

#NOEXCUSE

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## Domestic violence prevention worldwide

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### Summary

Domestic violence, particularly against women, is a prominent issue around the world. The sensitivity of the topic and major underreporting make it difficult to address, but increased awareness has amplified calls for reform. Slowly but surely, progress is being made, both in the Czech Republic and globally, to help support victims and end gender-based violence.

### Key points

- One in three women have experienced violence against them at some point in their lives, a statistic that is also applicable to the Czech Republic.
- The Czech Republic had struggled to reckon with the reality of gender-based violence, but especially in recent years has taken steps to prevent it and protect survivors, mainly with legislation and resources.
- There are thousands of measures from governments and organizations around the world that aim to promote the safety of women and girls and end violence against them.

## Introduction

One of today's leading issues is the equality and safety of women in countries around the globe. It is a crisis, that can even be fatal; "at least two women are killed every day in the EU by an intimate partner or family member" (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022). While gender-based violence affects people of all sexes, it disproportionately affects women. It also takes many forms to many different extents, but mainly including physical and emotional abuse. Despite the fact that it is considered a public health crisis, specifically against women and girls, violence "remains largely unreported due to the impunity, silence, stigma and shame surrounding it" (United Nations). This differs across cultures as well, making it even more challenging to address and solve.

## Global figures

Violence against women is considered a "major public health problem" by the World Health Organization, which estimates that approximately 30% of women globally have experience physical and/or sexual violence from a partner. Physical consequences of gender-based violence can include homicide or suicide, injuries, unintended pregnancies and subsequent complications and persistent health issues and poor overall health; all of which can also translate into mental health consequences as well, such as substance abuse, depression, anxiety and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. In instances of domestic violence, abuse can also occur around and have profound impacts on children.

This problem is prominent around the world. "Almost one in three women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual violence at least one in their life. This violence is often perpetrated by current or former intimate partners" (Global database on violence against women, n.d.), which also applies to the European Union. Furthermore, "only 22% of women in the EU who experience intimate partner violence report it to the police" and "over 80% of women in the EU who experience violence do not seek professional help" (EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2021). Violence can occur to women and girls of all ages in any environment, which is why it is so critical that all-encompassing prevention and protective measures are implemented around the world.

## Gender-based violence in the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic is no exception to these figures. "In 2003, 59% of Czech women reported having experience violence at least once in their life" and "32% of women in the Czech Republic have experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15, and 16% of people in the Czech Republic said they knew a woman within their area or neighbourhood who has been a victim of domestic violence" (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2016).

One of the leading issues in combatting domestic violence is the reluctance of police to handle such cases. Police officers are the primary contact when it comes to domestic violence cases. In many of these situations, the difficulty of assembling evidence makes it much harder to actually build a case, so more often than not it simply comes down to one person's word against another's. This makes it very challenging not only to get officers to take a case, but also for the case to lead anywhere productive. In addition to this, domestic violence was widely unaddressed because it was considered a taboo subject in Czech society; "For many years the attitude in this country has been to turn a blind eye and deaf ear to the problem - due to a widespread belief that domestic violence is something that should be resolved in the family - but now the authorities and NGOs have joined forces to fight the problem together" (Lazarová, 2002). Another common misconception was that offenders would exhibit obvious signs of bad behavior, but "there is no typical offender. And the same goes for the victim" (Zejdova, 2002). One of the most prominent cases that has inspired more change was

