

Understanding intimate partner violence in the European Union

The essential need for administrative data collection

Defining intimate partner violence

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is the most common form of violence against women and the most extreme form of gender discrimination. It poses a threat to the fundamental rights to dignity, liberty, security, health and, eventually, the lives of women.

EU Member States have not established a common definition for IPV, which means it is understood and measured differently across jurisdictions. The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) provides the following **statistical definition of IPV**:

'Any act of physical, sexual, psychological, or economic violence that occurs between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or shared the same residence with the victim.'

EIGE also provides definitions for each specific form of IPV, including physical, sexual, psychological and economic IPV.

These specific definitions form the basis of EIGE's indicators for measuring IPV.

Types of intimate partner violence

Physical IPV

Any act that causes physical harm to the current or former partner as a result of unlawful physical force. Physical violence can take the form of, among other things, serious or minor assault, deprivation of liberty, manslaughter or attempted homicide.

Sexual IPV

Any sexual act performed on the victim without consent. Sexual violence can take the form of rape or sexual assault.

Economic IPV

Any act or behaviour that causes economic harm to the current or former partner. Economic violence can take the form of, among other things, property damage; restricting access to financial resources, education or the labour market; or not complying with economic responsibilities, such as alimony.

Psychological IPV

Any act or behaviour that causes psychological harm to the current or former partner (e.g. coercion, defamation, verbal abuse or harassment).

Consequences of intimate partner violence

The elimination of gender-based violence and the protection of victims is a stated goal of the EU and a key area of work for EIGE. However, this is not possible without accurate, reliable and timely data on IPV victims, perpetrators and events.

IPV can affect women of any nationality, age, ethnicity, culture, religion, level of education or other characteristics worldwide.

- One in five women in the EU have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a current or previous partner (Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), 2014) ⁽¹⁾.
- Only 14 % of women in the EU report their most serious incident of IPV to the police (FRA, 2014).

IPV has been recognised by the international community as a major impediment to achieving Goal 5 of the UN 2030 agenda for sustainable development (gender equality).

In addition to the serious adverse health consequences for victims, the direct and indirect economic impacts of IPV are enormous and have ripple effects on individuals, families, communities and society as a whole. **EIGE estimates the cost of IPV against women in the EU to be nearly EUR 152 billion per year (EIGE, 2021c) ⁽²⁾.**

Only with a strong evidence base and solid data is it possible to generate and implement appropriate knowledge-based measures to combat IPV.

⁽¹⁾ FRA (2014), *Violence Against Women: An EU-wide survey – Main results*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg (<https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/violence-against-women-eu-wide-survey-main-results-report>).

⁽²⁾ EIGE (2021c), *The Costs of Gender-based Violence in the European Union – Technical report*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg (<https://eige.europa.eu/publications/costs-gender-based-violence-european-union-technical-report>).

The need for administrative data collection on intimate partner violence

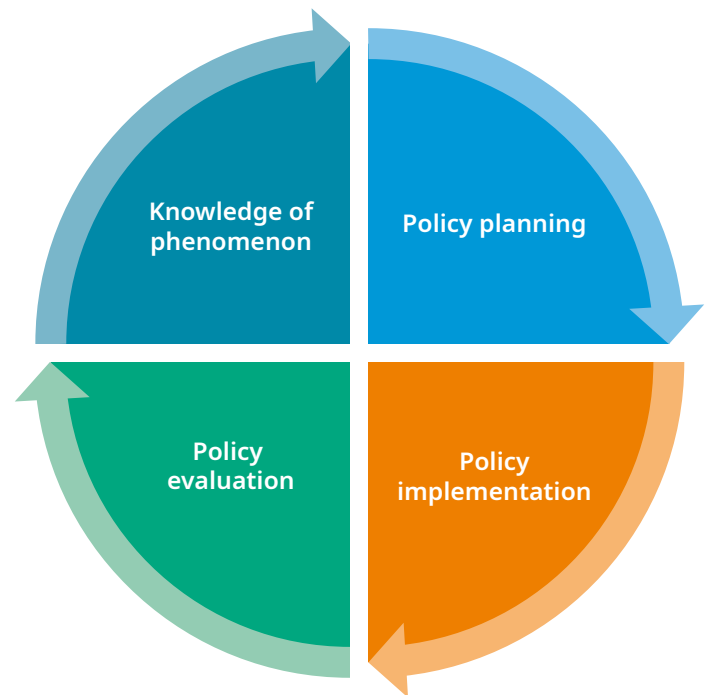
Administrative data is information that is created when people interact with public services (e.g. law enforcement, court systems and healthcare institutions).

