

EU survey on gender-based
violence against women
and other forms of
inter-personal violence
(EU-GBV) — first results

2022 edition



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1

Introduction and background information

This publication provides background information on the methodology development, and on the implementation of the EU survey on gender-based violence against women and other forms of inter-personal violence (EU-GBV). It also gives some first results from the survey.

Violence directed against a person because of that person's gender, or violence that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately can be defined as gender-based violence (GBV). Women and girls, of all ages and backgrounds are the most affected by GBV ⁽¹⁾. Eliminating GBV and improving knowledge on the topic is one of the priorities of the European Commission, as the lack of comparable and reliable data can impede further policy developments.

Development of the EU-wide survey on GBV started in 2016, pre-testing of the questionnaire was carried out in eight countries from October 2017 to March 2018. A pilot survey was conducted in 14 countries over the period 2018–2019. The main survey implementation started in 2020 and data collection is from 2020-2023 (wave 2021).

To ensure that high quality and comparable data are produced, the implementation of EU-GBV is based on a common questionnaire and methodology. The main concepts and definitions, as well as guidance on all technical and methodological aspects of this survey, are provided in the Methodological manual for the EU survey on gender-based violence against women and other forms of inter-personal violence (EU-GBV) ⁽²⁾.

As the data collection (wave 2021) is planned over the period 2020-2023, based on national timetables, the survey data will be published by Eurostat in batches (groups of countries) shortly after the validation process is finalised. This first dissemination includes the countries who finalised data collection in September 2022 (BG, FR, LV, LT, NL, AT, SI), while EU-wide data will be disseminated at the end of 2023.

⁽¹⁾ For further details, see European Commission webpage, *What is gender-based violence?* (available at https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-based-violence/what-gender-based-violence_en).

⁽²⁾ Eurostat, *Methodological manual for the EU survey on gender-based violence against women and other forms of inter-personal violence (EU-GBV)*, Eurostat, 2021 (available at <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3859598/13484289/KS-GQ-21-009-EN-N.pdf/1478786c-5fb3-fe31-d759-7bbe0e9066ad?t=1633004533458>).

2

Interpreting the EU-GBV survey results

Based on UN studies ⁽³⁾, a substantial amount of violent experience is not reported or officially recorded; it is therefore important to rely on a population survey in addition to police statistics.

Results of a violence against women survey conducted in 2013 ⁽⁴⁾ showed that only one third of victims of partner violence and one quarter of victims of non-partner violence contacted police or a support organisation following the most serious incidents of violence.

Based on the EU-GBV survey wave 2021, results available at the time of writing this article for seven EU Member States (BG, FR, LV, LT, NL, AT, SI), show a similar trend. More victims of partner violence contact the police compared to victims of non-partner violence, but still less than one quarter of women reported to the police at least one incident of partner violence.

Most cases of violence experienced are not reported to the police, therefore not officially recorded.

Another comparison could be made between the number of police recorded violent sexual offences ⁽⁵⁾ and number of women who reported any sexual violence in the survey. The number of women in the EU-GBV survey wave 2021 who reported experience of sexual violence during last five years is much higher compared to the number of violent sexual offences reported to the police during the same period. Of the six countries where both figures are available, the number of offences reported to the police accounts for less than 5 % ⁽⁶⁾ of the total number of women who, in the survey, said that they have experienced any sexual act of violence.

However, it is necessary to point out that survey data itself might only be a close proxy to real prevalence, as survey data depend on the willingness of the respondent to disclose any violence experienced.

