

NEWS

PROJECT

BeSecure-FeelSecure -  
Holistic Urban Security  
Governance Framework  
for Monitoring,  
Assessing and  
Forecasting the  
Efficiency, Sustainability  
and Resilience of  
Piraeus

📍 Piraeus, Greece

TOPIC

Urban security

EDIT 31 JANUARY 2024  
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## What can cities do to prevent gender-based violence?

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website



Cities play a crucial role in preventing gender-based violence (GBV) through comprehensive measures, as highlighted in the context of the BSFS project. This article delves into the critical issue of gender-based violence, emphasizing the role cities and local authorities play in prevention.

The topic of gender-based violence has been present throughout the duration of the BSFS project. On a symbolic note, the project kicked off during a violence against women event, marked in Piraeus by the lighting of the [Stone Clock in Pasalimani](#) and the project's [closure event](#) was on the eve of International Women's Day.

In more practical terms, the BSFS project participated in an [EFUS event](#) for the prevention of violence against women.

More importantly, one of the milestones of the BSFS project was the creation of the [Crime Victims Information Unit](#). According to their experience, gender based violence is one of the matters that they deal with in their everyday attention to victims.

In this article we will explore this topic and we will also discuss **what role urban authorities play** in the prevention and support of victims of gender-based violence.

Let's start by answering the following question...

### ***What is gender-based violence?***

Violence against women is not a new phenomenon -it has always existed across countries and periods in history. However, it is only since the 1990s that it has gained recognition as a **form of human rights abuse** and later as a

## sustainable development concern.

In 1992 the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women introduced the first internationally agreed definition of gender-based violence as:

***“violence against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately” [1]***

The terms “gender-based violence” and “violence against women (and girls)” are frequently used interchangeably.

Violence can take many forms. Perhaps one of the most well-known is physical violence. However, according to according to the UN Women, these are the **most common forms of violence that women around the world face [2]**:

1. Intimate partner violence
2. Sexual violence
3. Femicide
4. Human trafficking
5. Female mutilation
6. Online or technology facilitated violence

While the exercise of violence in interpersonal relationships can involve and affect people of any gender -as either victims or perpetrators-, it is worth noting that, **most violence against women is perpetuated by men for reasons pertaining to their gender**, and among the victims, women are affected disproportionately [3].

## Violence experienced by women in European cities

In 2014, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights conducted a **survey [3]** across the **28 member states of the European Union**. For this survey **42 000 randomly selected women** aged 18-74 were asked about their experiences of **physical, sexual, and psychological violence, at home, work, in public, and online**. The main takeaways of the survey are alarming:

**1/3** of all women in Europe have experienced **physical or sexual violence at least once during their adult lives**.  
**67%** of women **didn't report** the most serious incident of partner violence to the police or any other organization.  
**20%** of young women have suffered **harassment** online, through email or SMS.  
**18%** of women have been **stalked** (but **74%** of the most serious cases of stalking never came to the attention of the police).  
**55%** of women have experienced **sexual harassment** in some form, such as unwelcome touching, hugging or kissing since the age of 15.

We also ought to look at this phenomenon from an **intersectional perspective**, considering that characteristics such as gender expression, sexual orientation, socio-economic situation, etc. put women from specific communities at a higher risk. **Women with disabilities, migrant women, women living with disabilities, racialized women, etc. are more likely to experience gender-based violence and less likely to have the resources to seek support.**

## What is the role of local authorities in preventing gender-based violence?



At first glance, one could think that the type of violence women experience is a personal issue, and to prevent it, it is the individual who should take precautions. However, time and time again it has been proven that it is not a matter of clothes or individual actions to avoid triggering an assailant. **Gender-based violence is a systemic and structural issue:** practices driven by social norms (such as how a “respectable” woman should look and act) result in **harm** and a collective **neglect and minimization of the effects**. Unfortunately, laws do little to stop it, as the Women 2030 Global Shadow Report reveals [4].

However, actions at a city level can still have an impact on **transforming social norms**, empowering city dwellers of all genders to identify, combat, and denounce violence, and provide support to victims.

On November 2023, the European Committee of the Regions adopted Opinion CDR 2488/2023, a document titled **“Stopping gender-based violence – cities and regions leading the way”** [5]. This document emphasizes the urgency to tackle gender-based violence at all levels, and it **highlights the role of local and regional authorities by implementing concrete measures and actions:**

### Prevention

Cities can design and put in place **frameworks, policies, and gender-sensitive measures** to combat gender-based violence, in **cooperation with civil society and women’s organizations**.

Local authorities must recognize the importance of **urban design and transport planning** to help lower the rate of attacks in streets, public transportation, schools, workplaces, public toilets, parks, etc.

### Education

Local regional authorities and actors such as associations, educational and training institutions are key to **raise awareness by addressing gender inequalities, roles, and power dynamics**.

Special attention should be paid to **eradicating messages and discourses from the public sphere that promote gender stereotypes or justify gender-based violence**.

Awareness-raising campaigns abound, but they must reach target groups meaningfully and emphasize on the right to be protected against violence and encourage people to speak up.

**Violence prevention needs to target and include men**, promote gender equality, and counter destructive standards of toxic masculinity and stereotypes about gender and sexuality.

Campaigns should focus on stopping perpetrators of **domestic violence**.

### Immediate protection to victims

Local regional authorities are often the first instance to respond to needs of victims, ensuring that they are cared for by local social and health services and protected by law enforcement.

Victims need to be **informed** about their rights, the services available to them, and be given **follow-up to their complaints**. Information for the victims needs to be consistent, comprehensive, timely, and clear.

Local and regional authorities should put in place accessible, **survivor-centered reporting systems** (such as the Victims Information Unit created within the framework of BSFS) and paths for victims of hate crimes for women and children.

There is a need for **intervention programs for perpetrators of crimes**

**Differentiated training** is required for operators involved in preventive phases, care phases, and execution phases.

Through the BSFS project, Piraeus joins a network of victim-based initiatives to help combat gender based violence in European cities. The experiences will provide valuable knowledge for future implementation and improvement in other cities.

## References

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