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## **Measuring violence against women: Further development of surveys and methods for collecting comparable data, building on the 28-country survey of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights**

**Note by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)\***

### *Abstract*

Proposed indicators associated with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, target 5.2 – elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls – require survey data concerning the prevalence of various forms of physical and sexual violence against women. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) carried out in 2012 the first-ever European Union -wide survey on violence against women. The results can be further analysed to provide data for 28 countries and two SDG indicators, and more countries may be added to the comparison in the future as other organisations apply the FRA violence against women survey methodology outside the European Union. This paper discusses the challenges in collecting comparable data on violence against women, as well as presenting data based on the proposed SDG indicators.

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## I. Background

1. Through the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in 2015 the UN renewed the call for elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls – this is set out in SDG 5 (achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls), target 5.2 (‘Eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation’). Following the agreement on the SDGs, attention has turned to the development of indicators and data collection tools related to each of the goals.
2. Currently, two indicators have been proposed for monitoring the achievement of target 5.2<sup>1</sup>:
  - (a) Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner, in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age
  - (b) Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age and place of occurrence
3. It is important to note that there are some notable differences between the two SDG indicators and similar indicators, which were adopted earlier as a part of the minimum set of gender indicators<sup>2</sup>. The indicators included in the minimum set of gender indicators are:
  - (a) Indicator 48: Proportion of ever-partnered women (aged 15-49) subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner, in the last 12 months.
  - (b) Indicator 49: Proportion of women (aged 15-49) subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner, since age 15.
4. Comparing these two pairs of indicators, it is possible to observe that in the first instance the SDG indicator expands the scope of the earlier indicator 48 from the minimum set of gender indicators, by including psychological violence (in addition to physical and sexual violence), as well as by extending the age range of women from 15-49 years to 15 years and older. In the case of the second indicator, the change concerns similarly the age range of women being considered, as well as a move to focus on experiences in the past 12 months instead of experiences since the age of 15. The latter might be particularly challenging from the perspective of an efficient and reliable data collection as the prevalence rates of sexual violence by a non-partner in the previous 12 months is usually lower compared with the lifetime prevalence rate (since the age of 15), a fact which would also have an impact on further disaggregation of the data, e.g. by age and place of occurrence.
5. In addition, the indicator 16.b.1 *Proportion of the population reporting having personally felt discriminated against or harassed within the previous 12 months on the basis of a*

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations (UN), Statistical Commission (2016), *Report of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators* (E/CN.3/2016/2/Rev.1)

<sup>2</sup> United Nations (UN), Statistical Commission (2013), *Report on the forty-fourth session of the United Nations Statistical Commission* (E/2013/24; E/CN.3/2013/33). See also <http://genderstats.un.org/>.

*ground of discrimination prohibited under international human rights law* has been adopted to measure progress towards achieving the SDG 16.b *to promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development*.<sup>3</sup> This specific indicator could be used in combination with the two indicators adopted to measure progress towards SDG target 5.2 by calculating the percentage of women reporting having personally felt discriminated against or *harassed* within the last 12 months on the basis of sex, and also in combination with the indicator 5.1.1 “*Whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex*” concerning SDG 5.1 to end all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere. For example, the Council of Europe Convention on Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) includes **sexual harassment** (Article 40 of the Convention) as a form of violence against women, against which parties to the Convention need to take the necessary legislative or other measures.

6. In order to use the proposed indicators to monitor UN member states’ progress towards achieving the sustainable development goal concerning elimination of violence against women and girls, further efforts are needed to develop and implement regular survey data collection. To ensure comparability of data across countries, the UNODC-UNECE Manual on Victimization surveys (2010) and UN Guidelines for Producing Statistics on Violence against Women (2014) have offered researchers tools on promising and tested practices as concerns collecting survey data on violence against women.