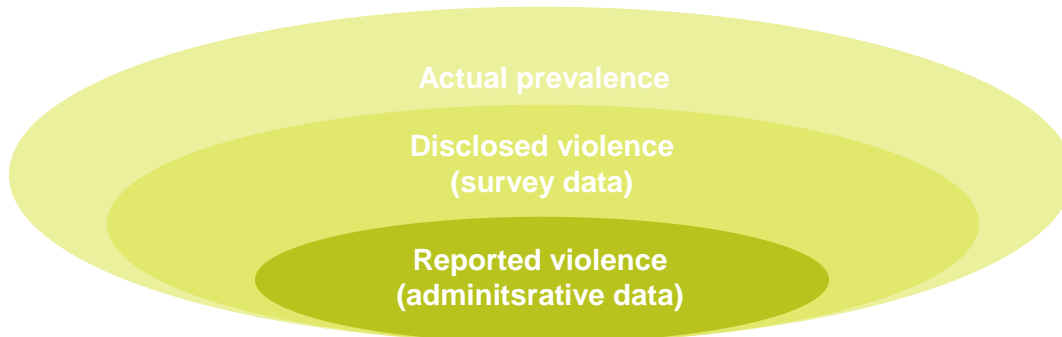
⁽³⁾ For further details, see UN Women webpage, Facts and figures: Ending violence against women. (available at <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>).

⁽⁴⁾ FRA, Violence against women: and EU-wide survey. Main results, FRA 2014 (available at https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results-apr14_en.pdf).

⁽⁵⁾ Eurostat, database, table crim_hom_soff (available at https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=crim_hom_soff&lang=en).

⁽⁶⁾ It is important to highlight that the counting unit for the police and survey data are different: number of offences are recorded by police (not persons), while number of persons who have experienced violence is counted in the survey. One person might report more than one offence to the police.

Figure 1: Prevalence of violence by different data sources.



Source: EIGE, *Gender Equality Index 2015. Measuring gender equality in the European Union 2005–2012. Report*, European Institute for Gender Equality, 2015, p. 121 (available at <https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/mh0415169enn.pdf>)

To understand the prevalence of violence and disclosure rates by survey respondents, it is important to take into account the extent to which violence is tolerated in the wider community ⁽⁷⁾. Research has shown that respondents' attitudes might reflect earlier individual experiences of violence and thus normalisation over time, or socially desirable norms in the community, and therefore might not be comparable between countries ⁽⁸⁾.

For example in cultures where people are ready to talk about their painful experiences, their answers may reflect more accurately their own experiences rather than community norms. However, in less aware communities it may be that people might reflect socially desirable norms.

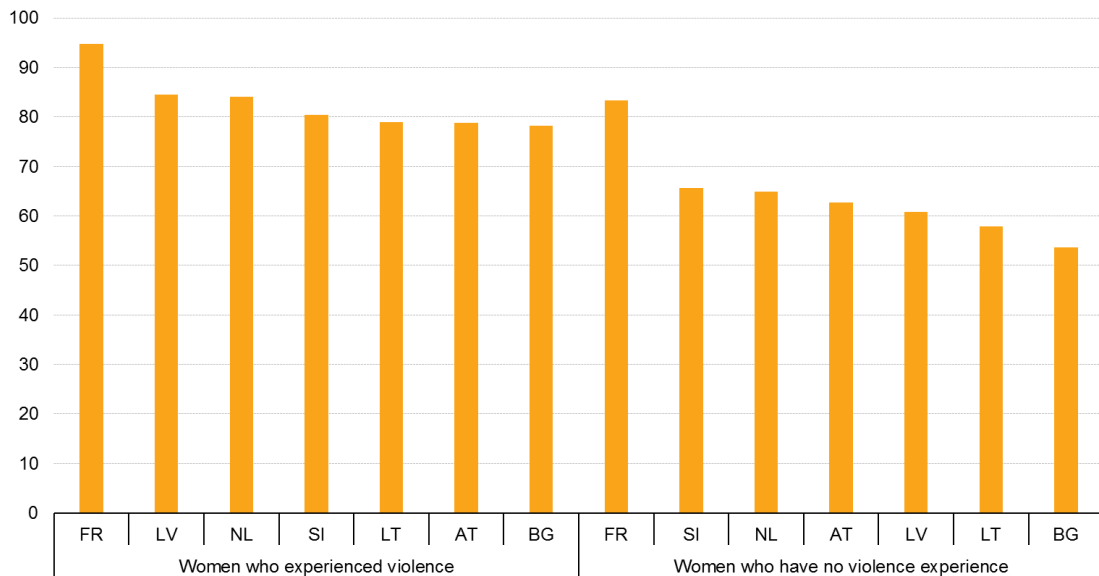
Extent to which violence is tolerated in the wider community might influence the number of women who are ready to share their violent experiences in the survey. Therefore, survey data itself might only be a close proxy to real prevalence.

