

# Human Rights Committee

*Confronting violence and repression against women*



*Background Paper*

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**Forum: Human Rights Committee**

**Issue: Confronting violence and repression against women**

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## **Introduction**

Across the globe, violence and repression against women remain some of the most pervasive and deeply entrenched human rights violations. From physical abuse and sexual exploitation to institutionalized discrimination and economic marginalization, women and girls face challenges that not only endanger their safety but also restrict their potential to fully participate in society. While strides have been made in advancing gender equality through legal frameworks and international conventions, millions of women continue to endure systemic oppression perpetuated by cultural norms, inadequate enforcement of laws, and structural inequalities.

This issue is far-reaching and multifaceted, affecting women of all ages, ethnicities, and socio-economic backgrounds. However, it is often exacerbated in regions experiencing conflict, poverty, or political instability, where women are disproportionately vulnerable to violence and repression. As the international community recognizes the urgency of this crisis, confronting violence and repression against women has become a moral and practical imperative for the achievement of global peace, prosperity, and sustainable development.

The UN Sustainable Development Goal 5 underlines equal gender and puts the focus on vulnerable women more particularly: the aging women, women living with HIV or belonging to ethnic minorities, sex workers, single and isolated women.

## Key terms

**Human rights :** Essential rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more. Everyone is entitled to these rights, without discrimination.

**Discrimination :** treating a person or particular group of people differently, especially in a worse way from the way in which you treat other people, because of their gender, ethnicity, sexuality...

**Femicide :** intentional murder of women because they are women, but broader definitions also include any killings of women or girls.

**Sexual harassment :** Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature done without the agreement of the person or people receiving it.

**Gender-Based Violence:** refers to harmful acts directed at individuals based on their gender. It stems from unequal power relationships and deeply rooted societal norms and attitudes about gender roles and identity. GBV can take many forms, including physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, and economic abuse. It disproportionately affects women and girls but can also impact men, boys, and gender-diverse individuals.

**Intimate Partner Violence:** refers to any form of abuse or aggression—physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, or economic—committed by a current or former partner or spouse. It can occur in all types of relationships and is rooted in power and control dynamics.

**Honor-Based Violence:** refers to harmful acts, including physical, emotional, or psychological abuse, committed to protect or restore the perceived honor of a family or community. It often targets individuals who are seen as violating cultural or social norms, especially around relationships, behavior, or dress.

**Female Genital Mutilation:** involves the partial or total removal of external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. It's a harmful practice rooted in cultural, social, or religious beliefs and is recognized internationally as a violation of human rights.

**Child Marriage:** formal or informal union of individuals under the age of 18, often involving one or both parties being minors. It's driven by cultural, economic, or social pressures and is recognized as a violation of human rights.

**Reproductive Rights:** refer to the rights of individuals to make informed decisions about their reproductive health, including access to contraception, safe abortion, maternity care, and education. These rights support autonomy, health, and equality.

**Economic Violence:** involves actions that cause financial harm or restrict an individual's economic independence. This can include controlling access to money, preventing someone from working, withholding resources, or sabotaging employment opportunities. It often occurs in the context of abuse or power imbalances.

**Technology-Facilitated Violence:** refers to harmful actions enabled by digital tools or platforms, such as cyberstalking, online harassment, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, or using technology to control or intimidate someone. It's an emerging issue in the digital age, often overlapping with other forms of abuse.

## General overview

Violence against women is a global epidemic, affecting every society and all ages and cutting across cultural, religious, and economic lines. According to data from the World Health Organization (WHO), an estimated 35% of women worldwide have experienced either physical or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence. The persistence of such violence is deeply rooted in societal attitudes that normalize gender inequality, as well as the lack of robust legal protections and social support systems for victims.

In many societies, practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM), honor killings, and child marriage are justified under the guise of tradition or religion, despite their severe physical and psychological harm. Economic violence, including denying women access to financial resources or education, further entrenches cycles of dependency and oppression. In recent years, technology-facilitated violence—such as cyberstalking, online harassment, and the non-consensual sharing of intimate images—has emerged as a new frontier in the fight against gender-based violence.

