2 a). This may include psychologically abusive behaviour and other forms of psychological violence such as controlling behaviour (for example,

trying to keep a woman from seeing her friends or visiting her family or relatives), economic violence (such as forbidding a woman to work outside the home) and blackmail (Table 6).

- ▶ The most common forms of psychological violence involve a partner belittling or humiliating a woman in private, insisting on knowing where she is in a way that goes beyond general concern, and getting angry if she speaks to other men. One woman in four has experienced each of these in their intimate relationships.
- ▶ Some 5 % of women have experienced economic violence in their current relationship, and 13 % of women have experienced some form of economic violence in past relationships. This includes the partner preventing her from making independent decisions on family finances, or forbidding her to work outside the home.

### Box 2: What the survey asked – psychological violence

How often does your current partner/Did any previous partner ever...

- Try to keep you from seeing your friends?
- Try to restrict your contact with your family of birth or relatives?
- Insist on knowing where you are in a way that goes beyond general concern?
- Get angry if you speak with another man? (or another woman, if the partner is a woman)
- Become suspicious that you are unfaithful?
- Prevent you from making decisions about family finances and from shopping independently?
- Forbid you to work outside the home?
- Forbid you to leave the house, take away car keys or lock you up?

How often would you say that your current partner has/Has any previous partner ever...

- Belittled or humiliated you in front of other people?
- Belittled or humiliated you in private?
- Done things to scare or intimidate you on purpose, for example by yelling and smashing things?
- Made you watch or look at pornographic material against your wishes?
- Threatened to take the children away from you?
- Threatened to hurt your children?
- Hurt your children?
- Threatened to hurt or kill someone else you care about

How often has something like this happened to you? Your current partner/any of your previous partners has...

- Threatened to hurt you physically?

Table 6: Psychological partner violence, by type of abuse and by type of partner (%)<sup>a</sup>

	Current partner <sup>b</sup>	Previous partner <sup>c</sup>	Any partner (current and/or previous) <sup>d</sup>
Controlling behaviour	16	40	35
Economic violence	5	13	12
Abusive behaviour	15	37	32
Blackmail with/abuse of children	2	14	8
Any psychological abuse	23	48	43

Notes: *a* For current partners, the percentage refers to women who say that they have experienced a particular form of psychological violence at least sometimes during the relationship. In the case of previous partners, the survey asked if respondents have ever experienced each of the forms of psychological violence by any previous partner. The column 'Any partner' refers to the combination of these two figures, that is, women who have experienced psychological violence at least sometimes in the current relationship or ever by any previous partners.

*b* Based on all women who have a current partner, that is who were married, living together with someone without being married, or involved in a relationship at the time of the interview (n = 30,675), except the item on blackmail with/abuse of children, which is based on all women who have a current partner and who have or have had children in their care (n = 24,770).

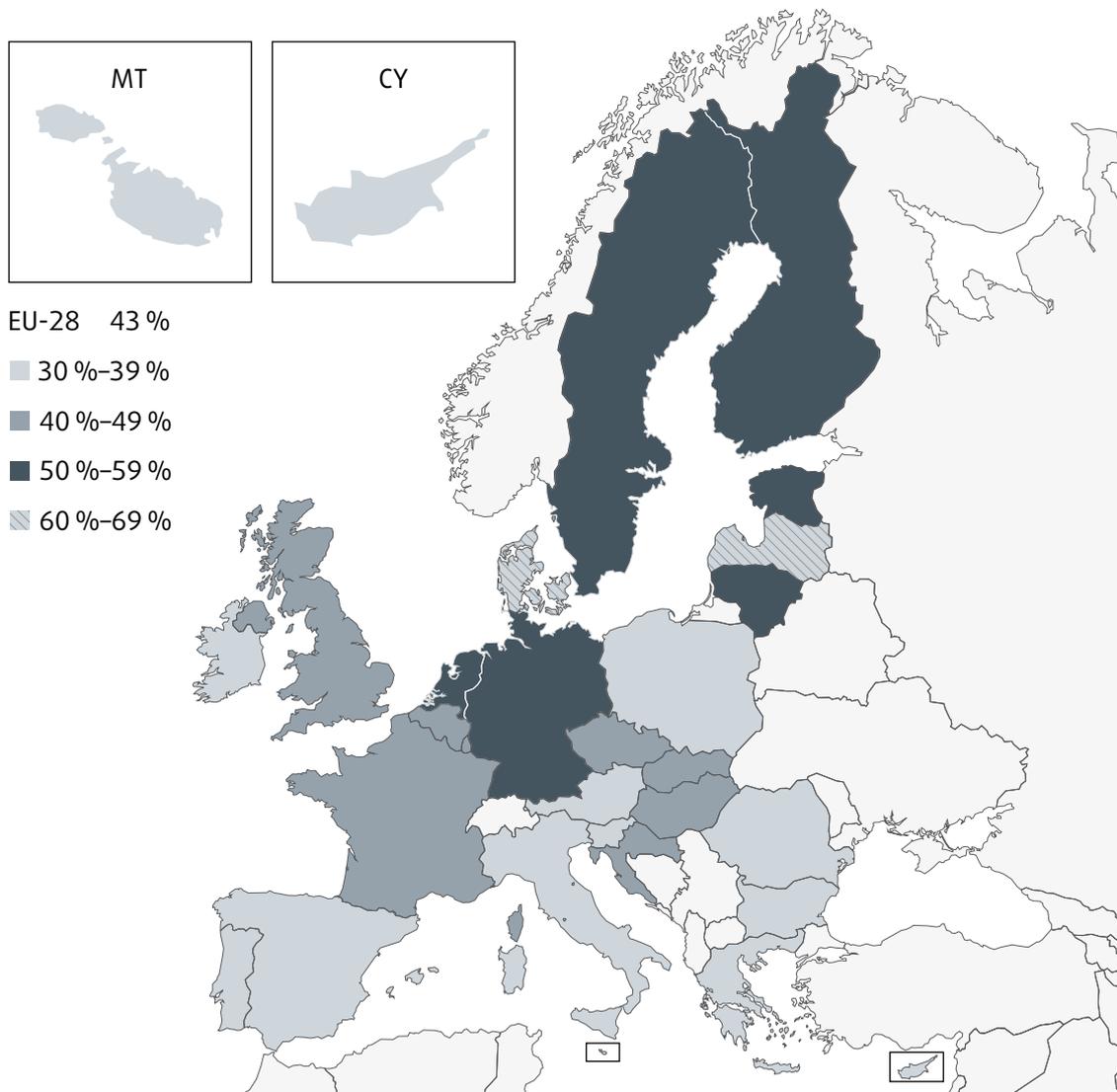
*c* Based on all women who have a previous partner, that is who had been married, living together with someone without being married, or involved in a relationship at least once in the past (n = 25,870), except the item on blackmail with/abuse of children, which is based on all women who have a previous partner and who have or have had children in their care (n = 14,469).