Even though administrative data is primarily collected for administrative purposes, it plays an important role in monitoring the implementation of policies and in assessing the effectiveness of the state response.

Administrative data on violence against women, collected by governments and different types of service providers, provides information about the use and demand of services and about the institutional response and/or outcomes for victims and perpetrators (e.g. prosecution and conviction rates). In addition, it can result in more efficient resource and budget allocation. The lack of comparable data across Member States hampers the appropriate allocation of funds and the development of effective national and EU-wide policies to prevent IPV.

Systematic data collection is of the utmost importance for effective policymaking in preventing and combating violence against women.

Figure 1. The role of data in policymaking



Legal obligations for administrative data collection in the EU

The EU victims' rights directive (Directive 2012/29/EU) establishes minimum standards on the rights of victims of crime and highlights the importance of statistical data collection as an essential component of effective policymaking.

The directive asks Member States to provide the European Commission with data on how victims have been able to access their rights, including the number and type of crimes reported by victims and, if available, the number of victims by age and gender.

Recital 64 of the directive's preamble provides further details on statistical data collection:

'Relevant statistical data can include data recorded by the judicial authorities and by law enforcement agencies and, as far as possible, administrative data compiled by healthcare and social welfare services and by public and non-governmental victim support or restorative justice services and other organisations working with victims of crime.

Judicial data can include information about reported crime, the number of cases that are investigated and persons prosecuted and sentenced.'

The EU victims' rights directive (Directive 2012/29/EU), recital 64.

The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention) requires state parties to produce, analyse and disseminate disaggregated data on violence against women to understand its root causes, incidence and effects, and conviction rates.

This data facilitates international cooperation, allows international benchmarks to be set and supports the development of evidence-based policies to prevent violence against women.

The UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) encourages the compilation of statistics and research on the extent, causes and effects of violence.

In 2017, the CEDAW Committee recommended that state parties establish a system to collect, analyse and publish statistical data on all forms of gender-based violence against women. The committee notes that the analysis of statistical data can help to identify protection failures and further develop measures to prevent violence against women.

Specific reference is made to the need for data disaggregated by type of violence, victim-perpetrator relationship and age of the victim, and in relation to intersecting forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW 2017, GR No 35, point 49) ⁽³⁾.

⁽³⁾ CEDAW (2017), General recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19 (<https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/cedaw/launch-cedaw-general-recommendation-no-35-gender-based-violence-against-women-updating-general>).

Data availability and comparability in the EU

EIGE has developed 13 indicators on IPV, rape and femicide to guide data collection by the police and justice sectors across the EU.

Table 1 presents the indicators on IPV (excluding indicators 8 and 9 on rape and intimate partner femicide). For further information on these indicators, please read EIGE's 2021 report on the EU state of play.

