

# ENCOURAGING THE PARTICIPATION OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND THE MEDIA IN THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: ARTICLE 17 OF THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION



A collection of papers  
on the Council of Europe Convention  
on preventing and combating violence  
against women and domestic violence

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French edition:

*Encourager la participation du secteur  
privé et des médias à la prévention de  
la violence à l'égard des femmes  
et de la violence domestique:  
Article 17 de la Convention d'Istanbul*

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All URLs cited in this document were  
last accessed on 4 December 2015.

Cover and layout: Documents and  
Publications Production Department  
(SPDP), Council of Europe

Photos: Shutterstock

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Printed at the Council of Europe

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# Introduction

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**T**he private sector and the media play a crucial role in preventing and combating violence against women in its various forms. Private and public employers have legal and moral obligations as well as an economic interest in supporting their staff by protecting their health and safety and by mitigating risks of all kinds – related and unrelated to the work environment. Various forms of violence against women such as sexual harassment, stalking and domestic violence are not only serious forms of abuse condemned by the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence<sup>1</sup> (CETS No. 210, hereinafter “the Istanbul Convention”), but they can also have a serious impact on work performance, absenteeism and the general well-being of staff. Whether it is violence perpetrated by a co-worker or someone outside the work environment, it negatively impacts the workplace.

This holds true for media organisations as places of work, but the media also play a significant role in shaping opinions and mentalities, and can therefore contribute even more to preventing violence against women by shaping how society views women and men and how it understands gender-based violence. The media have an immense potential for social change. However, the presence of sexism and degrading images, and the way the media cover and treat issues of violence against women can also hinder change. The media sector is therefore a vital partner in preventing and combating all forms of violence against women.

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1. Council of Europe (2011), Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, Explanatory report, available at [www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/210](http://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/210).

Recognising the important role of the private sector and the media, Article 17 of the Istanbul Convention requires states parties to tap into this potential by encouraging the private sector, in particular the information technology sector and the media, to take on the issue of violence against women and help shape, elaborate and implement internal and external policies in this field.

The purpose of this paper is to explain the rationale for the private sector and the media to engage in preventing and combating violence against women and to offer practical advice and good practice examples. Case studies and examples are drawn from a range of employers and organisations, which demonstrate how various interventions and governmental mechanisms can be used to tackle the effects of violence against women and raise awareness of gender-based violence. Specific attention is also given to examples of measures taken in co-operation with the private sector to increase children's safety when using the information and communications environments, including new social media that provide access to content of sexual or violent nature, which may be harmful.

# The scope of Article 17

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**T**he private sector is essential to the goal of changing attitudes of the public at large, overcoming gender stereotypes and raising awareness of the various forms of violence against women. Attempting to tap into this potential, Article 17 of the Istanbul Convention requires states parties to actively encourage the private sector and the media to contribute to the prevention of violence against women.

## **Article 17 – Participation of the private sector and the media**

1. Parties shall encourage the private sector, the information and communication technology sector and the media, with due respect for freedom of expression and their independence, to participate in the elaboration and implementation of policies and to set guidelines and self-regulatory standards to prevent violence against women and to enhance respect for their dignity.

2. Parties shall develop and promote, in co-operation with private sector actors, skills among children, parents and educators on how to deal with the information and communications environment that provides access to degrading content of a sexual or violent nature which might be harmful.

The explanatory report of the Istanbul Convention indicates that the purpose of Article 17 is to encourage a broader involvement of private companies and the media in the effort to end gender-based violence.

The first paragraph of Article 17 contains two different obligations for states parties. First, it requires them to encourage the private sector, the information and communication technology (ICT) sector and the media to participate in the development and implementation of local, regional and national policies and efforts to prevent violence against women. Second, it obligates states parties to encourage these sectors to set guidelines and self-regulatory standards in order to strengthen the respect for women's and girls' dignity and in this way contribute to the prevention of gender-based violence. For example, private companies may be encouraged to establish protocols or guidelines on how to prevent violence in the workplace and support victims.



Paragraph 1 of Article 17 also explicitly points out that states parties have to respect the fundamental principles of freedom of expression and independence of the media. Although existing standards, such as the 2013 Council of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2013)1 on gender equality and media,<sup>2</sup> and the legal framework of some member states include provisions on gender equality and/or violence against women in media content,<sup>3</sup> Article 17 of the Istanbul Convention attributes the task of preventing and combating violence against women through the media to the media themselves. Media organisations can contribute to this by introducing self-regulatory mechanisms, internal codes of conduct/ethics and internal supervision to promote gender equality; combating gender stereotypes; avoiding sexist advertising, language and content; and refraining from the use of degrading images of women associating violence and sex.

The second paragraph of Article 17 requires states parties to co-operate with the private sector to equip children, parents and educators with skills for dealing with the information and communication environments that provide access to degrading content of a sexual or violent nature. Although there is no doubt that the Internet is an innovative and global resource that serves the interests of many of its users, it is not always a safe, secure, open and enabling environment for everyone without discrimination. Many aspects of Internet governance are still fairly unregulated, providing myriad opportunities for the free access to, production and dissemination of degrading messages about women or girls, hypersexualised images, incitements to or normalisation of violence against women as well as growing occurrences of sexist hate speech. Such messages and images propagated through the Internet can have a negative effect by socialising children into harmful stereotypes and the acceptance of violence against women. There is also growing evidence of misuse of new technology and social media to exploit and target vulnerable young people, including girls, in the form of bullying, stalking, harassment and threatening behaviour. Therefore, raising public awareness on harmful material and practices in the information and communication environments, and education programmes for children, parents and educators on the safe use of the Internet are essential. The aim of such programmes would be to equip children, parents and educators with skills to protect children's safety while using new information technologies, mobile phones, tablets and social networking sites.

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2. Point A.1 of Recommendation CM/Rec(2013)1 of the Committee of Ministers on gender equality and media: "Unless already in place, member States should adopt an appropriate legal framework intended to ensure that there is respect for the principle of human dignity and the prohibition of all discrimination on grounds of sex, as well as of incitement to hatred and to any form of gender-based violence within the media."
  3. See p. 34.

# The rationale for the private sector and the media to engage in the prevention of violence against women and domestic violence

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**T**he Istanbul Convention aims at zero tolerance for violence against women. It requires states parties to criminalise or otherwise sanction the following specific forms of such violence: sexual harassment, stalking, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, forced abortion, forced sterilisation and domestic violence in its many forms (physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence).<sup>4</sup> This sends a clear message that violence against women, in all its many forms, is not a private matter. Because many women who experience any of these types of violence still suffer in silence, due to the pervasive culture of blaming and shaming the victims, violence is often undisclosed.<sup>5</sup> However, violence happens everywhere; its consequences are felt in all places, including in the private sector.

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4. Council of Europe, Information leaflet on the Istanbul Convention.

5. The European Union Fundamental Rights Agency (2014) found that about one quarter of women victims of partner or non-partner sexual violence in the European Union refrained from reporting because they felt ashamed of what happened. Up to 40% of women that suffered either physical or sexual violence have not turned to anyone, including friends or family.