*d* Out of all women who were married, living together with someone without being married, or involved in a relationship at the time of the interview, or at any time in the past (n = 40,192), except the item on blackmail with/abuse of children, which is based on all women who have a current or previous partner and who have or have had children in their care (n = 31,418).

Source: FRA gender-based violence against women survey data set, 2012

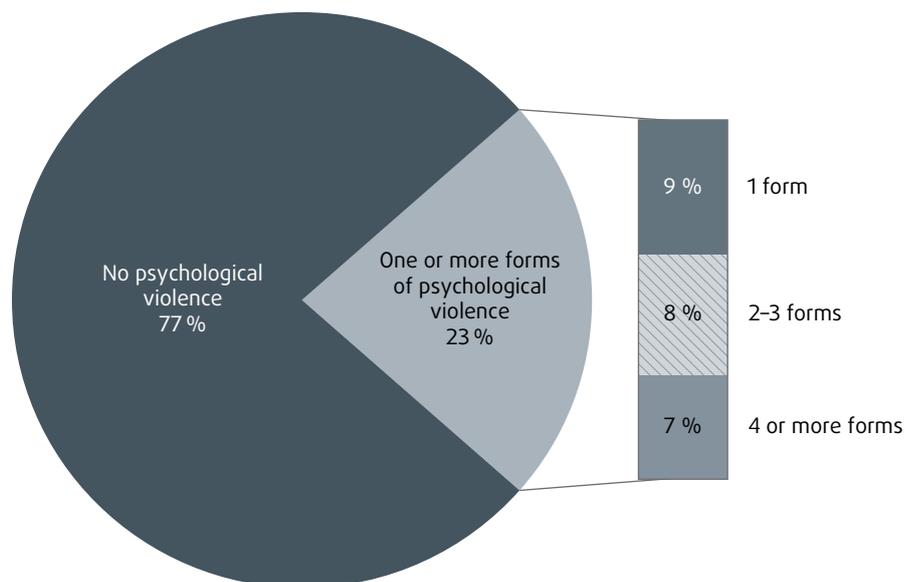


Figure 2 a: Psychological violence by a partner since the age of 15, EU-28 (%)



Source: FRA gender-based violence against women survey data set, 2012

**Figure 2 b: Psychological violence by current partner during the relationship and the number of different forms of psychological violence experienced by women, EU-28 (%)<sup>a,b</sup>**



Notes: *a* Based on all respondents who have a current partner (n = 30,675).

*b* Taken individually, the sum of the categories 'one form', '2-3 forms' and '4 or more forms' totals 24 %, while on the whole 23 % of women have experienced one or more forms of psychological violence. This difference is due to rounding.

Source: FRA gender-based violence against women survey data set, 2012

- ▶ Of women who are currently in a relationship, 7 % have experienced four or more different forms of psychological violence by their current partner (Figure 2 b).
- ▶ Most women who experience several (four or more) forms of psychological violence also indicated in the survey that their current partner has been physically and/or sexually violent against them.
- ▶ The likelihood of psychological violence in a woman's current relationship increases together with an increase in her partner's heavy alcohol use. The more often a current partner drinks so much that he gets drunk, the more common it is for the relationship to involve psychological violence.
- ▶ One in 10 women (9 %) has been stalked by their previous partner (Figure 3 b).

### Box 3: What the survey asked – stalking

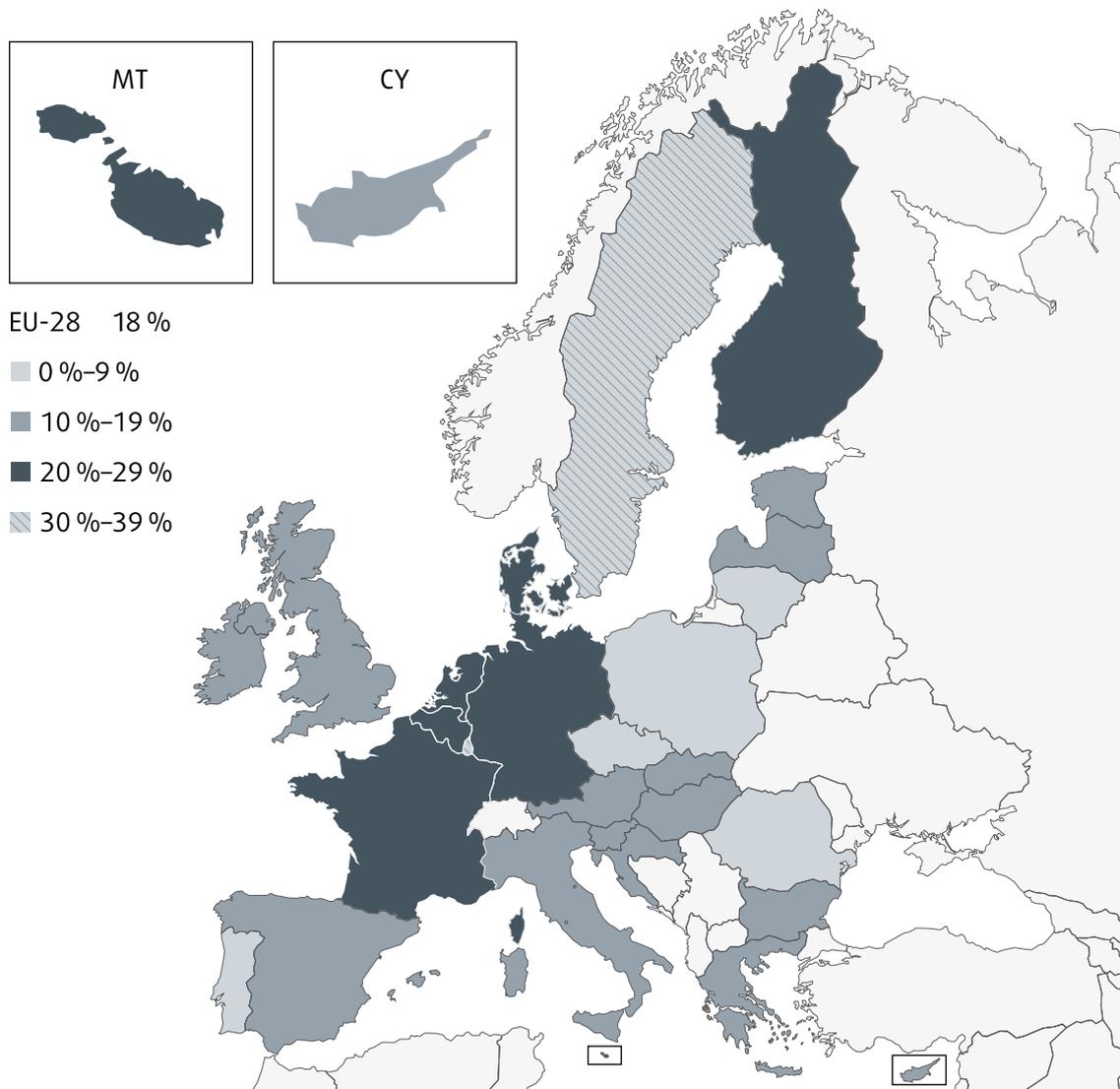
You may have been in a situation where the same person has been repeatedly offensive or threatening towards you. For the next questions I would like to ask you to think about both your current and previous partners as well as other people. Since you were 15 years old until now/ in the past 12 months, has the same person repeatedly done one or more of the following things to you:

- Sent you emails, text messages (SMS) or instant messages that were offensive or threatening?
- Sent you letters or cards that were offensive or threatening?
- Made offensive, threatening or silent phone calls to you?
- Posted offensive comments about you on the internet?
- Shared intimate photos or videos of you, on the internet or by mobile phone?
- Loitered or waited for you outside your home, workplace or school without a legitimate reason?
- Deliberately followed you around?
- Deliberately interfered with or damaged your property?