Based on the EU-GBV survey wave 2021 results available at the time of writing this article, women who said that they had never experienced violence in their lifetime were more of the opinion that intimate partner violence against women is not so common in their country, compared with the women who have shared violence experienced in their lifetime (see Figure 2).

⁽⁷⁾ Waltemauer, E., *Public justification of intimate partner violence: a review of the literature*, Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 2012, volume 13 pages 167-175 (available at <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1524838012447699>) and United Nations, *Guidelines for Producing Statistics on Violence against Women*. Statistical Surveys, New York 2014 (available at: https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/docs/Guidelines_Statistics_VAW.pdf).

⁽⁸⁾ Jansen H.A.F.M., *Prevalence surveys on violence against women. Challenges around indicators, data collection and use*, UN women, 2012 (available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/57/EGM/EGM-paper-Henriette-Jansen%20pdf.pdf>) and Nayak, M.B., Byrne, C.A., Martin, M.K. et al., *Attitudes Toward Violence Against Women: A Cross-Nation Study*, 2003, Sex Roles 49, pages 333–342 (available at: <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1023/A:1025108103617.pdf>).

Figure 2. Share of women who have opinion that intimate partner violence against women is common in their country



Source: EU-GBV survey, wave 2021

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The share of women who believe that violence against women is common in their country is significantly different between countries: this is the case for half of women who did not share any violent experiences in Bulgaria compared with 83 % in France. However, between countries, the share of women who have experienced violence in their lifetime is far more similar: from 78 % in Bulgaria to 95 % in France.

Women who said that they had never experienced violence tend to believe that intimate partner violence against women is less common in their country.

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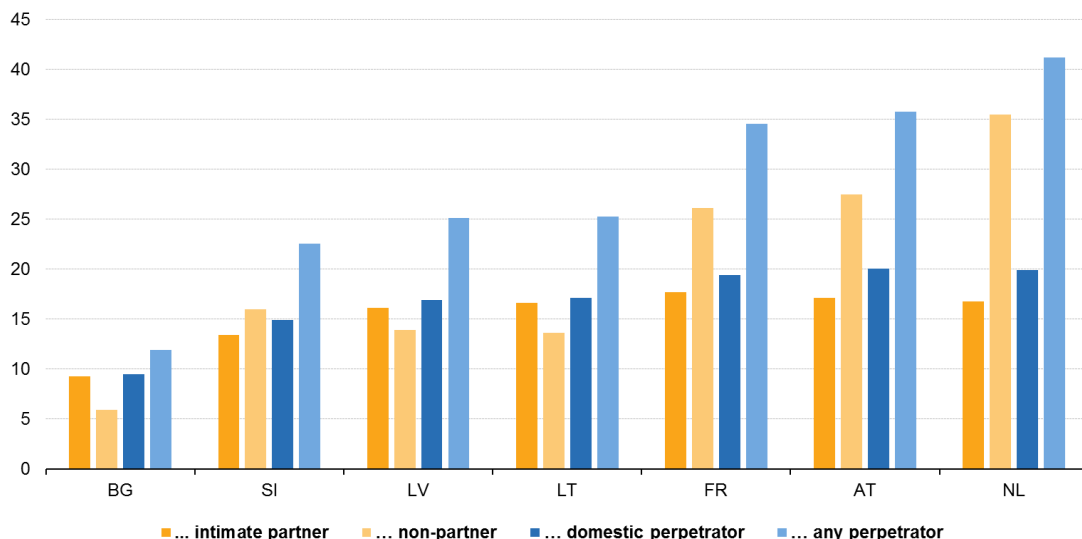
Prevalence of disclosed violence

