



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1291 Vienna, 26 November 2020

EU Statement on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

On 25 November, we marked the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. This also marked the beginning of 16 days of activism against gender-based violence.

Violence against women unfortunately persists in every country, every community and can take many different forms. It can happen at home, at work, at school, in the street or online. According to estimates by the World Health Organization, one third of women and girls worldwide experience violence at some point in their life. Disabled women are particularly vulnerable to violence.

Violence against women and girls continues to be a serious obstacle to achieving equality, development, peace as well as an obstacle to the fulfillment of women's and girls' full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The SDGs – and the aim to leave no one behind - cannot be achieved without putting an end to this violence.

On this occasion, the EU is engaged in putting forward ambitious plans to promote gender equality and women's empowerment and reaffirming our ongoing commitment to eliminating violence against women and girls. We would also like to recall that in 2017, the Council of the European Union adopted decisions to sign

the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention).

The health and socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic are particularly devastating for women and girls. Women's jobs are 1.8 times more vulnerable to being cut, and their poverty rate could go up by an estimated 9.1% while gender-based violence has increased significantly. Girls are receiving less distance education than boys, inter alia because globally they have 17% less internet access and 26% less access to mobile phone technologies.

In the light of the upsurge in domestic violence triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, the joint EU-UN Spotlight Initiative was quick to boost prevention and increase support for victims, as well as support for women's grassroots organizations providing essential services. We call on all partners to join this highly effective partnership.

Our goal is clear: we must end all forms of violence against women and girls. The 2018 Ministerial Council Decision on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women helps us achieving that goal. It is a collective commitment to address the shocking prevalence of gender-based violence against women and girls that continues to persist, impeding women and girls from reaching their full potentials. The Milan Decision also recognises the importance of engaging men and boys in addressing the root causes of gender inequality and violence as well as raising awareness about the impact of negative attitudes, behaviours and gender stereotypes. We also wish to recall the Ministerial Council Decision No. 14/04 on the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality and Ministerial Council Decisions No. 15/05 and No. 7/14. In this respect, we commend the OSCE's Women Ambassadors network, Women in the First Dimension (W1D) and MenEngage for their efforts in raising awareness on women's rights and in promoting gender equality.

As this year's *16 Days of Activism* campaign focuses on ending gender based violence in the world of work, we would like to highlight one recent best practice in this field. Women engaged in professional activities with public exposure, such as journalists, are more likely to be exposed to violence or abuse, both online and offline. We therefore commend the Office of the RFOM for the launching the

resource guide on the Safety of Female Journalists online, building on 2018 Ministerial Council Decision on Safety of Journalists, which condemns attacks on women journalists in relation to their work.

Implementation remains a key challenge for the full elimination of violence against women and girls. To bridge the implementation gap more efforts for collecting data and establishing efficient monitoring mechanisms are essential. We reiterate our support for the OSCE-led survey on Well-being and Safety of Women and its findings, and encourage all participating States to make good use of the practical guide for decision makers “How to use survey data to prevent and combat violence against women and girls.”

Women across the OSCE region continue to stand up in defense of civic rights and democracy. We deplore any attempts to quell these voices.

The EU encourages participating States to collectively continue to build on, and strengthen, the principles and commitments that are already in place. It is unacceptable that most incidents of conflict and non-conflict related violence against women are not brought to justice. Together we must continue taking practical steps towards the effective elimination of gender based and sexual violence.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

* Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.