## 2.4. Stalking

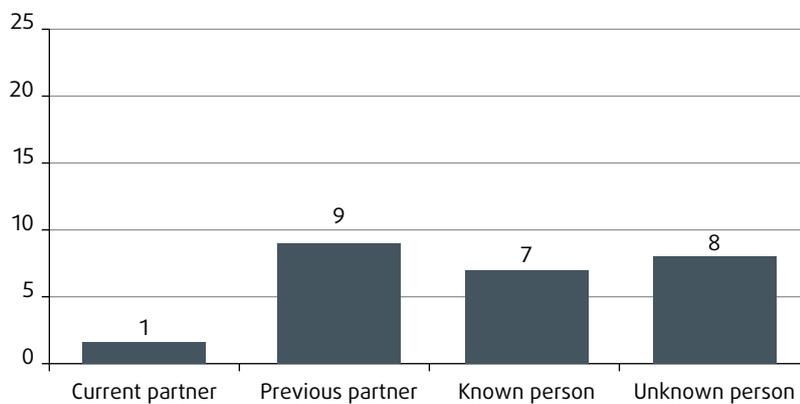
- ▶ In the EU-28, 18 % of women have experienced stalking since the age of 15 (Figure 3 a), and 5 % of women have experienced it in the 12 months before the survey interview. This corresponds to about 9 million women in the EU-28 experiencing stalking within a period of 12 months.
- ▶ Some 14 % of women have received offensive or threatening messages or phone calls repeatedly from the same person, and 8 % have been followed around or experienced somebody loitering outside their home or workplace. Out of all women surveyed, 3 % have experienced stalking that involved the same person repeatedly damaging her property.

Figure 3 a: Prevalence of stalking, women's experiences since the age of 15, EU-28 (%)



Note: Based on all respondents (N = 42,002).  
 Source: FRA gender-based violence against women survey data set, 2012

Figure 3 b: Prevalence of stalking since the age of 15, by type of perpetrator (%)



Notes: Current partner n = 31,007; previous partner n = 25,936; known person N = 42,002; unknown person N = 42,002.  
 Based on the incident(s) they have experienced, women could indicate more than one perpetrator.  
 Source: FRA gender-based violence against women survey data set, 2012

- ▶ Cyberstalking – stalking by means of email, text messages or the internet – affects young women in particular. Four per cent of all 18 to 29-year-old women, or 1.5 million, in the EU-28 have experienced cyberstalking in the 12 months before the interview, compared with 0.3 % of women who are 60 years old or older.<sup>2</sup>
- ▶ Out of all women victims of stalking, one in five (21 %) has experienced stalking that has lasted over two years.
- ▶ One in five victims of stalking (23 %) has had to change her phone number or email address as a result of the most serious incident of stalking.
- ▶ Three quarters of stalking cases (74 %) never came to the attention of the police, even though this involved the most serious case of stalking that the respondents referred to in the survey.
- ▶ When looking *only* at six specific forms of sexual harassment (see Box 4 for a list of these selected six items), which have been identified in the survey as more threatening and serious for the respondent: 45 % of women in the EU have experienced these forms of sexual harassment at least once in their lifetime, and 13 % in the last 12 months before the survey interview.
- ▶ Among women who have experienced sexual harassment at least once since the age of 15, 32 % indicate somebody from the employment context – such as a colleague, a boss or a customer – as a perpetrator.

## 2.5. Sexual harassment

Research has shown that individuals differ in their perception of what constitutes ‘sexual harassment’. Variation in the subjective meaning given to behaviour is also a reflection of prevalent social and cultural values, norms and attitudes concerning gender roles and appropriate interaction between the sexes.

- ▶ Depending on the number of different forms of sexual harassment that were asked about in the survey, an estimated 83 million to 102 million women (45 % to 55 % of women) in the EU-28 have experienced sexual harassment since the age of 15.
- ▶ An estimated 24 million to 39 million women (13 % to 21 %) in the EU-28 have experienced sexual harassment in the 12 months before the interview alone.

### Overall prevalence of sexual harassment

- ▶ Based on *all* 11 items used in the survey to measure sexual harassment (see Box 4 for a list of these items), every second woman (55 %) in the EU has experienced sexual harassment at least once since the age of 15, and one in five women (21 %) in the 12 months before the survey interview (Figure 4).

<sup>2</sup> In the survey, women could indicate that they do not use a mobile phone, email, social media or internet in general. The results on cyberstalking, as well as those on cyberharassment later in this report, are based on the experiences of those women who do use these modes of communication. The survey results therefore accommodate for the differences between EU Member States in the extent to which people have access to the internet and use mobile phones.