Prevalence of GBV against women by type of perpetrator

Based on previous research ⁽⁹⁾, one in three women has experienced physical or sexual violence from the age of 15 years old.

Based on the EU-GBV survey wave 2021, at least 12 % of women in Bulgaria up to 41 % of women in the Netherlands have said that they have experienced physical violence (including threats) or sexual violence during their adulthood (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Proportion of women (18–74) who have experienced physical (including threats) or sexual violence during adulthood by type of perpetrator



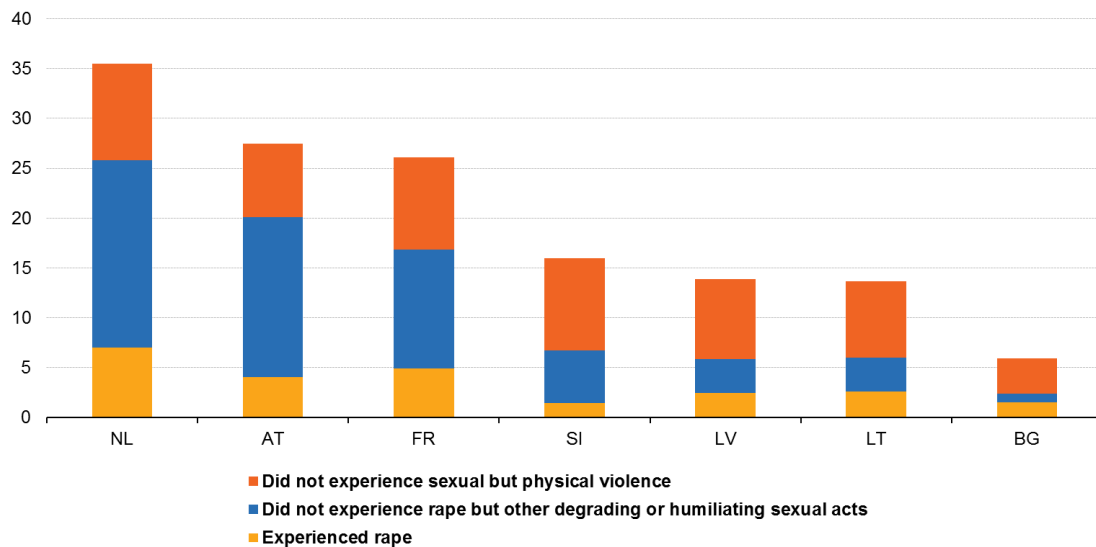
Source: EU-GBV survey, wave 2021

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⁹ FRA, *Violence against women: and EU-wide survey. Main results*, FRA 2014 (available at https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results-apr14_en.pdf) and The World Bank webpage. *Gender-based violence* (available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/socialsustainability/brief/violence-against-women-and-girls>).

In France, Austria and the Netherlands, women are more ready to disclose violent experiences, especially violence from a non-partner. The analyses of non-partner violence by type shows that the higher prevalence in these three countries is due to a higher prevalence of degrading or humiliating sexual acts other than rape.