In many European countries, employers have a legal responsibility to prevent sexual harassment at work<sup>6</sup> and potential court cases can have a great financial impact on companies. But violence against women also affects the workplace and businesses negatively in other ways. When violence, such as sexual harassment, takes place in the workplace, it erodes the fabric of trust and co-operation that sustains healthy work environments, and leads to lower economic output. Violence outside work, in particular domestic violence, impacts the workplace through its consequences on the affected employees.

There is also a relevant connection between media and violence prevention, as inadequate media reporting of violence against women without contextualisation, and giving preference to sensationalism, can reinforce gender stereotypes that perpetuate gender-based violence. In this context, non-binding standards of the Council of Europe<sup>7</sup> and national legal frameworks in a number of European countries<sup>8</sup> complement the provisions of Article 17 of the Istanbul Convention with more detailed provisions to prevent incitement to violence against women and or sexist hate speech in media content.

States parties to the Istanbul Convention are responsible for ensuring that national legislation, institutional frameworks and policies comprehensively address violence against women and domestic violence. As part of their holistic response, governments should also encourage the private sector and the media to recognise themselves as relevant contexts in which the prevention of gender-based violence can be addressed. This can be done by showing that actors within the private sector and the media do not only have a social interest and moral responsibility in contributing to violence prevention, but that there are also economic and social advantages for them to engage in combating violence against women.

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6. For example, Article 26 of EU directive 2006/54/EC on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation (recast) stipulates: "Member States shall encourage, in accordance with national law, collective agreements or practice, employers and those responsible for access to vocational training to take effective measures to prevent all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex, in particular harassment and sexual harassment in the workplace, in access to employment, vocational training and promotion".
  7. Recommendation CM/Rec(2013)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on gender equality and media.
  8. Examples of national legal frameworks are given in the chapter starting on p. 33.

## **The negative impact of violence against women on businesses and their employees**

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Firstly, employers can be made aware of the magnitude of the impact that violence against women has on workplaces: for example, 45% to 55% of women in the European Union report having experienced some form of sexual harassment in the workplace (Fundamental Rights Agency 2014). In the United Kingdom, it is estimated that every year more than 20% of employed women take time off work because of domestic violence. As a direct result of this abuse, 2% of these women even lose their jobs (Walby S. *et al.* 2004, p.38).

Secondly, it is increasingly recognised that domestic violence affects an individual's ability to carry out his or her professional responsibilities. Employees do not only bring one part of themselves to their job, but every aspect of their lives follows them through the doors of the workplace. Good health and well-being are key factors in enabling individuals to enter and remain in the labour market. Research demonstrates that the well-being of workers is significant also for business productivity and economic growth (McKee M. *et al.* 2012; Marmot M. 2010). A healthy psychosocial working environment, in terms of being consultative, supportive and flexible, can enable employees to be more motivated, profitable and above all, help to achieve a better-performing organisation. The well-being of personnel contributes to greater productivity and higher labour force participation, while also reducing future demands on health care (HAPI 2012).

Furthermore, violence does not only have negative effects on the individual, it also has significant implications for work colleagues who may become involved in order to assist or by witnessing an act of violence whether committed by a colleague, client or stranger. The abused employees suffer, but colleagues can also be directly or indirectly affected.

At an organisational level, the feeling of not being able to help may give rise to frustration within the organisation (Pattison G. 2006). Violence can influence the social cohesion of the working environment and the way the work is organised (Johnson P.R. and Gardner S. (2000), pp. 197-203). It negatively affects motivation and commitment among staff, loyalty to the enterprise, working climate, public image, and even openness to innovation and knowledge building. Furthermore, violence at work can include destruction of property and court cases on harassment and violence can divert and drain a company's budget. If cases are lost or settlements agreed to, there can be major direct financial implications.

Thirdly, the social and economic costs of violence against women and girls and domestic violence are high, not only for the victims but also for society and the private sector in the form of economic costs and lost economic output due to absences from work. Gaining an accurate and systematic figure for the costs of domestic violence across member states is difficult due to the immense differences in definitions, methodologies for data collection and publication of results. Still, some efforts have been made to estimate the costs of violence against women in Europe. The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) estimates that the cost of gender-based violence to the EU member states exceeds €200 billion per year (European Institute for Gender Equality 2014). This includes the lost economic output; the provision of services, including health, legal, social and specialised support; and the personal (physical and emotional) impact on the victim. One study shows that in the UK alone the total annual cost of domestic violence for the state, employers and victims is around £16 billion (Walby S. 2009). Lost economic output and losses to employers account for around £1.8 billion a year (Coy M. and Kelly L. 2011). This is the cost of sickness, absence, lost productivity, leaving work early, arriving late, turnover and ill health. It is estimated that around half of the costs of such sickness absences is borne by the employer and half by the individual in lost wages.

It is therefore crucial that violence against women and domestic violence are seen as serious, recognisable, and preventable also by the private sector. To this end, states parties can take a number of measures to motivate employers to become interested in enhancing and protecting their employees' health, safety and well-being as part of their business and management standards, policies and strategies. Examples of such measures are given in the following section and in the checklist at the end of this paper.

## **The link between the media's portrayal of women and men, their reproduction of gender stereotypes and violence against women**

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The media are more than mere mirrors of society or neutral communication environments.<sup>9</sup> Through their reporting and representations, the media create meanings and subjects, and actively shape opinions, attitudes, perceptions and ideas. In fact, with the advance of technology, the media now play a bigger

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9. Council of Europe (2013) "Media and the Image of Women".

role in the socialisation of individuals than they ever did. Media are an integral and constant part of people's everyday lives.

Media can reinforce the *status quo* by perpetuating gender stereotypes and attitudes that condone violence against women. Sexism, the trivialisation of violence or the hypersexualisation of women that can be found in the media, including social media, and advertising can even exacerbate violence against women. Gender stereotyping and violence against women are intrinsically connected. Ideas about the inferiority of women, notions of male entitlement, or preconceived views of female or male sexuality significantly influence behaviour and justify men's use of violence against women as a form of control. Furthermore, the media play a central role in the production and dissemination of images of women and men, which significantly influence public perceptions of both sexes and of gender roles.

Equally, the media can contribute to social change by promoting zero tolerance of violence against women. They can promote balanced images of women and men and help raise awareness about violence against women and domestic violence and about ways in which different sectors of society can act to prevent this violence and support victims. Examples of how the media can engage in the prevention of violence against women are given in the chapter on Media and the prevention of violence against women (p. 27).

# How to engage the private sector in preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence

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**W**hen designing measures to support the engagement of the private sector in preventing violence against women, it is important to address the various roles it may have: as an employer, but equally important as a shaper of attitudes and perceptions, as an advertiser or producer of goods and services and as a member of the wider community. There are opportunities to take action to prevent violence against women or to perpetuate violence against women in all of these roles. This section illustrates how the private sector can have an impact on violence against women and, conversely, how violence against women affects the private sector. A number of practical solutions for what businesses can do to improve the situation are discussed and illustrated by good practice examples.