### Box 4: What the survey asked – sexual harassment

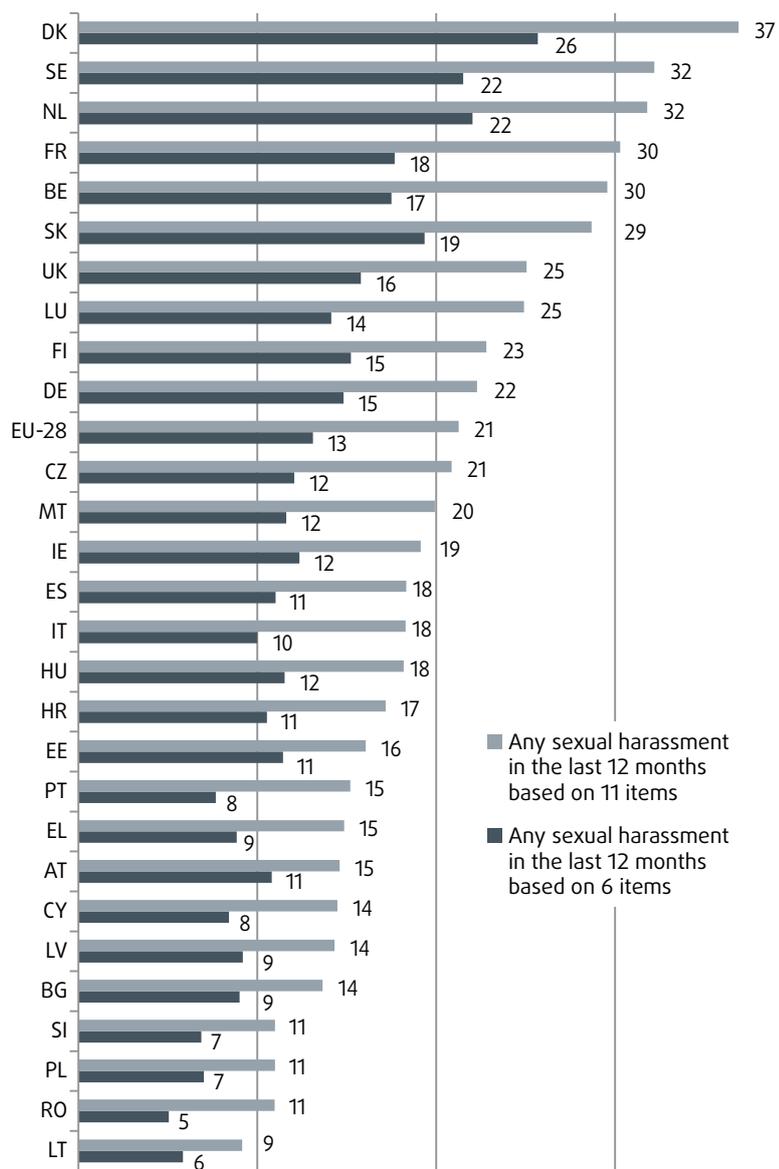
Some questions about experiences that women may have.

At times you may have experienced people acting towards you in a way that you felt was unwanted and offensive. How often have you experienced any of the following? How often has this happened to you in the past 12 months?

- *Unwelcome touching, hugging or kissing?\**
- *Sexually suggestive comments or jokes that made you feel offended?\**
- Inappropriate invitations to go out on dates?
- Intrusive questions about your private life that made you feel offended?
- Intrusive comments about your physical appearance that made you feel offended?
- Inappropriate staring or leering that made you feel intimidated?
- *Somebody sending or showing you sexually explicit pictures, photos or gifts that made you feel offended?\**
- *Somebody indecently exposing themselves to you?\**
- *Somebody made you watch or look at pornographic material against your wishes?\**
- *Unwanted sexually explicit emails or SMS messages that offended you?\**
- Inappropriate advances that offended you on social networking websites such as Facebook, or in internet chat rooms?

The asterisk (\*‘) indicates *six items which could be considered as the most serious* (out of the total list of 11 items asked about). The results concerning these six items have been analysed separately in order to assess the effect of the selection of items to the extent of sexual harassment, as measured in the survey.

Figure 4: Prevalence of sexual harassment in the 12 months before the survey, based on full and short sets of items measuring sexual harassment, by EU Member State (%)<sup>a,b,c</sup>



Notes: *a* Out of all respondents (N = 42,002).  
*b* Full set includes all 11 items used in the questionnaire to measure sexual harassment (see Box 4).  
*c* The short set includes the following six items: “Unwelcome touching, hugging or kissing”, “Sexually suggestive comments or jokes that made you feel offended”, “Somebody indecently exposing themselves to you”, “Sexually explicit emails or SMS messages that offended you”, “Sending or showing sexually explicit pictures, photos or gifts that made you feel offended”, “Someone making you watch or look at pornographic material against your wishes”.  
 Source: FRA gender-based violence against women survey data set, 2012

### Characteristics of sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is multidimensional, ranging from physical forms through verbal acts to non-verbal forms such as cyberharassment. Some examples are:

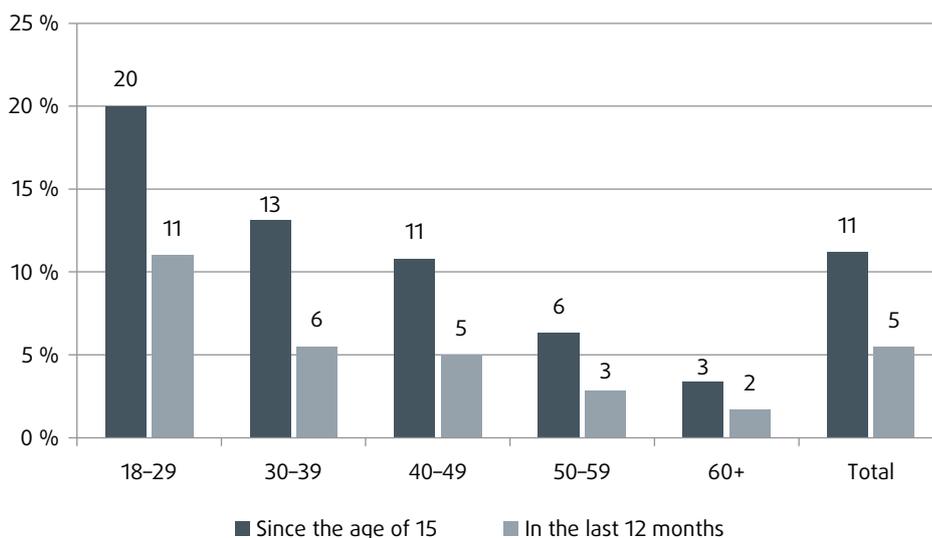
- ▶ physical forms of harassment – 29 % of women in the EU-28 have experienced unwelcome touching, hugging or kissing since they were 15 years old;
- ▶ verbal acts of harassment – 24 % of women have been subjected to sexually suggestive comments or jokes that offended them;
- ▶ non-verbal forms including cyberharassment – 11 % of women have received unwanted, offensive sexually explicit emails or SMS messages, or offending, inappropriate advances on social networking sites (referring to experiences since the age of 15).
- ▶ Looking at repeat victimisation, one in five women (19 %) has experienced unwelcome touching, hugging or kissing at least twice since she was 15 years old, and 6 % of women have been subjected to this physical form of harassment more than six times since the age of 15. Some 37 % of all victimised

women have been confronted with two or three different forms of sexual harassment since the age of 15, 27 % with four to six different forms, and 8 % with seven or more different forms of sexual harassment.