## II. FRA survey

7. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) has put the existing guidelines into practice when carrying out the first EU-wide survey on violence against women.<sup>4</sup> The FRA’s survey, which in total covered a random probability sample of 42,000 women aged 18-74 years (interviewed face-to-face by trained female interviewers) across the 28 European Union Member States, collected data on the prevalence of physical and sexual violence, sexual harassment, stalking and violence in childhood. Victims of violence were also asked questions concerning the impact and consequences of violence and use of victim support services – information that policy makers, practitioners and civil society can use to further help meet the needs of women victims of violence.
8. The survey’s approach to measuring various forms of violence was designed in consultation with experts in national and international violence against women survey research, and based on promising practices identified through different national and cross-national victimisation surveys. The forms of violence covered in the survey reflect the requirements set out in the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combatting

<sup>3</sup> United Nations (UN), Statistical Commission (2016), *Report of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators* (E/CN.3/2016/2/Rev.1)

<sup>4</sup> There have, to date, been a few international surveys on violence against women. Among these are the WHO’s 10 country survey on women’s health and domestic violence against women (2005), which did not cover the EU, and the 11 country international violence against women survey (2008), which included three EU Member States. Both these surveys show wide variations in prevalence rates for violence across countries.

Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention)<sup>5</sup> for state parties to the Convention with respect to criminalising specific forms of violence against women. FRA's survey approach is generally in line with the recommendations of the UN Guidelines for Producing Statistics on Violence against Women<sup>6</sup>, which were adopted after data collection for the FRA survey had taken place.

### **FRA survey: Main findings**

#### **Extent of the problem**

- An estimated 13 million women in the EU have experienced physical violence in the course of 12 months before the survey interviews.
- An estimated 3.7 million women in the EU have experienced sexual violence in the course of 12 months before the survey interviews.

#### **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.
- 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.

#### **Characteristics of physical violence**

- Some 31 % of women have experienced one or more acts of physical violence since the age of 15. 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.

#### **Characteristics of sexual violence**

- In total, 11 % of women have experienced some form of sexual violence since they were 15 years old, either by a partner or some other person.
- One in 20 women (5 %) has been raped since the age of 15.
- 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.

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<sup>5</sup> Council of Europe, Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, CETS No. 210, 2011. For more information see <http://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/home>.

### 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.
- The most common forms of physical violence involve pushing or shoving, slapping or grabbing, or pulling a woman's hair.
- 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.
- 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, 20 % experienced violence by their current partner while pregnant.

### 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.

The results of FRA's violence against women survey are available in various formats:

#### Main results report (in English)

<http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/violence-against-women-eu-wide-survey-main-results-report>

#### Summary report – Results at a Glance (in 22 languages)

<http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/violence-against-women-eu-wide-survey-results-glance>

#### Interactive online data explorer

<http://fra.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/data-and-maps/survey-data-explorer-violence-against-women-survey>

The survey results are accompanied by a comprehensive technical report and the survey questionnaire

<http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/violence-against-women-eu-wide-survey-survey-methodology-sample-and-fieldwork>

The survey data set (microdata) is available for researchers who want to carry out further analysis of the results. For details see:

<http://fra.europa.eu/en/news/2015/fra-violence-against-women-survey-dataset-released>