Figure 4. Proportion of women (18–74) who have experienced physical (including threats) or sexual violence by a non-partner since the age of 15, by type of violence



Note: estimated prevalence of women who have experienced rape in SI and women who did not experience rape but other degrading or humiliating sexual acts in BG is published with a flag as it is based on 20 to 49 sample observations

Source: EU-GBV survey, wave 2021

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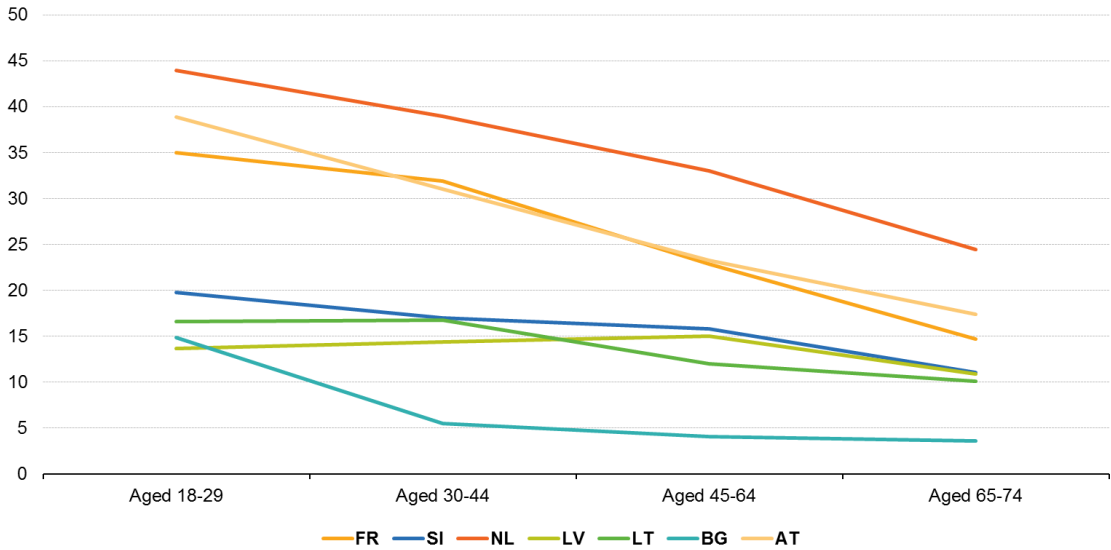
This tendency could be related to the general opinion of the wider community in the country regarding what level of violence is 'tolerated'. Therefore, women in countries where there is a lower threshold for what violence is 'tolerated' are probably more aware and do not consider as acceptable degrading or humiliating sexual acts carried out by a non-partner and therefore might be more prepared to share experiences of, for example, sexual touching and other 'less' serious sexual acts perpetrated by a non-partner.

The prevalence of non-partner violence might be higher in some countries because women in these countries are more aware and do not consider acceptable degrading or humiliating sexual acts by non-partner.

Prevalence of GBV against women by age of respondent

Based on the EU-GBV survey (wave 2021), younger women are more ready to share violent experiences they have faced. This trend is visible for all countries when comparing the prevalence of non-partner violence by age group.

Figure 5. Proportion of women who have experienced physical (including threats) or sexual violence by a non-partner since the age of 15, by age group



Note: estimated prevalence of women aged 18–29 for SI and BG and aged 65–74 for SI is published with a flag as it is based on 20 to 49 sample observations
 Source: EU-GBV survey, wave 2021



For example, in the Netherlands where more women than in other countries, have shared that they have experienced physical violence, including threats, or sexual violence by non-partner since they were 15 years old, 44 % of 18–29 years old women said that they have experienced violence by non-partner compared with 25 % of women aged 65–74.

Younger women are more ready to share violent experiences they faced.