the conviction of Parliament Member Dominik Feri, who was found guilty on two charges of rape and one charge of attempted rape. He was sentenced to three years in prison and ordered to pay the victims compensation of over 500,000 crowns. While the victims' lawyer, Adela Horejsi criticized the public scrutiny and trauma that accompanied the case, she also credited their courage towards a "man who leaned on the power and social structure" (Horejsi, 2024). The verdict was "widely seen as a turning point in tackling Czechia's ingrained conservative attitudes and misconceptions on sexual violence" and "helped to break taboos on how to hold people in a position of power accountable for their behaviour in the personal sphere" (Eisenchteter, 2024). It is important to note that parts of the case are still ongoing, notably four women not having their cases admitted to a proper hearing by the Constitutional Court. They complained to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, but their cases have been postponed by the police. These instances do not end here, however. The most recent case that has attracted media attention, involving 39 women, is that of the psychiatrist Cimický, who was guilty of abusing his own patients. Despite the fact that the verdict is not yet final, people have been eagerly awaiting results. Also, in January of 2024, a man walked out of court on probation after raping a minor. In the Czech Republic, this has sparked a heated debate about sentencing. Judges sentenced 643 people from 2016 to 2022, with 57 per cent of offenders walking away from court with a suspended sentence or a suspended sentence with supervision.

In addition to an increased social awareness of violence against women and the subsequent advocacy for women's safety, one of the Czech Republic's key prevention and reformation strategies has been action plans specific to three-year periods, beginning with a resolution passed in 2014. The most recently released version was the 2019-2022, whose "goal is to cover all forms of domestic and gender-based violence regardless of the gender of the person affected by these forms of violence. Implementing the measures set out in the Action Plan will thus help improve the position of all victims, regardless of demographic" (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2019). The Action Plan "contains a total of 24 measures and is divided into 3 strategic areas: 1. Prevention of domestic and gender-based violence; 2. Protection of and support for persons affected by domestic and gender-based violence (including children); 3. Providing access to justice for all persons affected by domestic and gender-based violence" (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2019). It emphasizes resource accessibility and review of previous national policies and international documents, and lays about specific tasks to make progress in each of the strategic areas.

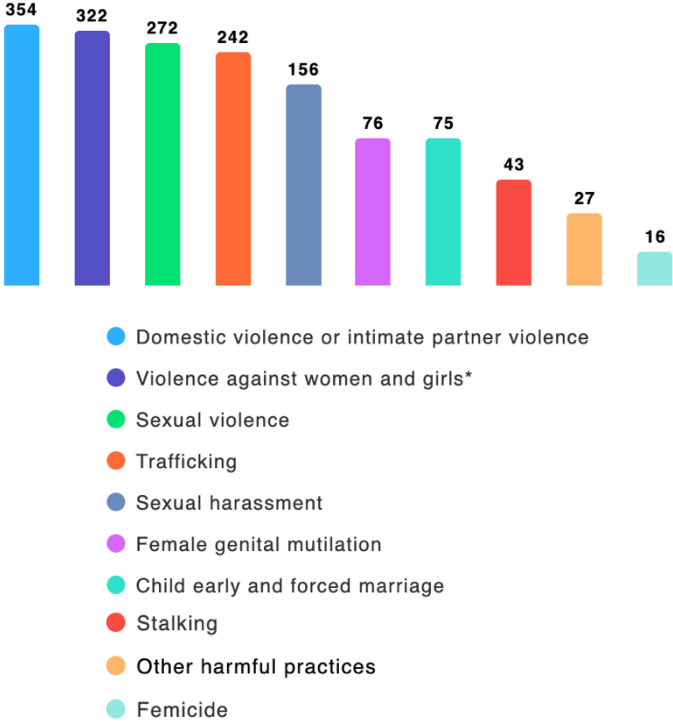
There are also several resources within the Czech Republic to assist survivors in various capacities. The White Circle of Safety is one of the most notable organizations, operating throughout the country. Their helpline operates 24/7 free of charge and they also have a website for victims to get in contact with representatives. The White Circle of Safety provides comprehensive help, including "legal information; psychological and social counseling; practical advice and information" (white Circle of Safety, n.d.), as well as case managers depending on the case and survivor. In 2023, they received 7,242 calls on the Victim Helpline and have spent 203328 hours (over 23 years) operating the helpline. They are headquartered in Prague and also have an Intervention Center in Ostrava, and provide additional information to help victims, whether it be with the organization or another party. As of 2016, there were four women's shelters to accommodate survivors and children throughout the country.