### III. Analysis of FRA survey results with respect to the SDG indicators

9. The first indicator for SDG target 5.2 measures the 12-month prevalence of physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or a previous partner among women who are 15 years of age or older. The FRA survey measured physical violence by asking respondents nine questions concerning various acts of physical violence, such as being slapped, beaten with a fist or having a hard object thrown at you<sup>7</sup>. The same nine questions were asked up to three times, separately with respect to violence perpetrated by the current partner, previous partner and other perpetrators (non-partner violence). Sexual violence was captured in the survey using four questions concerning rape, attempted rape and being forced or having to consent to other sexual activity. Similar to the questions on physical violence, questions concerning sexual violence were also asked separately for the different perpetrators. Taken together these questions can be used to develop a prevalence of physical and/or sexual violence.
10. The FRA survey approached psychological partner violence using a total of 17 questions about emotional abuse and controlling behaviour by a respondent's current or any previous partner. The various forms of psychological violence asked about in the survey can be summarised in four categories: controlling behaviour; economic violence; abusive behaviour; blackmail with/abuse of children. Due to the fact that incidents of psychological partner violence were not measured for the 12 months before the survey but for the current or former partnership as a whole, this information cannot be included in the calculation of the first indicator proposed for monitoring the achievement of target 5.2.
11. In addition to defining the types of violence, the reference period and the perpetrators concerned, indicator one refers to the experiences of women who are 15 years of age or older. The FRA survey interviewed women aged 18-74 years, but the survey questions concerned women's experiences since the age of 15.
12. Different surveys on violence against women have defined the minimum age of respondents in various ways. Some, but not all surveys, have also defined an upper age limit to the respondents. In their 2012, report the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) offers an overview of some of the national prevalence surveys that have collected data on violence against women<sup>8</sup>. The overview suggests most existing surveys have applied a lower age limit of 18 years, but there are also exceptions to this.
13. Requirement of parental consent may make it difficult for a survey to interview persons under the age of 18. While parental consent could be established in face-to-face interviews, it is more complicated or impossible to combine with telephone interviews or self-completion questionnaires. A further difficulty in terms of parental consent concerns the fact that an informed consent should be based on information concerning the study –

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<sup>7</sup> FRA designed the questionnaire, which was used to carry out the interviews in all 28 EU Member States. The questionnaire is available at: <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/violence-against-women-eu-wide-survey-survey-methodology-sample-and-fieldwork>.

<sup>8</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality (2012). Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU Member States: Violence against Women – Victim Support. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

however, recommendations on violence against women research such as those by the World Health Organization<sup>9</sup> highlight the importance of not disclosing the content of the survey questions to other members of the household apart from the respondent. This is to ensure the confidentiality of the interview and ultimately the safety of the respondent. UN Guidelines for producing statistics on violence against women<sup>10</sup> also note that seeking parental consent may put the confidentiality of the interview and safety of the respondent at risk, but the report goes on to suggest a minimum age of 15 years for respondents in surveys that collect data on violence against women.

14. FRA mapped in 2014 the requirements concerning parental consent for interviewing persons under the age of 18 for research purposes<sup>11</sup>. The results show that in some EU Member States parental consent is always required for children up to the age of 18, while in other EU Member States parental consent might be required depending on the context of the study.
15. These considerations led FRA to apply 18 years as the lower age limit for respondents to the FRA violence against women survey, while the survey questions ask about women's experiences since the age of 15. Therefore, in Table 1, 12-month prevalence of physical and/or sexual violence by a partner among partnered women aged 18-74 years of age is used as a proxy for the sustainable development goal indicator which refers to experiences of women who are 15 years of age or older.

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<sup>9</sup> World Health Organization (2001). *Putting Women First: Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Research on Domestic Violence Against Women* (WHO/FCH/GWH/01.1). Geneva: WHO.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations (2014). *Guidelines for Producing Statistics on Violence against Women* (ST/ESA/STAT/SER.F/110). New York: UN.

<sup>11</sup> See <http://fra.europa.eu/en/theme/rights-child/child-participation-in-research>.

Table 1: Women who have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by current or previous partner, since the age of 15 and in the 12 months before the interview (%)

	Since the age of 15	In the 12 months before the interview
Austria	13	3
Belgium	24	6
Bulgaria	23	6
Croatia	13	3
Cyprus	15	3
Czech Republic	21	4
Denmark	32	4
Estonia	20	(2)
Finland	30	5
France	26	5
Germany	22	3
Greece	19	6
Hungary	21	6
Ireland	15	3
Italy	19	6
Latvia	32	5
Lithuania	24	4
Luxembourg	22	(3)
Malta	15	4
Netherlands	25	5
Poland	13	2
Portugal	19	5
Romania	24	6
Slovakia	23	6
Slovenia	13	(2)
Spain	13	(2)
Sweden	28	5
United Kingdom	29	5
EU-28	22	4
<i>N</i>	8,589	1,623

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

Source: FRA violence against women survey dataset, 2012

16. Table 2 provides the results for indicator two, which refers to the prevalence of sexual violence by perpetrators other than the intimate partner in the previous 12 months. As described above, the results are based on four questions in the FRA survey concerning various forms of sexual violence.