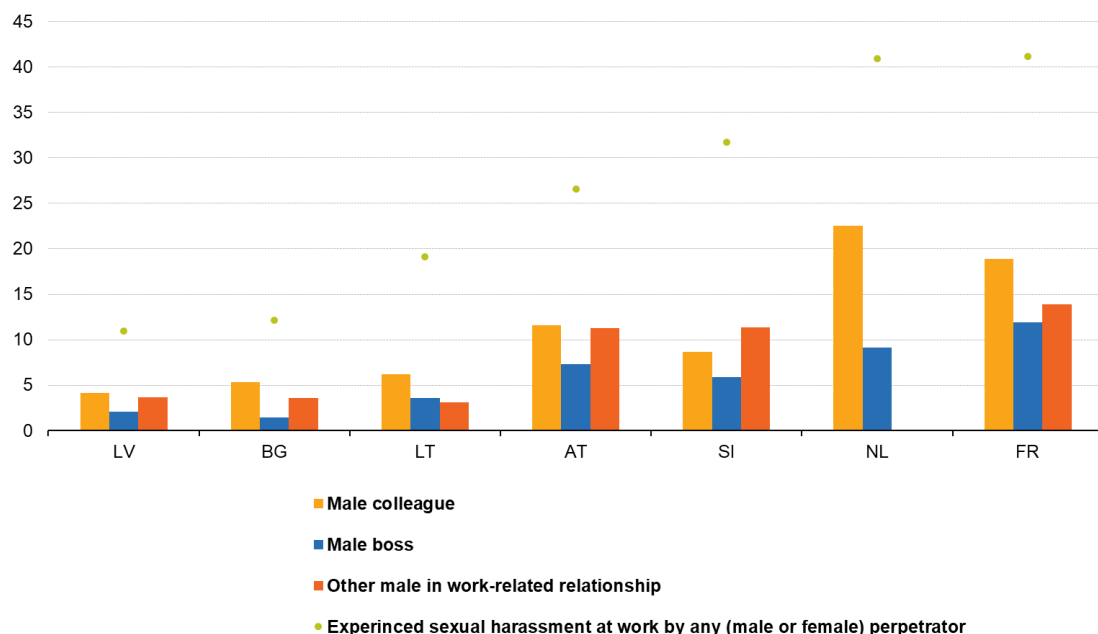
Prevalence of sexual harassment at work

The EU Directive (2006/54/EC) ⁽¹⁰⁾ requires the monitoring of the important phenomenon of violence, with a specific focus on working life. The Directive defines sexual harassment as ‘any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment’ (Article 2, 1 (d)).

Based on the EU-GBV survey (wave 2021), the proportion of women who have ever worked and who have experienced any unwanted behaviour with a sexual connotation in the workplace varies between 11 % in Latvia to 41 % in France.

Most perpetrators are male and in the majority of the countries, where data are available so far, the highest amount of sexual harassment happens between colleagues: from 4 % in Latvia to 22 % in the Netherlands. Many women have also experienced unwanted behaviour with a sexual connotation by their male boss in the workplace. The percentage of women who have reported such an experience during their lifetime is between 1.4 % in Bulgaria and 12 % in France.

Figure 6. Proportion of ever-working women (18–74) who have experienced sexual harassment at work, by type of perpetrator



Note: estimated prevalence of women in NL who have experienced sexual harassment at work by other male is not published as it is based on less than 20 sample observations