Table 1. EIGE's IPV indicators for the police and judicial sectors

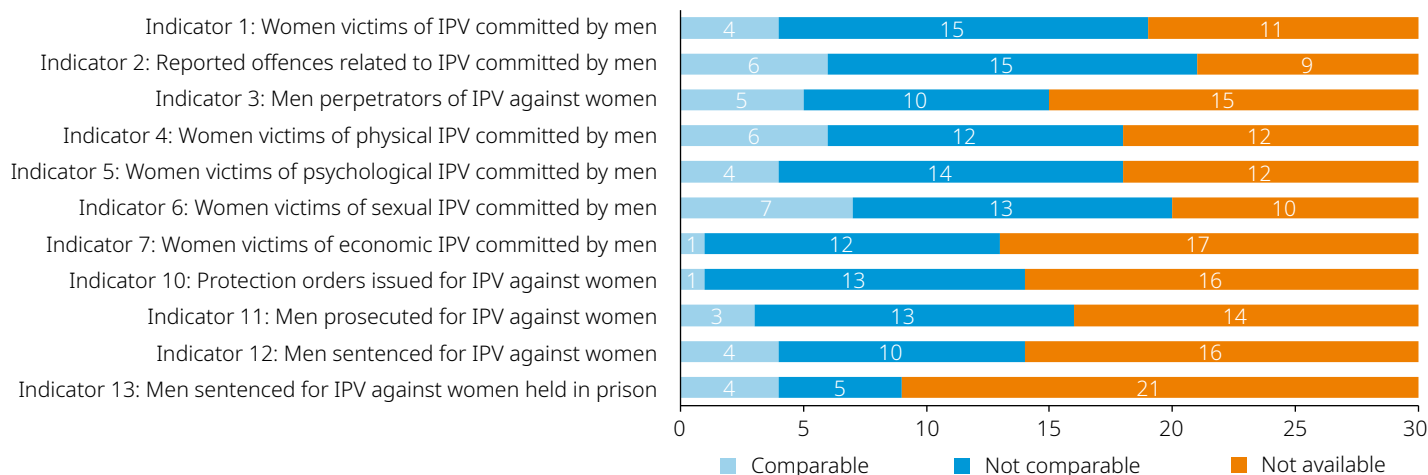
Indicators for the police sector	
Indicator 1	Annual number of women (aged 18 and over) victims of IPV committed by men (aged 18 and over), as recorded by police
Indicator 2	Annual number of reported offences related to IPV against women committed by men (aged 18 and over)
Indicator 3	Annual number of men (aged 18 and over) perpetrators of IPV against women (and percentage of male population that are perpetrators)
Indicator 4	Annual number of women (aged 18 and over) victims of physical IPV committed by men (aged 18 and over), as recorded by police
Indicator 5	Annual number of women (aged 18 and over) victims of psychological IPV committed by men (aged 18 and over), as recorded by police
Indicator 6	Annual number of women (aged 18 and over) victims of sexual IPV committed by men (aged 18 and over), as recorded by police
Indicator 7	Annual number of women (aged 18 and over) victims of economic IPV committed by men (aged 18 and over), as recorded by police
Indicators for the judicial sector	
Indicator 10	Number of protection orders applied and granted in cases of IPV
Indicator 11	Number of men (aged 18 and over) prosecuted for IPV against women
Indicator 12	Number of men (aged 18 and over) sentenced for IPV against women
Indicator 13	Annual number of men (aged 18 and over) sentenced for IPV against women held in prison or with a sanction involving a form of deprivation of liberty

Between 2018 and 2020, EIGE collected data from national police and justice sectors on EIGE's 13 indicators. In 2021, EIGE published a detailed analysis of the current availability and comparability of the indicators at the level of the 30 jurisdictions in the EU (27) and the United Kingdom (3).

A new data collection exercise, covering the 2018–2022 period, will be conducted in 2023.

As illustrated in Figure 2, with the exception of indicator 8 (rape) and indicator 9 (intimate femicide), the highest number of jurisdictions (7) can produce comparable data on indicator 6 (women victims of sexual IPV). However, only 1 jurisdiction can produce comparable data on indicator 7 (women victims of economic IPV) and indicator 10 (protection orders issued for IPV against women).

Figure 2. Number of jurisdictions in the EU (27) and the United Kingdom (3) with comparable data available on EIGE's IPV indicators



Source: Collected by EIGE from police national administrative sources from 2014–2018.

What is needed for high-quality data on IPV?

High-quality data on IPV is consistent, comprehensive, continuous and disaggregated.

Consistent data. Data must be provided in a regular manner, use the same categories for variables to describe IPV and establish a consistent understanding of how those variables are defined.

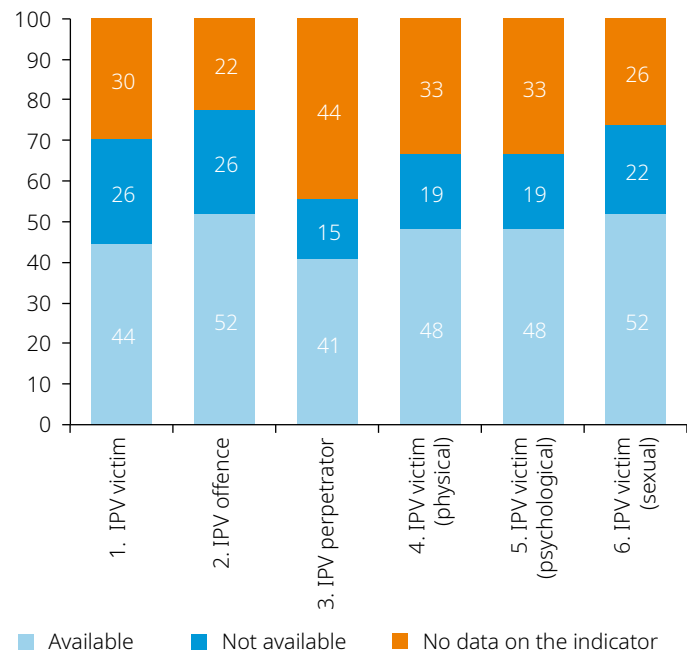
Comprehensive data. Data on IPV should include data on the incidence and frequency of IPV.