17. The results in Table 2 concerning sexual violence by a non-partner since the age of 15 and in the 12 months before the interview suggest that surveys that apply this indicator would need to carefully consider their sample size requirements in terms of collecting data on 12-month prevalence of sexual violence by a non-partner, in particular if the results are to be further broken down by the victim's age and the place where the incident occurred, as indicated in the definition of the indicator.

Table 2: Women who have experienced sexual violence by non-partner, since the age of 15 and in the 12 months before the interview (%)

	Since the age of 15	In the 12 months before the interview
Austria	4	(1)
Belgium	8	(1)
Bulgaria	6	(1)
Croatia	3	-
Cyprus	2	(0)
Czech Republic	4	(0)
Denmark	11	(1)
Estonia	9	(1)
Finland	11	(2)
France	9	(1)
Germany	7	-
Greece	(1)	(1)
Hungary	3	(1)
Ireland	5	-
Italy	5	(2)
Latvia	7	(1)
Lithuania	5	(0)
Luxembourg	8	(1)
Malta	5	(1)
Netherlands	12	(2)
Poland	2	-
Portugal	(1)	-
Romania	2	-
Slovakia	4	(1)
Slovenia	4	-
Spain	3	(0)
Sweden	12	(1)
United Kingdom	7	(1)
EU-28	6	1
<i>N</i>	2,355	256

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

Source: FRA violence against women survey dataset, 2012

18. Table 3 shows the FRA survey results for women that have experienced discrimination at work for two time periods which could be used as a proxy indication for SDG indicator 16.b.1 referring to the proportion of women reporting having personally felt discriminated in the previous 12 months on the basis of sex.

Table 3: Women who experienced discrimination at work because of sex by EU Member State (%)

	Ever at work	In the 12 months before the interview
Austria	12	5
Belgium	12	3
Bulgaria	8	3
Croatia	11	2
Cyprus	12	4
Czech Republic	16	5
Denmark	19	4
Estonia	8	2
Finland	11	3
France	19	6
Germany	14	4
Greece	10	2
Hungary	13	3
Ireland	9	(2)
Italy	17	5
Latvia	8	(2)
Lithuania	7	(1)
Luxembourg	6	(1)
Malta	11	3
Netherlands	13	3
Poland	7	(1)
Portugal	8	3
Romania	7	(1)
Slovakia	18	5
Slovenia	11	3
Spain	12	4
Sweden	25	8
United Kingdom	12	2
EU-28	14	4
<i>N</i>	<i>5,194</i>	<i>1,311</i>

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

Source: FRA violence against women survey dataset, 2012

19. These results could be combined with information on (sexual) harassment as the SDG indicator 16.b.1 refers to both discrimination and harassment: “the proportion of population reporting having personally felt discriminated against or harassed in the previous 12 months on the basis of a ground of discrimination prohibited under

international human rights law”. Sexual harassment is recognised as discrimination on the grounds of sex and as a breach of the principle of equal treatment between men and women. In EU law, the concept of sexual harassment is mainly related to the field of employment and occupation – albeit recognised that it can occur not only in the workplace, but also in the context of access to employment, vocational training and promotion.

20. The FRA survey on violence against women covered 11 possible acts of sexual harassment that respondents felt to be unwanted and which they experienced as offensive or intimidating. As with other forms of violence covered in the survey, victimisation was measured using two reference periods – since the age of 15 years, and during the 12 months before the interview – and differentiated between incidents committed by different perpetrators. Table 4 provides information on the prevalence of sexual harassment since the age of 15 and in last 12 months.