## **Improvement measures around the world**

Globally, today there are over 7,000 measures in 193 different countries that are aimed at preventing violence against women and protecting survivors. 1,583 of these include legislative measures and "more than 95% of institutional mechanisms for domestic and intimate partner violence were

established after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action 1995” (Global Database on Violence against women, n.d.). At the time of its creation, the Beijing Platform was considered the most comprehensive document relating to gender-based violence prevention ever.

**Graph 1:** Forms of violence addressed by national legislation



**Source:** Global Database on Violence against women

One such document, specific to the EU, is the Istanbul Convention, “the most far-reaching international treaty to tackle this serious violation of human rights” (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2016). The Istanbul Convention focuses on four key areas: prevention, protection, prosecution and development of integrated policies. It was adopted in 2011 and entered into full force in 2014, and while the Czech Republic signed it in 2016, it still has not ratified the Convention as of this year, and therefore is not bound to its provisions. It is one of the only signatory countries that has not done so, along with Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Lithuania and Armenia. Divisions within the Czech Republic regarding the protection of victims and violence prevention versus the preservation of traditional values (mainly among religious institutions) has made ratification extremely difficult. However, ratification of the treaty is one of the leading strategies to help combat gender-based violence, especially in the Czech Republic. The “innovative” document “criminalises offenses, such as female genital mutilation, forced marriage, stalking, forced abortion and forced sterilisation recognises violence against women as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination obliges states which have signed and ratified the Convention to invite their parliaments to participate in the monitoring process” (Council of Europe, n.d.). Clear definitions and the bindingness of the Istanbul Convention would be a concrete foundation for the Czech Republic to continue to build upon, ensuring the safety of women and reduction in domestic violence cases and harm.

International organizations also play very important roles in this movement. The United Nations is also very active in the efforts to achieving gender equality. Their UNITE to End Violence against Women initiative was launched in 2008 and involves a global 16-day activism push against gender-based violence. It is managed by UN Women and “calls on governments, civil society, women’s organizations,

young people, the private sector, media, and the UN system to join forces to address the global pandemic of violence against women and girls” (UN Women, 2024). This year, the campaign platform “Every 10 Minutes, a woman is killed... will draw attention to the alarming escalation of violence against women to revitalize commitments, call for accountability and action from decision-makers” (United Nations, 2024). The World Health Organization has also developed an acronym to act as a prevention framework for policy makers known as RESPECT. “Each letter of RESPECT stands for one of seven strategies: Relationship skills strengthening; Empowerment of women; Services ensured; Poverty reduced; Enabling environments (schools, work places, public spaces) created; Child and adolescent abuse prevented; and Transformed attitudes, beliefs and norms” (World Health Organization, 2024). The goal of WHO’s acronym is to provide a framework for leaders to use to create and enforce legislation that prioritize women’s safety, thereby providing meaningful and effective change.

## Conclusion

It is absolutely essential that politicians and nongovernmental organizations continue to push for meaningful and effective change to protect everyone from gender-based violence, in whatever form it may take; legislation, public participation and education, continuing initiatives, etc. While strides have certainly been made in protecting women from violence around the world, there is still major reform and education that needs to take place, especially to account for constant societal changes. For instance, a relatively new consideration of technology as a mechanism for violence has resulted in a “global uptick in measures to address technology-facilitated violence against women” (Global Database on Violence against women, n.d.), especially following the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Countries in the Asia-Pacific regions have led these efforts so far. The Czech Republic’s Action Plan does contain a small section dedicated to cyber-violence.

The statistics about how harmful domestic violence is to women around the world are incredibly alarming. Leaders have an immense responsibility to protect their constituents, half of which are women, and violence against women is a violation of their human rights. Global efforts, especially recent ones, are encouraging in this fight, but it is important that progress continues to be made and more concrete protections are instated around the world.

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