## **The involvement of the private sector in its role as employer**

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In most European countries, national legal frameworks contain provisions on the role of employers regarding the prevention and elimination of sexual harassment at work.<sup>10</sup> These include putting in place specific procedures and contact/resource persons within the human resources departments, and are often completed by the work of trade unions. However, as suggested by the

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10. See note 5 on Article 26 of EU directive 2006/54/EC, op. cit. In addition, according to the ILO Report *Sexual harassment at work, national and international responses*, “Sexual harassment laws in most jurisdictions impose duties on employers. Some impose a duty to respond to incidents of harassment”, see Bibliography.

Istanbul Convention, there are additional ways in which the private sector can intervene and play a role to prevent violence against women, including violence that happens outside the workplace.

## **Providing information and training on violence against women**

A first step for employers who wish to participate in the prevention of violence against women and domestic violence can be to raise awareness of this issue among their employees. Because gender-based violence is easily seen as a taboo topic, employees can find it difficult to talk about violence and they might not always know how to have a conversation about it. Employers thus have the possibility to give their staff the “permission”, as well as the information, to talk about violence in the workplace. Education of staff can therefore include training on how to have a conversation about gender-based violence both at the workplace and in the community. The training can also include the interpretation of signs of trouble as well as discussions on what to do and what not to do if there is reason to believe that a colleague is confronted with violence at home or in the workplace. Appointing high-level ambassadors within the organisation to represent the cause of prevention also highlights that fighting violence against women is important and of concern to everyone.

In the United Kingdom, the firm KPMG has worked towards raising their staff’s awareness about domestic violence. The aim has been to foster a professional environment in which employees that are experiencing abuse can come forward. In order to make the company’s official position public, its internal support policy has been posted on the company’s Intranet. The Intranet also provides information about the support available and the procedure to apply. Furthermore, line managers receive training to develop their confidence to deal with abusers as well as with victims of domestic violence. A connection between business productivity and domestic violence is made by linking the support and prevention to the performance management in the organisation.

Education about gender-based violence will give the staff an understanding of why violence prevention and victim support might be of importance within the company. Once employees better understand the issue, they are also more willing to help and contribute to the company’s internal policies. Internal business support systems for employees at risk of violence can make a difference, and they do not have to be expensive – they can tap into resources already available within the organisation. It is important to build a basis for trust between employees and the organisation. Trusted managers



and colleagues can help in this task, since employees who are confronted with violence might first open up about their situation to someone they know, rather than a complete stranger or a law-enforcement agent. The training can thus also include preparing employees to give “psychological first aid” to victims of violence within their own organisation.

Furthermore, employers can reduce the economic and business costs of domestic violence in the workplace by adopting an active role in violence prevention. Violence against women should be seen as an issue of workplace safety. The organisation can inform staff about help lines and services available. For example, in the Spanish company HC Energía this is done by providing information on the company’s Intranet about sexual harassment and stalking, and about different ways of reporting them in accordance with provisions of Spanish Act 3/2007 (European Commission (2012), pp. 258-259). Information about counselling and professional support for victims of gender-based violence is also available on the company’s Intranet.

**Providing information on domestic violence: Milbank, Tweed, Hadley & McCloy LLP and Wragge & Co. LLP (United Kingdom/International)**

**Intervention:** These two international law firms have engaged in a number of initiatives to address domestic violence in the workplace, after becoming members of the Corporate Alliance against Domestic Violence. To raise awareness of domestic violence in the workplace, posters have been put up in the toilets. This gives employees the possibility to read the information in a safe, private environment which allows potential victims of violence to understand that what is happening to them is unacceptable and that help is available. The posters have tear-off slips with a free 24-hour helpline number that employees can discreetly take with them. The firms’ Intranet sites offer links to websites which provide further practical help and support for victims. The material on the Intranet also addresses what to do if an employee thinks that they or someone they know might be an abuser. The human resources teams and key managers in the firms are trained in how to identify the signs that someone may be a victim of domestic violence, what to do and what not to do. Receptionists and security guards have also been trained in dealing with abusers who try to contact victims at work. Employees can be escorted to their cars, a taxi, bus or train if they are being stalked.

**Results:** The increased awareness of domestic violence in the workplace has led to people’s increased readiness to discuss the problem. Since the

managers have received training in how to address the issue, reports of gender-based violence of all kinds has increased within the firms. The posters in the toilets seem to have been particularly effective. On the Intranet, the pages on domestic violence get 20 to 25 visits a month from employees who stay longer than average on the page, which indicates that they are reading the information. Some cases of domestic violence have even been reported to the human resource department.

**Lessons learnt:** Education and information are important tools in making employees realise how common the problem of domestic violence actually is in the society and even within the firm. Government research and data have been useful in raising this awareness among staff members. It is important to contribute to the understanding that domestic violence is a very prevalent, albeit hidden, problem.

**How the approach works to prevent violence:** By raising awareness and taking active measures to overcome domestic violence, the issue is made visible within the firm. This increased visibility creates an environment of safety and confidence in which employees are invited to reflect upon their personal situation, or upon that of others, in their surroundings. They become aware of their rights and of the structural nature of domestic violence as a social issue beyond their individual situation. Information on where to seek help and support is available to both victims and perpetrators of domestic violence.

The prevention of violence and the provision of support to victims within the organisation can also be integrated into the employees' benefits scheme. The health and well-being of the staff can be followed up with online surveys and health checks. Psychological, medical, legal and economic support can be made available to victims of gender-based violence, as is the case at Red Eléctrica de España. This Spanish company covers expenses incurred due to gender-based violence suffered by its employees up to a sum of €600 per month for a period of up to six months. It must be noted that internal support programmes can choose to focus not only on victims and survivors of abuse, but also on perpetrators, who might be present within an organisation as well.

## **Incentives and partnerships for the private sector to engage with violence against women**

Despite existing initiatives and good practices, the private sector easily becomes a missing link when it comes to confronting violence against women and

domestic violence. As financial support is not always available, government political support and leadership as well as incentives, are needed to encourage the engagement of the private sector in violence prevention, as foreseen by the Istanbul Convention.

As a result of resistance created by companies' beliefs that violence does not occur in their organisations, actors in the private sector need help to understand why they should engage in the fight against gender-based violence, as well as how to co-ordinate and incorporate this issue into their staff policy. Therefore, providing the private sector with targeted information and data on the frequency and the costs of violence against women; how people are affected by gender-based violence in the workplace; to what extent it negatively affects business, productivity and economic growth; government strategies to prevent it as well as incentives (when) available; are important tools for governments in engaging the private sector in violence prevention. Business may not always have access to information about best practice, but they may be an effective place to implement policies of violence prevention.

In order to set incentives, governments and other organisations can also offer tax breaks, create award schemes or introduce gender equality labels to stimulate violence prevention in the private sector. Such policies exist in different countries, although they tend to focus on gender equality in general, not specifically on violence.<sup>11</sup> At the global level, the Women's Empowerment Principles – Equality Means Business (global),<sup>12</sup> a joint initiative of UN Women and the UN Global Compact, seeks private sector commitment and rewards businesses for their work on women's rights. The principles outline seven steps for business on how to empower women in the workplace, marketplace and community. Principle 3 relates to "Ensuring the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers". Although this principle does not specifically mention eliminating violence against women, it is a first step to raising awareness about violence at work and for business leaders from all countries and sectors to demonstrate leadership and commitment to advance equality between women and men.

