**Violence against women must be recognised as an EU crime**

**At its July plenary, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) debated the Commission's draft directive to tackle gender-based violence and gender equality in presence of Cristina Fabre of the European Institute for Gender Equality. The Committee adopted two opinions with recommendations for making the legislation more effective in combatting such an issue of epidemic proportions and demanded for its inclusion in the list of EU crimes.**

In recent years, the European Union has stepped up its efforts to promote and mainstream gender equality and women’s empowerment. The goal is to create a gender-equal Europe in which everyone is freeto pursue their chosen path, has equal opportunities to thrive, and can participate in and leadour society equally.

Despite these efforts, violence against women remains the most common human rights violation across Europe, with one third of all women being victims of violence. And the situation keeps deteriorating: the pandemic has had a significant impact on women's safety, with restrictions keeping women and children at home with their abusers and resulting in an increase in cases of domestic violence, while the current war in Ukraine serves as yet another reminder of women's increased vulnerability to violence in armed conflicts.

Opening the debate, **EESC President Christa Schweng** stated that "*Gender equality is at the heart of the European project and a crucial precondition to build a fairer and more prosperous society. As the voice of organised civil society, the EESC is committed to a more gender equal society and to achieve a Union free of violence against women and girls."*

**Cristina Fabre,** leader of the gender-based violence team of the European Institute for Gender Equality, mentioned the economic impact of inequalities in Europe: "*We see that promoting gender equality improves our economy. GDP per capita has the potential to rise from 6.9% to 9.6%, if we are able to ensure equal rights for women and girls*."

**José Antonio Moreno Diaz,** rapporteur of the opinion on the recent [proposal for a directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/combatting-violence-against-women), discussed how the EU can combat this epidemic of violence against women and girls, which he describes as a "*form of terrorism claiming thousands of victims each year*." The EESC is deeply concerned about the systematic denial of structural violence against women from the extreme right. This denial not only undermines equal coexistence between men and women, but it also undermines the values and principles enshrined in Article 2 of the TEU. "*Violence against women is a violation of human rights so we call for its inclusion in the list of EU crimes under Article 83(1) of the TFEU"* urgedMoreno Diaz.

In this opinion, the Committee argues that social problems are not solved purely through the court system and that punishment should not be the sole means of action. "*We also need to ensure victims' access to healthcare services, including sexual and reproductive health services*", explained the co-rapporteur **Ody Neisingh** emphasising the needs of women in vulnerable situations, " *Fix the system, not the women.* *Particular attention should be devoted to women with disabilities and women in war."*

On the request of the Czech Presidency, a separate opinion on [gender equality](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/gender-equality) was also adopted during this plenary. The EESC Rapporteur **Milena Angelova** explained that violence against women stems from deeply rooted gender stereotypes and that gender equality, being a matter of culture, requires recognition, ownership, and constant commitment by all actors of society. "*Eliminating inequalities requires a holistic and horizontal approach that includes mainstreaming gender equality in all policy decisions.* *We must build a life-long gender equality culture, encompassing all stages and areas of life*", said Angelova.

At the margin of the debate, the EESC launched the Danish Culture Institute's online video exhibition 'Voices of Violence'. The video series depicts the frightening reality of female survivors of violence across Europe. The exhibition will run from July 13 to August 31. More information is available on the EESC [website](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/agenda/our-events/events/voices-violence) or by scanning the QR code below.