Continuous data. Data on victims and perpetrators should be collected at each stage of the criminal justice process, including the number of people in contact with the police and the number of people prosecuted, convicted and held in prison.

Disaggregated data. Data must be disaggregated by the sex and age of the victim, the sex and age of the perpetrator, the relationship between the two and the different forms of IPV, including physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence.

The relationship between the victim and the perpetrator is a key aspect to account for the gender dimension of violence. This information is decisive in differentiating a case of domestic violence perpetrated by a family member from a case of domestic violence perpetrated by an intimate partner. As illustrated in Figure 3, less than half of all Member States can provide information on the victim–perpetrator relationship across all IPV indicators for the police sector.

Figure 3. Data availability on victim–perpetrator relationships for IPV indicators 1–6 across the EU-27, (%)



Impact of ‘counting units’ on high-quality data

A main factor that affects the interpretation and comparability of administrative data on crime are the counting units used for recording and counting crime and criminal justice processes.

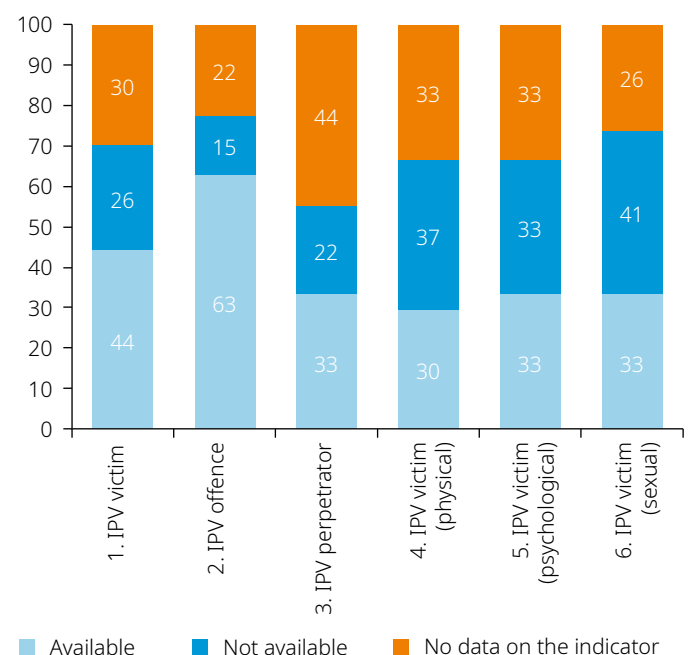
Counting units refers to the basic unit of analysis for the indicator (such as victims, suspects, persons prosecuted, persons convicted, offences or cases). The counting units used by the jurisdictions for the EIGE indicators are highly variable.

Analysis of various EU-level data collections on crime and criminal justice indicators shows that data on police-recorded offences are generally more available than data on persons (victims or perpetrators).

As no consolidated international standard exists on counting units, differences between jurisdictions make cross-national comparison challenging. Typically, each criminal justice institution uses counting units based on its own operational requirements. Police may use charges, investigations, offences, suspects, victims and incidents, while courts may use cases, convictions and sentences.

Linking data across institutions would require the use of the same counting units (such as persons suspected and persons convicted). The unit of classification is more often accurately produced for the number of IPV offences (indicator 2) than the number of IPV victims (indicators 1, 4, 5 and 6).

Figure 4. Data availability according to the indicator counting unit for IPV indicators 1–6, across the EU-27, (%)



Barriers to data collection in Member States

Institutional barriers

Lack of standard definitions. Member States have not established a common definition for IPV.