### Details of sexual harassment

- ▶ Generally, the risk of exposure to sexual harassment is above average for women aged between 18 and 29 years, and between 30 and 39 years. More than one in three women (38 %) aged between 18 and 29 years experienced at least one form of sexual harassment in the 12 months before the interview, as well as almost one in four women (24 %) between 30 and 39 years of age.
- ▶ The risk of young women aged 18–29 years becoming a target of threatening and offensive advances on the internet is twice as high as the risk for women aged 40–49 years, and more than three times higher than the risk for women aged 50–59 years (Figure 5).
- ▶ Sexual harassment is more commonly experienced by women with a university degree and by women in the highest occupational groups: 75 % of women in the top management category and 74 % of those in the professional occupational category have experienced sexual harassment in their lifetime, compared with 44 % of women in the occupational category ‘skilled manual worker’ or 41 % of women who state that they have never done paid work. This finding could result from a variety of reasons, such as professional women being more alert to what constitutes sexual harassment, as well as professional women’s exposure to work environments and situations where they are at enhanced risk of abuse.
- ▶ In most cases of sexual harassment since a woman was 15 years old (68 %), the perpetrator was somebody she did not know. Other perpetrators of sexual harassment include people whom the woman knows (without specifying it further) (35 %), someone related to a woman’s employment such as a colleague, boss or customer (32 %), or a friend or an acquaintance (31 %).
- ▶ Out of all women who described the most serious incident of sexual harassment that has happened to them, 35 % kept the incident to themselves and did not speak about it to anyone, 28 % talked to a friend, 24 % spoke to a family member or a relative and 14 % informed their partner. Only 4 % reported the incident to the police, 4 % talked to an employer or boss at their workplace, and less than 1 % consulted a lawyer, a victim support organisation or a trade union representative.

Figure 5: Forms of sexual cyberharassment since the age of 15 and in the 12 months before the survey, by age groups (%)<sup>a</sup>



Notes: <sup>a</sup> Out of all women excluding cases where the answer to the questions on cyberharassment was not applicable (n = 35,820); 6,084 respondents answered ‘not applicable’ on both items; information on age was missing for 98 cases).

Source: FRA gender-based violence against women survey data set, 2012

## 2.6. Childhood experiences of violence

► Overall, considering physical, sexual and psychological violence, 35 % of women indicate that they have experienced at least one of the three forms of violence before the age of 15 by an adult perpetrator.

► **Prevalence of sexual violence:**

Of all women surveyed, 12% of women indicate that they experienced some form of sexual abuse or incident by an adult before the age of 15. This corresponds to about 21 million women in the EU (Table 7).

### Box 5: What the survey asked – childhood experience of sexual violence

Before the age of 15 how often did an adult who was 18 years or over the following to you, when you did not want them to:

- Expose their genitals to you?
- Make you pose naked in front of any person or in photographs, video or an internet webcam?
- Touch your genitals or breasts against your will?
- Forced you to have sexual intercourse?

► **Prevalence of physical violence:**

On average, 27 % of women have experienced physical violence by an adult in childhood – that is, before they were 15 years of age.

► **Prevalence of psychological violence:**

Some 10 % of women indicate that they have experienced some form of psychological violence by an adult family member.

### Box 6: What the survey asked – childhood experience of physical violence

Before the age of 15 how often did an adult who was 18 years or over the following to you:

- Slap or pull you by the hair so that it hurt?
- Hit you very hard so that it hurt?
- Kicked you very hard so that it hurt?
- Beat you very hard with an object like a stick, cane or belt?
- Stabbed or cut you with something?

### What the survey asked – childhood experience of psychological violence

Before the age of 15 how often did an adult family member the following to you:

- Said, that you were not loved?
- Said, that they wished you had never been born?
- Threatened to abandon you or throw you out of the family home?
- Any adult: threatened to hurt you badly or kill you?

Table 7: Childhood experience of any violence before the age of 15, by adult perpetrators (%)<sup>a,b</sup>

EU Member State	Physical violence	Sexual violence	Any physical or sexual violence	Psychological violence by a family member	Any physical, sexual or psychological violence
AT	27	5	30	9	31
BE	14	14	25	11	30
BG	28	3	29	5	30
CY	10	4	12	5	15
CZ	30	3	32	8	34
DE	37	13	42	13	44
DK	36	13	42	12	46
EE	43	10	48	9	50
EL	20	5	23	7	25
ES	21	11	28	6	30
FI	46	11	51	10	53
FR	33	20	44	14	47
HR	28	2	30	5	31

EU Member State	Physical violence	Sexual violence	Any physical or sexual violence	Psychological violence by a family member	Any physical, sexual or psychological violence
HU	20	5	24	8	27
IE	21	9	26	5	27
IT	25	11	31	9	33
LT	15	6	18	8	20
LU	35	15	43	13	44
LV	30	7	33	8	34
MT	16	10	21	4	23
NL	16	20	30	14	35
PL	14	4	17	5	18
PT	24	3	25	5	27
RO	23	(1)	23	4	24
SE	33	15	41	12	44
SI	8	6	12	7	16
SK	33	4	34	8	36
UK	25	18	36	11	40
<b>EU-28</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>35</b>

Notes: a Results based on a small number of responses are statistically less reliable, so observations based on fewer than 30 responses are put in brackets and observations based on fewer than five responses are suppressed (denoted with '-').

b Multiple response possible – at least one incidence of physical or sexual or psychological violence occurred (N = 42,002).

Source: FRA gender-based violence against women survey data set, 2012

### Details on the perpetrators of violence in childhood

- ▶ Perpetrators of *physical* violence in childhood mainly came from within the family. More than half of the women who have experienced some form of physical violence before the age of 15 identify their father as a perpetrator (55 %), and almost half of women name the mother as a perpetrator (46 %) (women could indicate one or more perpetrators).
- ▶ Almost all (97 %) perpetrators of sexual violence in childhood are men. Every second woman who was a victim of sexual violence in childhood states that the perpetrator was a man she did not know before.

### Forms of physical violence

- ▶ Some 22 % of all women surveyed say that an adult, aged 18 years or over, “slapped or pulled her hair so that it hurt”. The majority of women states that this happened more than once (16 % of the total surveyed).

### Relationship between violence in childhood and later experiences

- ▶ Close to one third (30 %) of women who experienced sexual victimisation in a former or current relationship indicate experiences of sexual violence in childhood, compared with 10 % of women who have not experienced sexual victimisation in their current or former relationship indicating experiences of sexual violence in childhood (Figure 6).

### Forms of psychological violence

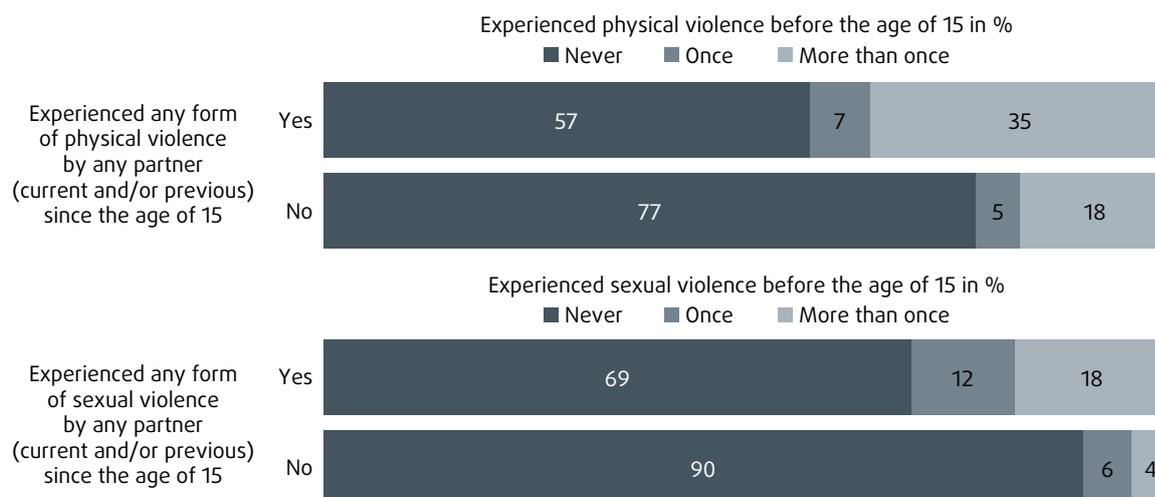
- ▶ One in 10 women (10 %) refers to forms of psychological victimisation in childhood within the family; 6 % of women remember having been told they were not loved. This was the most common form of psychological violence out of those included in the survey (see Box 6).