Repression, on the other hand, takes more subtle but equally harmful forms. This includes barriers to education, employment, and political participation, as well as restrictive cultural practices that dictate women's roles and freedoms. Women living under authoritarian regimes or in conflict zones face heightened risks, often becoming targets of sexual violence used as a weapon of war or instruments of control.

The effects of violence and repression extend far beyond individual victims, impeding societal progress and perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality. This issue calls for a comprehensive and coordinated global

response that addresses root causes, ensures accountability, and empowers women and girls to reclaim their rights and dignity.

Consequences: can be seen here

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>

## Major Parties Involved

Addressing violence and repression against women requires the active involvement of various stakeholders, each contributing unique resources, perspectives, and strategies to combat this global issue effectively.

- **United Nations:** The United Nations plays a central role in shaping international efforts to confront gender-based violence. Agencies like UN Women lead advocacy campaigns, provide funding for programs, and support the development of policies aimed at gender equality. The UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) conducts investigations into violations against women and works with member states to enforce global human rights standards. Furthermore, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5, underline the importance of achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.
- **Governments:** National governments are critical in addressing violence and repression through legislation and enforcement. Some countries have implemented comprehensive frameworks to protect women, such as establishing penalties for domestic violence, criminalizing child marriage, or banning practices like female genital mutilation (FGM). However, not all governments have adequately addressed these issues, and weak enforcement mechanisms often hinder progress. Governments also have the power to allocate resources to survivor support services, such as shelters, legal aid, and rehabilitation programs.
- **Non-Governmental Organizations:** NGOs play a vital role in addressing gender-based violence, both at the grassroots and international levels. Organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch highlight human rights abuses, lobby for policy changes, and provide direct support to affected communities. Local NGOs are often instrumental in reaching vulnerable populations, delivering education programs, and offering survivor-centered assistance that is culturally sensitive and accessible.
- **Grassroots Movements and Activists:** Community-based groups and activists are at the forefront of driving cultural and social change. These movements challenge harmful traditional practices, raise awareness within their communities, and advocate for women's rights at the local level.

Campaigns like "Me Too" have highlighted the pervasive nature of sexual harassment and violence, encouraging women worldwide to share their stories and demand accountability.

- **Private Sector:** Corporations have increasingly been held accountable for their role in combating violence and promoting gender equality. Many companies have implemented policies to address workplace harassment and discrimination, while others fund initiatives aimed at empowering women economically. Technology companies, in particular, play a pivotal role in addressing online harassment and ensuring that digital platforms are safe for all users.
- **International Organizations and Regional Bodies:** Beyond the UN, regional bodies like the African Union, the European Union, and the Organization of American States have developed their own frameworks to combat violence against women. For example, the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention provides a comprehensive legal framework for preventing gender-based violence and protecting victims.
- **Survivors and Advocacy Groups:** Survivors of gender-based violence and their advocacy groups are powerful agents of change. By sharing their experiences, they break the silence surrounding these issues and inspire others to take action. Survivor-led organizations also play a key role in designing policies and programs that reflect the realities of those affected, ensuring that responses are survivor-centered and effective.

## Possible solutions

To address the pervasive violence and repression against women, a multifaceted approach is necessary, combining legal, educational, and societal initiatives with international cooperation.

First and foremost, governments must prioritize comprehensive legislative reform to criminalize all forms of violence against women. This includes passing laws that explicitly prohibit domestic violence, honor-based violence, child marriage, and other harmful practices. However, merely enacting laws is not enough; it is equally critical to ensure that these laws are effectively enforced. Strengthening judicial systems and training law enforcement officers to handle cases sensitively can encourage more women to report abuse and seek justice. The Istanbul Convention offers such a legal framework for the European countries. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action are the legal framework for the UN.