Lack of standardised methods of data collection across EU jurisdictions. Member States use different units of measurement, counting rules, recording processes and databases for collecting data on IPV.

Lack of disaggregated data. There are gaps in data availability for data disaggregated by the sex and age of the victims and perpetrators, the victim–perpetrator relationship and the different forms of IPV experienced.

Limitations of analysis. The analysis of trends based on administrative data can also be biased, as it primarily represents changes in reporting rather than in incidence. For example, legal changes can increase reporting, which does not necessarily mean an increase in the occurrence of IPV.

Limited scope. The data on IPV measured by Member States is often limited in scope. For example, there is limited information available on ‘economic violence’.

Poor coordination. In some Member States, there is a lack of effective coordination between institutions that collect administrative data on IPV.

Resource constraints. There are resource constraints in police and judicial sectors, limiting the extent to which jurisdictions can effectively collect comparable data on the various forms of IPV.

Societal barriers

Under-reporting of IPV. Victims of IPV may struggle to report forms of violence due to lack of awareness about what constitutes IPV (e.g. economic violence), personal fears of the victim (e.g. relating to retaliation or economic dependency) and societal stigmas (e.g. victim-blaming attitudes).

Recommendations to improve data collection on IPV

Only with comprehensive data and disaggregated variables can effective policies be designed and evaluated.

The following recommendations can be adopted at the EU and Member State levels to improve data collection on IPV.

Table 2. EU- and Member State-level recommendations for improving data collection on IPV

Member State-level recommendations	
Recommendation 1	Standardise the definitions of IPV across the EU.
Recommendation 2	Adapt data-recording systems to include specific breakdowns essential for identifying IPV, including data on the sex and age of the victim and perpetrator and the victim–perpetrator relationship as a minimum.
Recommendation 3	National statistical offices, ministries, governmental and independent equality bodies, and other public bodies should analyse the gender dimension of IPV, along with its causes and consequences.
Recommendation 4	Member States should ensure coordination between administrations, equality bodies, civil society and universities to collect data on IPV, analyse the data and issue relevant policy proposals.
Recommendation 5	Ensure the continuity of data-gathering activities and statistical capacity building and training through dedicated funding for administrations that collect data on IPV.
Recommendation 6	Based on the data gathered and analysed, competent authorities should regularly report on IPV. The reports shared by authorities should be made publicly available and act as a basis for developing further measures against IPV.
EU-level recommendations	
Recommendation 7	Accede to the Istanbul Convention to ensure that all Member States are made accountable for upholding Article 11 on data collection.
Recommendation 8	Adopt an EU directive on combating all forms of violence against women and domestic violence to complement the implementation of the Istanbul Convention.

Further reading

All data is published in EIGE's Gender Statistics Database, which provides a one-stop source for all gender statistics at the Member State and EU levels. Statistical evidence from the database can be used to support the Commission's strategy on gender equality and support Member States in monitoring

progress, as well as improving the violence against women institutional response.

Below is a list of resources that provide further information on the prevalence and types of IPV, and on EIGE's work to combat IPV through data collection.

Learn more about IPV

Council of Europe (2021), *Second general report on GREVIO's activities, covering the period from June 2019 to December 2020*, Strasbourg.

EIGE (2017), *Terminology and Indicators for Data Collection: Rape, femicide and intimate partner violence*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

EIGE (2020), *Intimate Partner Violence: Data collection methodology*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

EIGE (2021a), *EIGE's Indicators on Intimate Partner Violence, Rape and Femicide: EU state of play*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

EIGE (2021b), *EIGE's Indicators on Intimate Partner Violence, Rape and Femicide – Recommendations to improve data quality, availability and comparability*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

EIGE (2021c), *The Costs of Gender-based Violence in the European Union – Technical report*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Eurostat (2020), *European Statistical System Handbook for Quality and Metadata Reports – 2020 edition*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

FRA (2014), *Violence Against Women: An EU-wide survey – Main results*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

UN Women and World Health Organization (2022), *Improving the collection and use of administrative data on violence against women – Global technical guidance*, New York.

European Institute for Gender Equality

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) is the EU knowledge centre on gender equality. EIGE supports policymakers and all relevant institutions in their efforts to make equality between women and men a reality for all Europeans by providing them with specific expertise and comparable and reliable data on gender equality in Europe.

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