### Children’s exposure to violence in the family

- ▶ Overall, 73 % of women who have been victims of violent incidents by their previous or current partner indicate that children living with them were aware of the violence.



**Figure 6: Relationship between physical and sexual violence before the age of 15 and experiences of physical and sexual violence by a partner later in life (%)<sup>a</sup>**



Note: <sup>a</sup> Out of all women (N = 42,002).

Source: FRA gender-based violence against women survey data set, 2012

## 2.7. Fear of victimisation and its effect

- ▶ Women who have heightened levels of fear of assault tend to have also experienced physical or sexual violence in their lives.
- ▶ One in five women (21 %) has worried (at least) sometimes in the 12 months before the interview about the possibility of being physically or sexually assaulted by someone.
- ▶ Women were most worried about a possible assault by strangers – 15 % of women have worried about this at least sometimes in the 12 months before the interview.
- ▶ Of all women surveyed, 7 % indicate they have worried about the possibility of physical or sexual assault by a previous partner in the 12 months before the interview.
- ▶ Slightly more than half of all women in the EU (53 %) avoid certain situations or places, at least sometimes, for fear of being physically or sexually assaulted (Table 8). In comparison, as shown by existing general population surveys on crime and victimisation, men’s fear of crime, and its impact on their lives, is generally lower than women’s.

- ▶ Across the 28 EU Member States, 8 % of women say that in the 12 months before the interview they have, at least sometimes, carried something for self-defence purposes.
- ▶ Younger women worry more than older women about physical or sexual assault in public places, and they are more worried than older women about assault by strangers.

## 2.8. Attitudes and awareness

When looking at the survey results, consideration needs to be given to the possibility that in societies in which intimate partner violence is considered largely a private matter, incidents of violence against women are unlikely to be shared with family and friends, and are also rarely reported to the police.

- ▶ Eight in 10 women (78 %) in the EU think that violence against women is very common or fairly common in their country (Figure 7); Figure 8 shows the breakdown by EU Member State.

**Table 8: Women who have avoided at least sometimes<sup>a</sup> certain places or situations in the 12 months before the survey for fear of being physically or sexually assaulted**

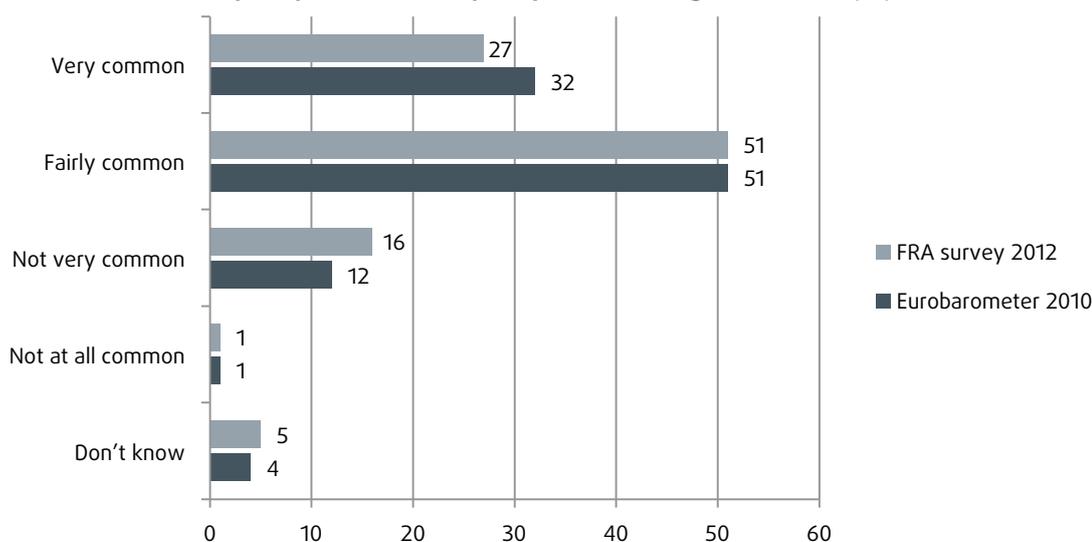
Public domain	%	n <sup>b</sup>
Avoided leaving your home on your own	14	41,812
Avoided taking certain streets or going to certain areas	37	41,818
Avoided going to places where there are no other people	40	41,751
Private domain	%	n <sup>b</sup>
Avoided opening your door when home alone	31	41,822
Avoided going home because of what might happen there	4	41,664
Avoided being alone with a colleague or boss at work	3	23,647
At least one of the above	53	

Notes: *a* Includes women who say that they avoid the situations or places ‘sometimes’, ‘often’ or ‘all the time.’

*b* Based on all respondents, excluding those who declined to answer. For category ‘Avoided being alone with a colleague or boss at work’ the results are based on all respondents for whom the question was applicable (that is, who has been working in the past 12 months in a job involving colleagues or a boss).

Source: FRA gender-based violence against women survey data set, 2012

**Figure 7: Women’s overall perception on the frequency of violence against women (%)<sup>a,b,c</sup>**



Notes: *a* FRA survey, out of all respondents (N = 42,002).

*b* Special Eurobarometer 344 (2010), out of all female respondents (n = 13,853).