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11. In Belgium, the Wo.Men@Work Award rewards the CEO who works hardest to achieve gender equality within his or her company based in Belgium [www.womenatworkaward.be/concept](http://www.womenatworkaward.be/concept). In Georgia, UNDP has created a Gender Equality Award to reward champions of gender equality in the private sector [www.ge.undp.org/content/georgia/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2015/07/06/gender-equality-in-business-and-politics.html](http://www.ge.undp.org/content/georgia/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2015/07/06/gender-equality-in-business-and-politics.html).

12. More information can be found at [www.weprinciples.org](http://www.weprinciples.org).

Efforts can also be made by using incentives related to public procurement: in France for example, companies that do not respect the provisions of the 2014 law on real equality between women and men can be excluded from public procurement.<sup>13</sup>

In addition, by organising roundtables and building networks, government support can also offer a link between the public sector, the private sector and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which ideally can lead to the development of public-private partnerships. NGOs, especially those working specifically on violence against women, have an expertise that can be useful for the private sector to raise awareness and create local partnerships. NGOs can, for example, intervene within companies to raise awareness among staff about special events such as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

**Creating peer-support schemes to prevent violence through targeted services and the exchange of experiences: the Corporate Alliance against Domestic Violence<sup>14</sup> (UK)**

**Intervention:** the Corporate Alliance against Domestic Violence (CAADV) provides a network for companies that wish to address the needs of employees who endure, perpetrate and witness domestic violence. The Alliance offers its members training programmes, services and support as well as business-to-business tools for developing domestic violence policies within their organisation.

**Results:** The CAADV assists member and non-member companies to act on disclosures by employees of domestic violence; for example, in 2013 there were 18 instances of self-disclosures and subsequent support. The Alliance has a current membership of over 50 members and affiliate employers, reaching over 5 million employees in the private, public and voluntary sector. The Alliance has provided accredited training directly to over 10 000 employees, not to become counsellors but to identify the warning signs and take action.

**Lessons learnt:** The example of the CAADV demonstrates the potential in offering targeted services and in building networks of employers and finding allies in order to share experiences and good practice regarding the prevention of violence.

13. *Loi du 4 août 2014 sur l'égalité réelle entre les femmes et les hommes* (France), available at: [www.gouvernement.fr/action/la-loi-pour-l-egalite-reelle-entre-les-femmes-et-les-hommes](http://www.gouvernement.fr/action/la-loi-pour-l-egalite-reelle-entre-les-femmes-et-les-hommes).

14. [www.caady.org.uk/](http://www.caady.org.uk/).

**How the approach works to prevent violence:** The CAADV offers practical procedures, best practice policy development and implementation, research and knowledge on the issue to its members. The CAADV works as a peer-support scheme among businesses, in order for them to contribute to the prevention of violence against women and domestic violence.

The importance of trade unions in putting the prevention of violence against women on the agenda must also be recognised. Trade unions can be a vital partner as well as a forum for the exchange of ideas and visions of ways to combat gender-based violence from the perspective of the private sector.<sup>15</sup>

Addressing gender-based violence as a human rights violation should be the imperative of all decision makers in both the public and private sectors. The private sector can play an important role in tackling problems related to gender-based violence due to its flexibility. Taking due account of national and international frameworks, the private sector can design and implement its own policies and measures against violence, and can do so quickly. When doing so, it is important to strike the right balance between business interests and the efficiency of measures put in place to address the issue of gender-based violence. This is evident in the use of terminology and discourse. In the private sector, business language, including such expressions as “output” and “productivity”, is likely to appear in the discourse on gender-based violence, whereas public discourse will focus more on violence against women as a human rights violation.

Ending gender-based violence is the ultimate goal and, to this end, governments should encourage businesses to align their measures with public policies and to participate in violence prevention by providing information on how employee well-being can be linked to economic advantages and better business results, for example by reducing absences and increasing productivity. Eventually, the challenge of engaging the private sector in the prevention of gender-based violence and victim support lies in building on a common denominator, which links up public, private and third-sector visions, resources and terminology while ensuring the implementation of standards in relation to addressing violence against women.

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15. See, for example, the 2014 European Trade Union Confederation March 8th Report focusing on trade unions’ strategies to prevent violence against women: [www.etuc.org/sites/www.etuc.org/files/other/files/etuc\\_8th\\_march\\_survey\\_2014\\_en\\_eh.pdf](http://www.etuc.org/sites/www.etuc.org/files/other/files/etuc_8th_march_survey_2014_en_eh.pdf).

## **The private sector as shaper of attitudes towards women through its goods and services**

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When it comes to the prevention of violence against women and domestic violence, the private sector also plays an important role as a shaper of attitudes. To change attitudes towards gender-based violence, support is needed from the private sector as it can have significant impact on cultural and social norms. On the one hand, businesses can contribute to the trivialisation of violence against women by linking the marketing and retailing of goods and services to violence. On the other hand, by avoiding gender blindness and stereotyping and/or by actively promoting gender-sensitive messages, companies can promote equality and non-violence as part of their policies on goods and services and of their corporate social responsibility. For example, employees in customer service can be trained and information can be made available to them on how to deal with situations in which they may encounter clients who are confronted with gender-based violence. In this way, staff members are able to provide customers with information and direct them to expert services, without necessarily having to be experts on the issue.

There is a risk of violence against women becoming normalised by the private sector and the market when the imagery of physical and sexual violence is used to sell and advertise products and services. This objectification and victimisation of women have an impact on individuals on a societal level by influencing men's and women's perception of violence, sexuality and gender roles. Research suggests that men become more passive and accepting of violence against women after exposure to sexually violent advertising (Capella M. L. *et al.* 2010). When gender-based violence is linked to the selling of a good or service, not only the good or service is sold, but also an accepting attitude towards violence. The image of violence against women as something normal, excused, legitimate or even desirable, risks rendering aggressive behaviour against women more prominent and accepted by society.

There is an urgent need to market goods and services without using gender stereotypes or references to physical and sexual violence. Today, a variety of products and services, ranging from fashion and cars to hotels and restaurants, are sold by using the imagery of physical and sexual violence directed towards women. These kinds of advertisements and marketing strategies demean the image of women by eroticising violence, often presenting it as something sexy, glamorous and edgy. In 2007, an advertisement from the clothing company Dolce & Gabbana, featuring a shirtless man holding down a woman, caused

outrage and was eventually withdrawn. Many other brands have also been accused of making references to violence against women in the marketing of their products and services.

Furthermore, it must be noted that the goods and products themselves can contribute to a distorted picture of violence against women and gender roles or be used to exercise violence. Examples can be found in particular in the ICT sector. GPS tracking devices for mobile phones are perfect tools for stalkers, as are smart-phone applications that enable the tracing of a person's whereabouts by using the mobile number. In the same way, video games, such as *RapeLay* centre on male characters that stalk and rape women, link masculinity with male supremacy and violent repression of women.<sup>16</sup>

Intended or not, this kind of product design has an impact on how violence against women is perceived by society. According to research, men who played video games containing sexualised female characters felt less empathy for victims of sexual harassment and were more likely to blame the victim (Dill K. E. *et al.* 2008). In relation to this, it must be emphasised that Article 17 of the Istanbul Convention also places an obligation on governments to develop and promote, in co-operation with the private sector, skills among children, parents and educators on how to deal with degrading content of sexual or violent nature in the information and communication environment.