Source: EU-GBV survey, wave 2021

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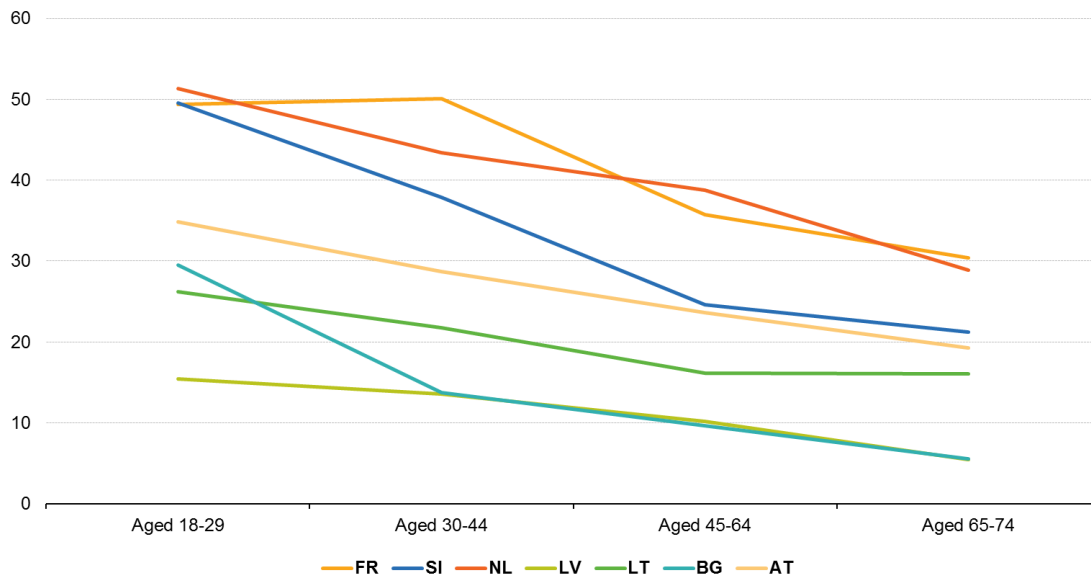
Similarly, as with other type of violence, younger women are more ready to share experiences on unwanted behaviour with a sexual connotation in the workplace.

The trend is most visible in Bulgaria, Latvia and Slovenia. For example, in Bulgaria, 18 % of women

(10) For more information, see Directive (EU) 2006/54/EC of 5 July 2006 on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation (recast) (available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32006L0054>).

aged 18–44 reported in the survey that they have experienced unwanted behaviour with a sexual connotation during their working life compared with 5.5 % in the age group 65–74.

Figure 7. Proportion of ever-working women (18–74) who have experienced sexual harassment at work, by age group



Note: estimated prevalence of women who have experienced sexual harassment at work in BG for age group 18–29 and in SI for age group 65–74 is published with a flag as it is based on 20 to 49 sample observations
Source: EU-GBV survey, wave 2021

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A lower prevalence rate for older age groups might be connected with social norms existing in their country: several researchers have pointed out that when sexual harassment is more accepted as a socially normal behaviour, women do not consider this kind of behaviour as sexual harassment at work and instead, often start to blame themselves.

4

Conclusions

The aim of the EU-GBV survey is to address the data collection requirements of the Istanbul Convention ⁽¹⁾ by developing a survey questionnaire and methodology in order to measure gender-based violence (as defined by the Convention), which is expanded to also cover the types of violence and perpetrators.

However, it is important to point out that survey data itself serves as a close proxy to the real prevalence of gender based violence, as the successful conclusion of the survey depends on multiple factors, but mostly on the willingness of the respondent to disclose any violence experienced. To understand the real prevalence of violence and disclosure rate, it is, firstly, important to take into account the extent to which violence is 'tolerated' in the wider community. It appears, for example, that in some countries the prevalence of non-partner violence might be higher because women in these countries are more aware of what is acceptable behaviour and do not consider degrading or humiliating sexual acts carried out by non-partner acceptable.

Although, as previously mentioned, the data disseminated can only be considered as an important proxy of the prevalence rates since the direct comparison between countries needs to take into account the important differences in national contexts, such as cultural differences, 'tolerance' of certain types of violence, trust in governmental institutions etc.

As the prevalence rates do not reflect the differing dynamics and consequences of violence, Eurostat plans to publish a wide range of indicators collected in the survey that will allow a deeper analysis of the types of violence, the frequency, severity, seriousness and reporting of partner and non-partner violence, as well as the indicators on sexual harassment at work (prevalence, frequency, reporting, opinion), violence in childhood and the indicators on knowledge of support services and general opinion.

⁽¹⁾ For more information about the text of the Istanbul Convention, see Council of Europe, Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, Istanbul 2011 (available at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=treaty-detail&treatynum=210>).

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