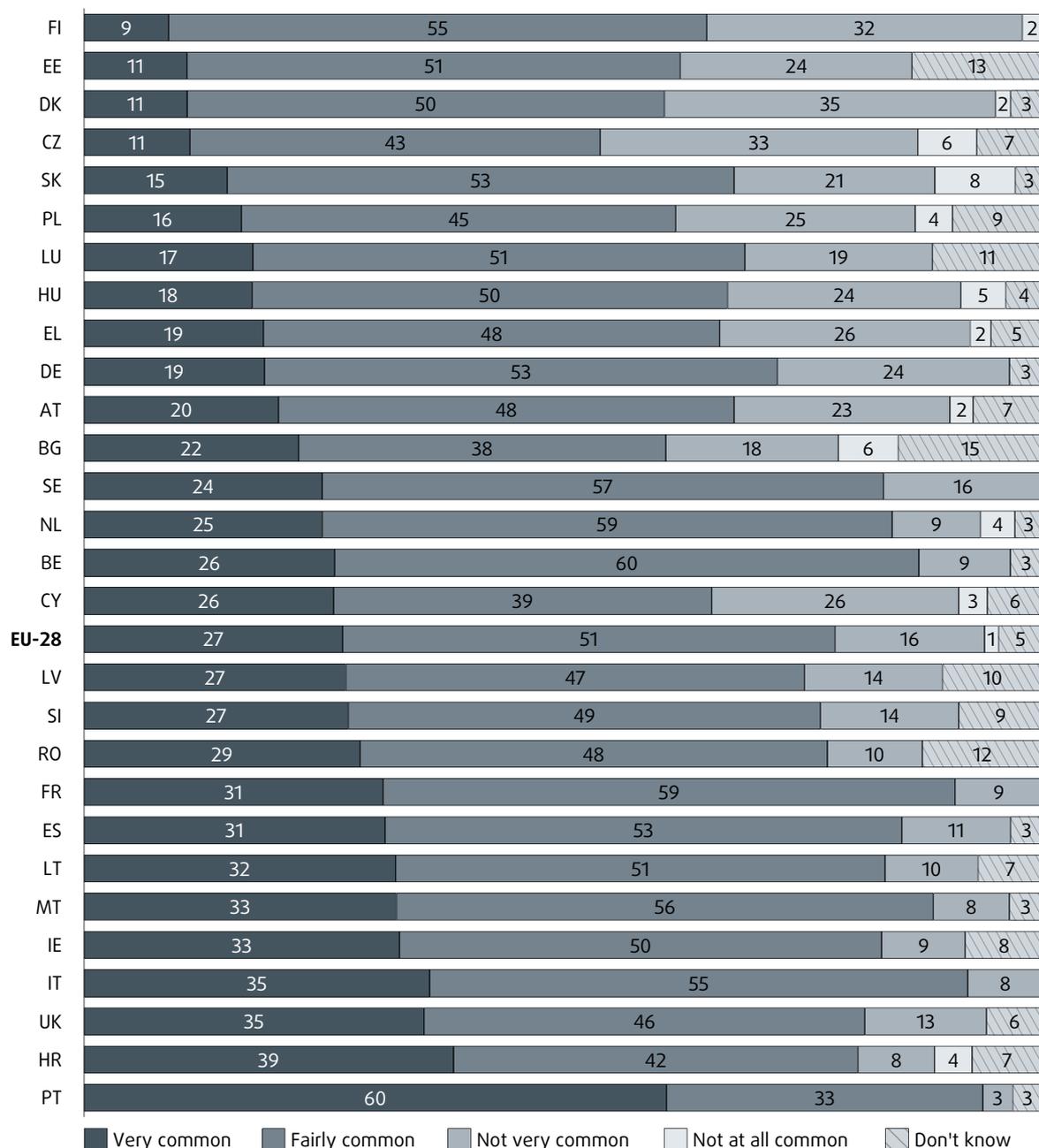
*c* The wording of the FRA survey question refers to ‘violence against women by partners, acquaintances or strangers’, while the question in Special Eurobarometer 344 asked about ‘domestic violence against women’.

Sources: FRA gender-based violence against women survey data set, 2012; Special EB Domestic violence against women data set, 2010

- ▶ On average, 39 % of women in the EU indicate that they know of other women who are victims of ‘domestic violence’ in their circle of friends and family. More than one in five women (22 %) know someone at their current or previous place of work or studies who has been a victim of intimate partner violence.
- ▶ On average, every second woman in the EU is aware of existing legislation concerning protection and prevention of domestic violence. Half of the women surveyed state either that there is no specific legislation on domestic violence in their country of residence or that they do not know if there is (Figure 9).
- ▶ On average, almost one in five women (19 %) in the EU is not aware of any of the support services for victims of violence against women in their country that were listed in the questionnaire.
- ▶ Every second woman in the EU, on average, has recently seen or heard campaigns addressing violence against women.

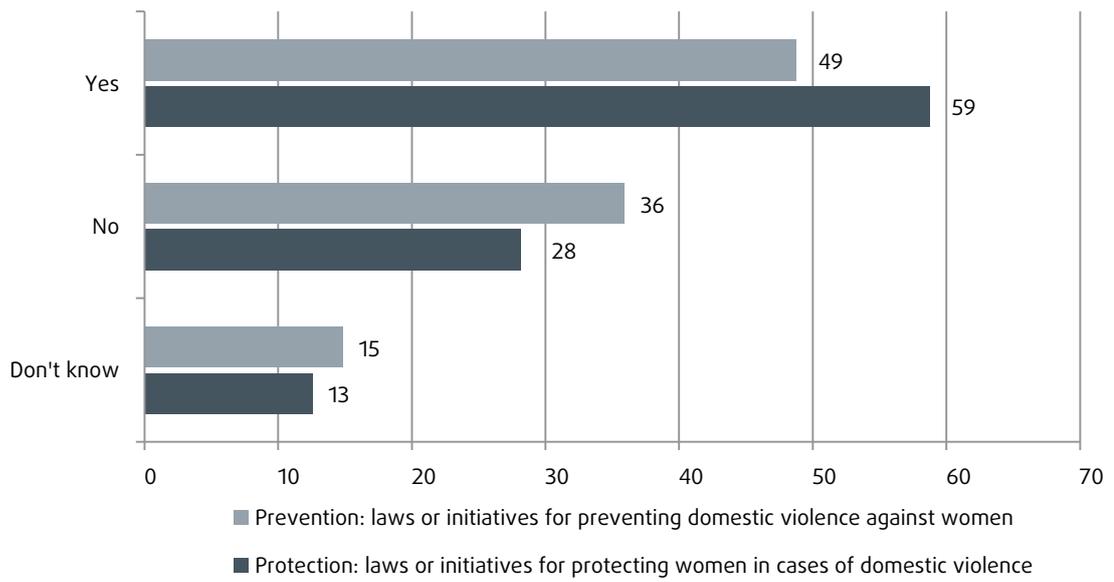
- Close to nine in 10 women (87 %) would support the practice whereby doctors routinely ask about violence when they see women with certain injuries in their practice.

Figure 8: Women’s perception of the frequency of violence against women, by EU Member State (%)<sup>a</sup>



Note: a Out of all respondents (N = 42,002).  
 Source: FRA gender-based violence against women survey data set, 2012

Figure 9: Level of awareness of specific laws or political initiatives in the EU-28 (%)<sup>a</sup>



Note: <sup>a</sup> Out of all respondents (N = 42,002).

Source: FRA gender-based violence against women survey data set, 2012



# Ways forward

The survey presents the EU and its Member States with the most comprehensive EU-wide dataset on violence against women, which can serve to inform policy responses and action on the ground.

The FRA survey findings show that violence against women is an extensive but widely under-reported human rights abuse across the EU. FRA has formulated a series of opinions that are outlined at the beginning of this report. They are presented in more detail at the end of each chapter in a separate main results report accompanying the survey. These opinions aim to support EU and national policy makers, where relevant, to introduce and implement comprehensive measures to prevent and respond to gender-based violence against women.