However, companies can also choose to use their goods and services to prevent violence. The prevention of violence against women and the contribution to victim support can even become a part of the company's brand. In some cases, the product itself, through its design, serves the purpose of violence prevention, as in the case of the Vodafone TecSOS.<sup>17</sup> This mobile phone has been developed by the Vodafone Foundation in collaboration with the Spanish Red Cross and is designed to provide protection to victims of domestic violence. The phone has a button that activates immediate contact with the emergency services, providing details of the victim's location and triggering a recording of the activity in its vicinity. The mobile device has been used by more than 30 000 women in Spain, Italy, Portugal, Hungary, Ireland and the United Kingdom.

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16. For more information about the representation of female characters in video games, see: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=QC6oxBLXtkU&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QC6oxBLXtkU&feature=youtu.be).

17. Vodafone TecSOS homepage: [www.vodafone.com/content/index/about/foundation/mobiles\\_for\\_good/tecsos.html](http://www.vodafone.com/content/index/about/foundation/mobiles_for_good/tecsos.html).

Given the influence that the private sector has as a shaper of attitudes towards violence against women, there is a need for governments to promote the involvement of those working in the private sector in overcoming gender blindness and stereotyping. Governments must take action to encourage the private sector to avoid the use of sexist, violent and harmful content in the design of goods and services as well as in marketing. A number of member states have already adopted a regulatory framework regarding the content of advertising and have established independent bodies in charge of looking at advertising from an ethical point of view, including issues related to human rights and gender equality, and which can also receive complaints from the public.<sup>18</sup>

Incentives can also be set to stimulate corporate social responsibility commitments involving gender issues and/or women's dignity. This can either be done through individual company commitments or by convincing the business sector to engage in the development of ethical standards regarding gender equality and women's dignity.<sup>19</sup>

Such commitments can be monitored, evaluated and highlighted by using gender-proofing schemes, equality labels or non-violence prizes. By offering political leadership, governments are able to set standards and stress the importance of preventing gender-based violence in the private sector.

Reaching businesses through consumers is another way in which governments can try to stimulate the involvement of the private sector. Public awareness to encourage citizens to protest against the use of violence and sexual content in product design and marketing can be attained by campaigns targeted at consumers. The risk of consumer boycotts as a result of degrading content in the marketing of products and services can thus be emphasised in order to involve representatives from the private sector.

## **Engaging the private sector in awareness-raising programmes and victim support**

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Another role that the private sector may take on is that of engaging in awareness raising or offering financial support to services for victims or to programmes to eliminate violence. This can be done by engaging in campaigns

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18. See chapter commencing p. 33 for examples of these.

19. Handbook on the implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec(2013)1 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on gender equality and media (pages 25-27).



and fundraising or through a non-profit branch such as a foundation. It is also possible for businesses to create partnerships at local or national levels in order to support appropriate organisations and services.

In order for the private sector to be able to successfully support programmes on the prevention of violence against women and domestic violence, a good infrastructure and expert knowledge of the issue are needed. Strong leadership in messaging and allocation of resources is another key component in addressing violence. It may be of importance for the private sector to have male and female spokespersons on gender-based violence and it should not only be victims to come forward to speak about violence. Women and girls are exposed to higher risks of gender-based violence but both men and women can be victims of domestic violence. The participation of men and boys in awareness raising about gender-based violence is important as both sexes suffer from its consequences. In addition, programmes are effective when men assume responsibility for male violence and are included as part of the solution.

**Creating partnerships with NGOs working on violence and raising awareness: The Kering PPR Foundation for Women's Dignity and Rights (France/International)**

**Intervention:** Kering is a French multinational retailing company that specialises in luxury and sporting goods. The majority of its employees and customers are women. Since 2008, the Kering Foundation has been committed to fighting violence against women through a holistic approach with the ambition to help before (prevention), during (care and support) and after (professional training and inclusion) violence. The foundation has initiated partnerships with an increasing number of NGOs committed to the cause of fighting violence against women. The initiative also involves accompanying social entrepreneurs and supporting sustainable projects involving local communities and public authorities. The main types of aid consist of financial support and human support by mobilising Kering Group employees. The foundation is also engaged in awareness and prevention initiatives concerning violence against women. The actions involve fundraising and support of photo exhibitions, films and campaigns raising public awareness of violence against women. In France, the Kering Group has signed the Charter for the Prevention and Fight against Domestic Violence.

**Results:** In 2013, the actions taken by the Kering Foundation were estimated to have reached 140 000 women worldwide through 47 long-term partnerships initiated with NGOs in Europe, Africa, Asia and the Americas.

**Lessons learnt:** Companies in the private sector can play an important role in the struggle to prevent and combat violence against women by providing resources, using their reputation and visibility and thus exerting a positive influence on governments. The Kering Foundation exercises significant leverage through the group's 33,000 employees and its global visibility. Experience has shown that in order for a project to be successful it must also ensure local skill transfer and work on the community as a whole, involving all relevant stakeholders. These criteria are thus considered when the foundation selects its partners and the projects to be supported. As a next step, the foundation envisages to engage work on changing behaviours and plans to focus more on prevention.

**How the approach works to prevent violence:** At a societal level, the foundation's support of campaigns has raised awareness and concern about violence against women. At the company level, the foundation has done work to sensitise and engage employees of the group on the topic of domestic violence.

The selling of products can also be used to contribute to the prevention of violence against women, through awareness raising and fund raising. By buying a product, the informed customer can choose to make a contribution to an ethical cause. An example of this kind of initiative can be found at the international beauty and cosmetics company The Body Shop. The company aims to break the silence on domestic violence by engaging its employees in a global campaign to raise public awareness about violence against women. A portion of the sales of the campaign products have gone to the support of victims of domestic violence. The "Stop Violence in the Home" campaign was launched in 2003. By 2008, it had reached 56 markets and £3.6 million had been raised for domestic violence charities.<sup>20</sup>

Avon is another example of an international beauty and cosmetics company involved in fund raising, lobbying and raising awareness about domestic and gender-based violence. The company strives to increase public awareness about the implications of gender-based violence on individuals and the community in order to change attitudes. Avon identifies and works with partners to present research and engage employers and funders in combating violence

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20. The Body Shop International Plc Values Report 2009, available at [www.thebodyshop-usa.com/pdfs/values-campaigns/Values\\_report\\_lowres\\_v2.pdf](http://www.thebodyshop-usa.com/pdfs/values-campaigns/Values_report_lowres_v2.pdf). See also: [www.thebodyshop-usa.com/values-campaigns/stop-violence.aspx](http://www.thebodyshop-usa.com/values-campaigns/stop-violence.aspx).

against women. Since 2004, the Avon Foundation has donated US\$58 million to non-profit organisations in the field of awareness raising, support services and prevention programmes.<sup>21</sup>

It is also important to raise awareness about the need for a stronger engagement of the private sector in fundraising on issues of violence against women as part of their partnership activities and priorities.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, only 4.8% of total grant monies awarded by 42 European foundations in 2009 benefited women and girls of which only one fifth focused on women's human rights (Mama Cash 2011). It is therefore crucial for private funders and foundations to engage more with creating partnerships and funding activities on violence against women, given the prevalence of the phenomenon, but also given the diminution of public funding for this issue.