Table 4: Prevalence of sexual harassment since the age of 15 and in the 12 months before the interview by EU Member State (%)<sup>a</sup>

	Any sexual harassment since the age of 15	Any sexual harassment in past 12 months
Austria	35	15
Belgium	60	30
Bulgaria	24	14
Croatia	41	17
Cyprus	36	14
Czech Republic	51	21
Denmark	80	37
Estonia	53	16
Finland	71	23
France	75	30
Germany	60	22
Greece	43	15
Hungary	42	18
Ireland	48	19
Italy	51	18
Latvia	47	14
Lithuania	35	9
Luxembourg	67	25
Malta	50	20
Netherlands	73	32
Poland	32	11
Portugal	32	15
Romania	32	11
Slovakia	49	29
Slovenia	44	11
Spain	50	18
Sweden	81	32
United Kingdom	68	25
EU-28	55	21
<i>N</i>	21,180	7,724

Source: FRA violence against women survey dataset, 2012

21. The results of the FRA survey show that sexual harassment remains a pervasive and common experience for many women in the European Union (EU). Dependent on the type of incident recorded, an estimated 83 to 102 million women (45 % to 55 % of women) in the 28 EU Member States have experienced at least one form of sexual

harassment since the age of 15.<sup>12</sup> 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 survey interview, depending on the forms of sexual harassment considered (either 6 forms or 11 forms, as asked about in the survey). Sexual harassment occurs in various settings and uses different means, such as the internet. The FRA survey results indicate that sexual harassment against women involves a range of different perpetrators and includes the use of ‘new’ technologies. The survey shows that sexual harassment disproportionately affects younger women, and that it is more commonly perceived and experienced by women with a university degree and women in the highest occupational groups.

#### IV. Developments in survey research on violence against women

22. The FRA survey has been widely used since the results were launched in March 2014. In addition to the traditional reports, the results have been made available through an interactive online data explorer on the FRA website. In June 2015 FRA submitted the survey microdata to the UK Data Service, making the data available to researchers who want to conduct further analysis of the findings, either at the EU level or focussing on a certain country. In addition to the extensive media coverage of the survey results at the time of the launch, over time numerous researchers have used the results – either the aggregate statistics or the survey microdata – as a basis for their analysis of the prevalence and consequences of violence against women in the EU. Therefore, the survey has demonstrated the high level of public interest in comparable data on violence against women, while at the same time responding to the needs of academics and other researchers to have robust data for analysis, and for policy makers to further develop evidence-based responses to the issue. The possibility to link the results with sustainable development goal indicators and priorities of the Istanbul Convention keep the results relevant, while creating room for continued development of violence against women survey data collection tools and programmes for repeated data collection to measure trends.
23. Currently the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) – supported through the EU Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace – is in the process of carrying out surveys on violence against women in ten non-EU countries based on the FRA violence against women survey model. The OSCE will further develop the FRA survey questionnaire, adding items to collect data on conflict-related violence.
24. In parallel, Eurostat has announced plans to set up a task force for the development of a survey on gender-based violence against women and men. The national statistical institutes of the EU Member States would be invited to take part in the development and implementation of the survey on a voluntary basis, with a view to establishing a survey

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<sup>12</sup> Eleven types of sexual harassment were asked about in the survey, which can be broadly clustered under ‘physical forms of harassment’, ‘verbal forms of harassment’, ‘non-verbal forms of harassment’ and ‘cyber-harassment’. Among these eleven, six were selected as potentially the most serious and threatening for the respondent, namely: ‘Unwelcome touching, hugging or kissing’, ‘Sexually suggestive comments or jokes’, ‘Somebody sending or showing sexually explicit pictures, photos or gifts’, ‘Somebody indecently exposing themselves to the respondent’, ‘Somebody making the respondent watch or look at pornographic material against her will’ and ‘Unwanted and offensive sexually explicit emails or SMS messages’. Differences in the estimates of harassment reflect whether all items were counted or only six.

tool, which after the first data collection round can be extended to further countries. The FRA's violence against women survey methodology – appropriately adapted to collect data on experiences of both women and men – can serve as a basis for the development of the new survey. For those national statistical institutes which, to-date, have not carried out nationwide surveys on violence against women, the results of the FRA survey provide insights concerning the direction and interpretation of the results that can be expected in the future surveys on gender-based violence or violence against women.

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