General considerations can be summarised as follows. They give possible 'ways forward' for responding to violence against women and can be taken into account when looking at the survey results.

- Future EU strategies on equality between women and men could build on the survey's findings to address key areas of concern with respect to women's experiences of violence. Examples could include new or newly recognised forms of violence against women, such as stalking or abuse through the medium of new technologies, as well as aspects of violence that are under-reported by women to the police and victim support organisations.
- Given the scale of violence against women reported in the survey, the EU's post-Stockholm Programme landscape in the field of justice and home affairs should ensure that violence against women is acknowledged and addressed as a fundamental rights abuse within the framework of the EU's responses to crime and criminal victimisation.
- The EU Victims' Directive applies to all crime victims and makes reference specifically to victims of gender-based violence alongside other vulnerable victims. It provides a solid base on which to build targeted responses, at the Member State level, to meet the needs of women as victims of violence with respect to victim support and criminal justice interventions. As part of the review of the implementation of the directive undertaken by the European Commission, a component could assess whether the directive meets – in practice – the needs and rights of women who are victims of violence.
- The EU should explore the possibility of accession to the Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). At present, it is the most comprehensive regional instrument addressing violence against women. The FRA survey results can also support EU Member States in ratifying the convention.
- EU Member States are encouraged to develop specific national action plans on violence against women, which should use the results of the survey in the absence of data at the national level. Civil society actors working with women who are victims of violence can usefully be involved in the development of action plans to help ensure that these can deliver practical results for victims and are sustainable.
- EU policy in the fields of employment, education, health, and information and communication technology should address the impact of violence against women in their respective fields. This should be reflected at the Member State level in specific policy interventions and national action plans that address these different fields.
- The EU should ensure that funding mechanisms that continue the work of DAPHNE and other programmes, which variously contribute to the protection of children, young people and women against all forms of violence, can be used to further support research and work by civil society organisations addressing violence against women. In particular, funding is needed for the work of targeted victim support services in the field of violence against women.
- A victim-centred and rights-centred approach to women as victims of violence needs to be reinforced at the EU and Member State level. Positive examples have emerged in recent years in a number of Member States that recognise 'domestic' or 'intimate partner' violence as a matter for state intervention rather than a private matter.
- The EU and Member States could signify their commitment to the collection of data, on a regular basis, on different forms of violence against women. This can provide evidence for the development of policy responses and action on the ground. This process could be supported by Eurostat and its relevant

expert groups, and could be used to feed data to the specific monitoring bodies of the UN and the Council of Europe, as well as the European Institute for Gender Equality.

- EU and Member State policies and national action plans to combat violence against women must be developed on the basis of evidence that draws directly from women's experiences of violence. Data

on women's experiences of violence should be collected in addition to administrative and criminal justice data, which do not capture the majority of unreported victimisation. The EU and Member States should promote and fund surveys in a concerted effort to uncover information on the extent and nature of violence experienced by women. These surveys can be repeated every few years to measure developments over time.



# The survey in a nutshell

The FRA survey on violence against women – based on face-to-face interviews with 42,000 women – is the most comprehensive survey to date in the European Union, and worldwide, on women’s experiences of violence.

Given that official data collection mechanisms do not reflect the real extent and nature of violence against women, various international and national bodies and organisations have repeatedly called for the collection of data on this specific human rights abuse. With the publication of the results from the FRA’s survey, the EU and its Member States have – for the first time – EU-wide comparable data on which to formulate policies and take concrete action to address violence against women.

## Why did FRA undertake a survey on violence against women?

FRA developed the survey following a request by the Spanish Council Presidency of the EU in 2010, and also by the European Parliament, to collect comparable data on gender-based violence against women.

## Who took part in the survey?

In each EU Member State, a minimum of 1,500 women took part in the survey – from 1,500 interviewees in Estonia to 1,620 in the Czech Republic – with the exception of Luxembourg, where 908 women were interviewed.

The survey targeted the general population of women aged 18–74 years who live in the EU and speak at least one of the official languages of their country of residence. All respondents were selected randomly and the survey results are representative at both EU and national level.

## How was the survey developed and conducted?

FRA consulted with key policy makers, practitioners, researchers and survey experts on the design of the survey and the issues to be covered.

Draft survey questions were tested in six EU Member States: Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland and

Spain. The results of the pretest informed the development of the final survey questionnaire for the survey in all 28 EU Member States.

All interviews were conducted face to face by female interviewers in interviewees’ homes. A standard questionnaire was used, which was developed by FRA building on established survey instruments, and which was translated into the main languages used in the EU Member States. Questionnaires were filled out by interviewers using either pen and paper interviewing (PAPI) or computer assisted personal interviewing (CAPI), whereby interviewers use laptops to fill out the questionnaire. The interviews took place between April and September 2012.

The fieldwork was managed by Ipsos MORI, a large international survey company, working in partnership with HEUNI (the European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control, which is affiliated with the United Nations) and UNICRI (the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute). The project was under the overall management of FRA staff.

## What did the survey ask?

The survey covered women’s personal experiences of physical and sexual violence, psychological partner violence, sexual harassment and stalking. Most questions referred to women’s experiences since the age of 15, but the survey questionnaire also included a set of questions on women’s experiences of violence in childhood – before the age of 15 – in cases where adult perpetrators were involved. The survey also included questions on women’s opinions and perceptions regarding violence against women and domestic violence.

The survey questions addressed incidents of violence by partners and by other perpetrators. Women were also asked a number of background questions about their age, education and employment situation (for example), which can be used to analyse in more detail the correlates and risk factors of victimisation.

All women were asked the same questions in the survey, translated into Member States’ languages.

For more details about the development and monitoring of the fieldwork, see the full survey technical report at: <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/vaw-survey-technical-report>.



European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights

**Violence against women: an EU-wide survey**

Results at a glance

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## HELPING TO MAKE FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS A REALITY FOR EVERYONE IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Violence against women undermines women's core fundamental rights such as dignity, access to justice and gender equality. For example, one in three women has experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15; one in five women has experienced stalking; every second woman has been confronted with one or more forms of sexual harassment. What emerges is a picture of extensive abuse that affects many women's lives but is systematically under-reported to the authorities. The scale of violence against women is therefore not reflected by official data. This FRA survey is the first of its kind on violence against women across the 28 Member States of the European Union. It is based on interviews with 42,000 women across the EU, who were asked about their experiences of physical, sexual and psychological violence, including incidents of intimate partner violence ('domestic violence'). The survey also included questions on stalking, sexual harassment, and the role played by new technologies in women's experiences of abuse. In addition, it asked about their experiences of violence in childhood. Based on the detailed findings, FRA suggests courses of action in different areas that are touched by violence against women and go beyond the narrow confines of criminal law, ranging from employment and health to the medium of new technologies.



Publications Office

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