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21. [www.avonfoundation.org/causes/domestic-violence/funding/](http://www.avonfoundation.org/causes/domestic-violence/funding/), [www.avonfoundation.org/causes/domestic-violence/funding/avon-communication-awards/](http://www.avonfoundation.org/causes/domestic-violence/funding/avon-communication-awards/).

22. According to the OECD-DAC reviews, globally, only 5% of all aid targeted gender equality as a principal objective in 2012-2013. More information: [www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/financing-for-gender-equality#sthash.jnNjMk6g.dpuf](http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/financing-for-gender-equality#sthash.jnNjMk6g.dpuf).

# Media and the prevention of violence against women

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**T**he provisions of the Istanbul Convention that require states parties to encourage the media to participate in the prevention of violence against women are usefully complemented by non-binding standards that give more detailed, practical recommendations on how these provisions can be put into practice. Recommendation CM/Rec(2013)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on gender equality and media advocates specific measures,<sup>23</sup> in particular that:

Unless already in place, member States should adopt an appropriate legal framework intended to ensure that there is respect for the principle of human dignity and the prohibition of all discrimination on grounds of sex, as well as of incitement to hatred and to any form of gender-based violence within the media. (Paragraph A.1)

And that:

Media organisations should be encouraged to adopt self-regulatory measures, internal codes of conduct/ ethics and internal supervision, and develop standards in media coverage that promote gender equality, in order to promote a consistent internal policy and working conditions aimed at a non-stereotyped image, role and visibility of women and men, avoidance of sexist advertising, language and content which could lead to discrimination on grounds of sex, incitement to hatred and gender-based violence. (Paragraph B.4)

This recommendation focuses on the importance of the content of media coverage and reporting for the prevention of violence against women, as part of promoting gender equality. In addition, a number of member states have adopted a regulatory framework regarding gender equality, human dignity

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23. See also Council of Europe Handbook on the implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec(2013)1 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on gender equality and media.

and violence against women in media content.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the structural organisation of the media and communications sector, including the gender makeup of media professions and the presence of women among media decision makers, also influences the capacity and willingness of the media to take part in preventing violence against women.<sup>25</sup> Women's participation in the media has been shown to lead to positive changes with respect to the involvement of the media in preventing violence against women. In particular, women's own initiatives in the production of media, through networking and collective action on social media, have brought about increased reporting of rape and sexist attitudes.<sup>26</sup>

This section discusses the engagement of the media in the prevention of violence against women and possible measures that states parties can take to encourage their participation on two levels: using the media to prevent violence against women ("through media") and persuading the media to refrain from gender stereotypes and to adopt a gender-sensitive approach to reporting on violence against women ("in media content").

## **Promoting a positive role of the media in preventing violence against women**

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The media play an important role in how society perceives women and men. Consequently, all media (print, TV, radio and social media) also have a large influence on the public's awareness of domestic violence and violence against women. A number of research reports indicate that the media and popular television programmes have significant influence on the framing of public attitudes and on the acceptability of domestic violence across Europe (Seymour E. 2004). The media thus play an important role in raising the public's awareness of domestic violence as an unacceptable social situation as well as an economic issue.

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24. See chapter commencing on p. 33. In addition, European Union Directive 2007/65EC amending Council Directive 89/552/EEC on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the pursuit of television broadcasting activities provides: "Member States shall ensure by appropriate means that audio-visual media services provided by media service providers under their jurisdiction do not contain any incitement to hatred based on race, sex, religion or nationality." (Article 3a); and that "audio-visual commercial communications shall not: (...) include or promote any discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, nationality, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation" (Article 3b).

25. Council of Europe (2013), "The Media and the Image of Women", p. 5.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

The media are responsible for providing accurate and balanced accounts when reporting about domestic violence and violence against women. A number of surveys indicate that the awareness of gender-based violence has grown rapidly across Europe during the last decade. According to a Eurobarometer report in 2010, 98% of Europeans are aware of domestic violence as an important issue that must be tackled. This rising awareness has, to a large extent, been enhanced by media coverage of violence against women and domestic violence (Eurobarometer 2010).

When designing effective media campaigns on gender-based violence, evaluation and monitoring mechanisms need to be established early on. This will enhance the likelihood of campaign messages effectively reaching the intended audiences. As already pointed out, media reporting on this issue must also work towards raising awareness of the structural problems of gender inequality, which form an important part of the context of gender-based violence, as opposed to presenting violence against women as an issue affecting only women individually.

In addition, social media have an influence on individual and societal responses to gender-based violence. Alongside new communication technologies, new tools and platforms emerge where violence and sexual abuse can be perpetuated. Gender-based violence in social media can take the form of cyber bullying, cyber stalking, digital dating abuse, recording and distribution of sexual assault imagery or threats, hate speech against women, use of social networks in the recruitment for human trafficking of women and girls and online exploitation of minors. Social media do not create gender-based violence, but they can easily incite, condone or serve as a tool for abusive behaviour towards women and girls (Fairbairn J. *et al.* 2013), including sexist hate speech. Some groups of women constitute particular targets of sexist hate speech, notably young women, women journalists and women in media, women in gaming, women in politics and women human rights defenders. However, every woman who speaks out or writes is a potential target for online and offline sexist hate speech. This growing phenomenon whereby women receive threats and insults of a sexual character on a daily basis via emails, websites, social media or other means needs to be addressed by all stakeholders, including the media themselves. In addition, the anonymous character of social media can be a factor for the impunity of perpetrators. Media literacy campaigns, initiated in co-operation with media organisations, are essential in this respect. Examples of these are given in the next section.

However, social media do not only create challenges to combating gender-based violence, they also offer unique dynamics and new possibilities of mobilisation against violence in a digital environment. In Slovakia, for example, seven women's organisations have engaged in a media campaign, *The Fifth Woman*,<sup>27</sup> focusing on the use of information and communication technology in media campaigns concerning violence against women.

**Online sharing of experiences and support against sexism: The Everyday Sexism Project<sup>28</sup> (international)**

**Intervention:** the Everyday Sexism Project demonstrates that social media can be used to make a change in how women are portrayed to society. The project is constructed around an interactive online platform where women can share personal experiences of sexism and discrimination. Testimonies from 22 countries are recorded on the website in their original languages and English.

**Results:** The website has received testimonies from women around the world, addressing different forms of discrimination and violence against women. The aim is to create a critical mass of these testimonies in order to make it impossible for society to ignore the problem.

**Lessons learnt:** using the potential of online mobilisation and the anonymity provided by the Internet is a powerful way to both raise awareness and give people who have been confronted with sexism and violence an opportunity to come forward.