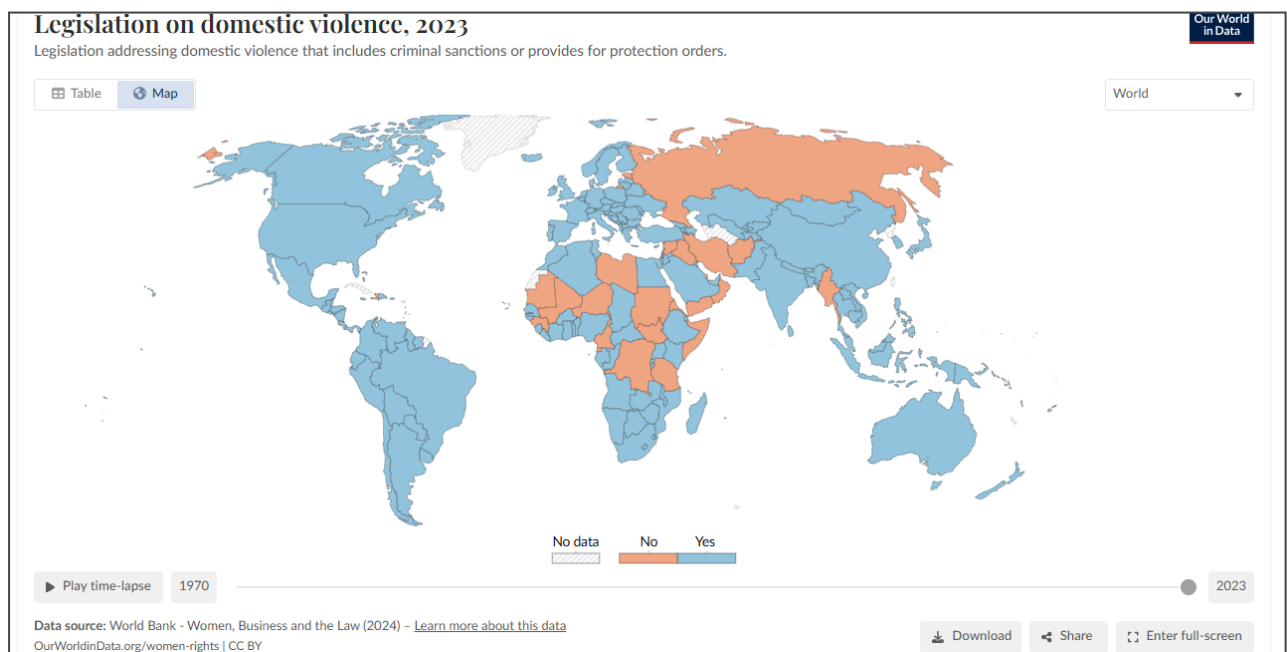
Education and awareness campaigns are vital to dismantling cultural norms and attitudes that perpetuate gender-based violence. Community-level initiatives, such as workshops and public discussions, can challenge deeply ingrained stereotypes about women's roles and empower individuals to recognize and resist

oppressive practices. Schools also play a crucial role in this effort, as incorporating gender equality and human rights education into curricula can help shape more equitable societies over time.

Providing robust support services for survivors is another cornerstone of addressing this crisis. Shelters and safe spaces can offer immediate protection for women escaping abusive situations, while counseling and legal aid services help them rebuild their lives and access justice. Additionally, establishing hotlines and digital platforms for reporting violence ensures that survivors have accessible and confidential ways to seek help.

International cooperation is essential for sharing best practices, holding countries accountable, and pooling resources to combat violence against women. Multilateral organizations, such as the United Nations, can facilitate global partnerships and provide funding for initiatives that address gender-based violence. These efforts must also extend to conflict zones, where sexual violence is often used as a weapon of war and where international intervention is urgently needed.

Finally, technology should be leveraged as a tool for empowerment and protection. Mobile applications that allow women to report abuse and connect with support services, for example, can be lifesaving in crisis situations. Similarly, social media campaigns can raise awareness about gender-based violence and foster solidarity among women across the globe. It is equally important, however, to address the darker side of technology, such as online harassment and cyberstalking, by enacting laws that regulate and penalize these behaviors effectively.



source: <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/legislation-domestic-violence>

## Sources

Very useful source for the countries if they want to check their countries on the database  
<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>



- <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/human-rights>
  - <https://www.who.int/>
  - [www.unwomen.org](http://www.unwomen.org)
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