**How the approach works to prevent violence:** The Everyday Sexism Project aims to catalogue instances of sexism experienced by women on a day-to-day basis. They might be serious or minor, outrageously offensive or so normalised that women do not even feel they have the right to protest. By showing the structural nature of the phenomenon, through the accumulation of stories from around the world, it helps to change the perception of everyday sexism and empowers women to act against it.

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27. Final evaluation of the project: [www.apcwomen.org/gemkit/en/practitioners/reports\\_221f.htm#jump8](http://www.apcwomen.org/gemkit/en/practitioners/reports_221f.htm#jump8).

28. See: <http://everydaysexism.com/>.

## **Preventing violence against women by eradicating gender stereotyping in media reporting**

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The reporting on gender-based violence has increased in the media, but stereotyping is still very common. The portrayal of violence against women as well as domestic violence can be problematic, because media tend to prioritise negativity and the extraordinary. A thoughtful analysis of the causes of violence is often lacking in the media, as stories frequently misrepresent and sensationalise events and crimes such as rape. This form of sensationalist reporting risks creating a normalisation of violence within society.

Even well-intentioned reporting on domestic violence can exacerbate stereotyping. Research shows that the media can induce society to justify violence against women by focusing unduly on assumed “reasons” for the violence (Herrera C. and Exposito F. 2009). A report from Zero Tolerance (2012) suggests that distorted media coverage of domestic abuse can influence individuals’ behaviour as well as their attitudes. Stereotypical reporting on domestic violence, for example by suggesting that it is a by-product of a messy and difficult relationship of equals rather than an expression of power and control by one person over another, might encourage a woman who is living with an abusive partner to stay for fear of not being taken seriously.

Although statistics show that the various forms of violence against women, including domestic violence, affect women across all social strata and irrespective of socio-economic status, this variety is not represented in most media reporting on the issue. An over-representation of certain groups of women as victims, such as those from disadvantaged social and economic backgrounds only nurtures stereotypes and obscures the fact that it is violence perpetrated against women because they are women, not because of their socio-economic class. At the same time, most media reporting tends to focus on women as victims rather than on the men who perpetrate the violence, leaving out an important piece of the puzzle. Engaging in ethical reporting on the various forms of violence against women must also mean exploring the views, identities and convictions of the men who rape and abuse women.

Studies on the role of the media in framing the perception of gender and violence against women indicate that women in many cases are objectified in reporting and that violence is explained away with superficial reasons. Each story tends to be presented as separate and unique. This lack of analysis of violence against women and domestic violence as a structural problem tends to normalise the issue. It implies that it is a sporadic and unusual problem of “others” rather than something common that concerns everyone in society.



The report “Just the Women” (Eaves *et al.* (2012) issued in the UK as part of the Leveson Inquiry<sup>29</sup> has analysed how crimes of violence against women were reported in 11 British national newspapers over a two-week period in 2012. According to this report, violence against women is reported in a way that reinforces myths and perpetuates stereotypes. The reporting is often inaccurate and minimises the actions of the perpetrator, whereas the blame is placed on the victim and others.

In order to prevent stereotyping, a gender-sensitive depiction of violence against women and domestic violence is needed in the media. News stories on gender-based violence should be presented in a larger context. Media organisations can contribute to a better understanding of gender-based violence as a structural problem linked to inequalities between women and men. Above all, they must also help to underline that this kind of violence is not a private matter.

An example of gender-sensitive reporting on violence against women is that of the Radiotelevisione Italiana (RAI) 3. This television channel has engaged in awareness raising about violence against women, by broadcasting a weekly programme entitled *Amore Criminale* (Criminal Love). The series aims to depict violence against women in a non-stereotypical way by featuring over 100 cases of women who have been killed or severely injured by their partners. In Belgium, the Media Emancipation Effect Report initiative aims for a fair gender portrayal in television programmes by introducing different gender-assessment instruments suitable for television.

Furthermore, stereotyping can be avoided through the promotion of non-sexist language and the avoidance of sexist advertising and content. For example, the Giulia association of female journalists in Italy encourages the use of non-sexist language and strives towards making accurate information about gender-based violence available in the Italian media. In Scotland, the charity organisation Zero Tolerance has published a media guide with standards for good reporting on violence against women. Other organisations have produced guidelines on media reporting on violence against women which are useful tools that could be further disseminated and used.<sup>30</sup>

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29. The Leveson Inquiry is a detailed inquiry into media ethics in the wake of the phone hacking scandal in the UK in 2011. The inquiry is split into four modules assessing the relationship between the press and the public, the police and politicians.

30. The guidelines produced in 2014 by the International Federation of Journalists for reporting on violence against women is an example of this: [www.ifj.org/fileadmin/images/Gender/Gender\\_documents/IFJ\\_Guidelines\\_for\\_Reporting\\_on\\_Violence\\_Against\\_Women\\_EN.pdf](http://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/images/Gender/Gender_documents/IFJ_Guidelines_for_Reporting_on_Violence_Against_Women_EN.pdf).

# Collaboration between governments, the private sector and the media to promote measures to prevent violence against women and domestic violence

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**T**he approach taken by governments regarding violence against women and domestic violence is important as it will have an influence also on how the media report on these issues and on the overall involvement of the private sector in this area. Government leadership can encourage or discourage active prevention of violence in the private sector and media through their methods and standpoints. Governments thus have the opportunity to drive forward social change in how violence against women is perceived in society by collaborating with media organisations on the issue of gender-based violence. For example in the United Kingdom, the Home Office has launched a television campaign entitled “This is Abuse”, which is aimed to help teenagers recognise abusive relationships.<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, the language used by the government for communicating policies and information about violence against women has an impact on how violence and women are perceived in society, as this language might be echoed in the media. For example, within a cultural context that identifies people with their roles and positions within society rather than with their personal characteristics, women are often presented in the context of the family, instead of being portrayed as individuals with rights and responsibilities.

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31. See: <http://thisisabuse.direct.gov.uk/>.

## **Enhancing the training of media professionals on issues related to gender equality and violence against women**

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Through the education of journalists, governments can support the use of non-sexist and non-discriminatory language and a less-stereotyped portrayal of women and men in the media. In Sweden, this has been done by training the journalists at the Sveriges Television (SVT) public broadcasting company in gender awareness. In Portugal, the Portuguese public television company (RTP), in collaboration with the Commission for Equality in Labour and Employment, has trained their staff in gender equality, the use of non-sexist language, reporting on gender-based violence, female genital mutilation, domestic violence as a form of gender-based violence and media coverage of homicides in the context of intimate relationships.

In the same way, governments could suggest the introduction of this topic as part of the training of journalists through specialised interventions in schools or through creating links between professionals working with violence against women (NGOs, legal professionals) and educational professionals in the media sector.

## **Promoting media self-regulation and regulation of discriminatory and violent content**

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Avoidance of sexist and harmful content and advertisements using sexual and violent imagery can be achieved by encouraging the media to use self-regulation standards. Independent, self-regulatory bodies exist in many countries to monitor the media's compliance with a set of agreed standards that typically include non-discrimination, promotion of gender equality and gender-sensitive reporting on violence against women and domestic violence. Regulation regarding sexist and violent content through legislation and regulatory bodies is also in place in a number of European countries, as well as co-regulation whereby the media sector co-operates with the government to set rules regarding media content.

An example of partnership in this regard is that between the Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies in charge of Equal Opportunities and the Italian Advertising Self-Regulation Institute, concluded in January 2013 with the aim of ensuring that commercial communication “does not use images representing violence against women or inciting violence against women”.<sup>32</sup>

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32. Council of Europe (2014), “Compilation of good practices in media”, p. 21.

In Cyprus, the Radio Television Authority is an independent body, which is responsible, among other things, for the regulation of content broadcast over private radio television channels, based on the provisions of the Radio and Television Stations Regulation 10/2000 on reporting that addresses issues of violence against children, women or the elderly.<sup>33</sup> This authority examines media content either on its own initiative or following complaints lodged by the public. Avoiding any kind of discrimination on the grounds of sex, among others, in programming is one of the main priorities of the authority's work.

Spain was a forerunner in measures to combat violence against women. In 2004, the country passed a law on measures for comprehensive protection against gender-based violence. The law takes a multidisciplinary approach to the prevention and handling of violence, focusing in particular on education, advertising and media coverage of violence, and requiring respect for dignity and equality in this context. The 2004 Spanish legislation on gender-based violence declares unlawful any advertising that uses the image of women in a degrading or discriminatory way (Article 10). Article 14 of the law also regulates media treatment of violence against women.<sup>34</sup>

The 2014 French Law on Gender Equality<sup>35</sup> establishes the role of the National Audiovisual Council (CSA) as regards respect for women's rights in all audio-visual communication. The CSA must ensure that women and men are fairly represented in all audio-visual communication services and pay special attention to the way in which women are portrayed in programmes, with a view in particular to combating stereotypes, sexist prejudice, degrading images and violence against women.<sup>36</sup>

It is important not only for standards against harmful content and sexist advertising to be adopted and accepted, but also for complaint mechanisms to be in place and used. In December 2013, the first judgment about sexist, cross-border advertising was delivered in Europe, against the "Girls of Ryanair" calendar, produced by Ryanair since 2007. In December 2012, after the calendar had been published each year, the consumer advocacy association *Alianza para la Defensa de Consumidores y Usuarios Activos* (Adecua) in Spain

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33. Ibid, p. 14.

34. For more information (in Spanish) see [http://noticias.juridicas.com/base\\_datos/Admin/lo1-2004.t1.html#c2](http://noticias.juridicas.com/base_datos/Admin/lo1-2004.t1.html#c2).

35. *Loi du 4 août 2014 sur l'égalité réelle entre les femmes et les hommes* (France), available at: [www.gouvernement.fr/action/la-loi-pour-l-egalite-reelle-entre-les-femmes-et-les-hommes](http://www.gouvernement.fr/action/la-loi-pour-l-egalite-reelle-entre-les-femmes-et-les-hommes).

36. Handbook on the implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec(2013)1 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on gender equality and media.

filed a lawsuit against the campaign. They were joined by the Office of the Prosecutor, the Women’s Institute, the Observatory of Women’s Image, and the feminist advocacy organisation “*Federación de Mujeres Progresistas*”. The Second Commercial Court of Malaga found both the online campaign (in which the calendar was advertised as a charitable fundraiser) and the calendar’s use in an airfare promotion unlawful, since the female flight attendants were depicted “in sexually suggestive poses” and “the female body was used as a mere object to draw attention to the advertisement”. The airline was ordered to suspend the campaign and not repeat it in the future.<sup>37</sup>

## **Partnerships to increase media coverage of gender equality and violence against women**

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Governments can also try to actively increase the awareness of gender-based violence by increasing the media coverage on the issue in its national public service media. In the UK, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has launched an initiative for monitoring gender equality on and off screen. The aim is to achieve a fair balance between the representation of men and women of different ages in broadcasting. Also in Belgium, the Flemish Radio and Television Network has introduced diversity policies aiming to bring diversity to the attention of the programme makers. The Extraordinary Action Plan against Sexual and Gender-based Violence in Italy aims, *inter alia*, at increasing the awareness of media operators in order to ensure that information and (commercial) communication respects gender representation and, in particular, women’s image.

## **Promoting co-operation on media literacy**

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Government leadership and partnership with the media and private sectors are also important for promoting measures that help children, parents and educators deal with degrading content of a sexual and violent nature in the media. The hypersexualisation of images and use of social media for the objectification of women constitute a new context within which women and men, and especially young people, construct and express their identities. Bullying, hypersexualisation and sexism are on the rise in universities and

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37. “Ryanair case”, available at: [www2.womenslinkworldwide.org/wlw/sitio/caso-interna.php?idcaso=387&idi=en](http://www2.womenslinkworldwide.org/wlw/sitio/caso-interna.php?idcaso=387&idi=en).

schools and have spread rapidly through new media and social media.<sup>38</sup> For this reason, Article 17 of the Istanbul Convention encourages states parties to co-operate with the ICT sector in raising awareness of risks and helping children and their parents to manoeuvre the potential harm that lies in using new technologies.

The objective is to promote social media awareness and literacy by developing and promoting skills among children, parents and educators to deal with harmful information and abusive behaviour found in social media. This should be done with the aim of empowering young people online by developing their capacity to consciously, independently and safely navigate the information society (Richardson J. 2010, p. 292). The online safety of youth is above all dependent on Internet literacy and their awareness of the need to protect their own personal and sensitive data rather than on messages of safety and caution.<sup>39</sup> The advantages of investing in prevention must be highlighted, as tech-savvy children grow up to be less vulnerable users of modern communications.

Many member states of the Council of Europe have taken various measures to promote children's safety when using the Internet, electronic communications and social media. Such measures range from creating codes of conduct for parents and children in Albania;<sup>40</sup> developing and maintaining various information websites, in co-operation with partners in the private sector, to provide information to children and parents on the safe use of the Internet and electronic communications, such as in Italy;<sup>41</sup> or providing parents with filtering software options, such as in Turkey.<sup>42</sup>

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38. Council of Europe (2013), "Media and the Image of Women", p. 9.

39. Council of Europe (2009), Internet Literacy Handbook.

40. Code of conduct for parents and children on safe and responsible use of electronic communication. The code (in Albanian) can be accessed here: <http://plus.al/download/Kodi-i-sjelljes-07-02-2013.pdf>.

41. The portal *Vita de social* (in Italian) ([www.commissariatodips.it/vita-da-social.html](http://www.commissariatodips.it/vita-da-social.html)) was developed by companies to inform Internet users about protection software systems, monitoring mechanisms and how to make a complaint. The portal was developed and maintained in partnership by the Ministry of Education, Facebook, Fastweb, Google, 3(H3G), Libero, Microsoft, Poste Italiane, Telecom, Symantec, Skuola.net, Vodafone, Virgilio.it, Wind, Youtube, and Gruppo Eventi. In addition to the portal, outreach events have been organised, such as an info truck that has been placed outside primary and secondary schools to host debates and raise awareness among students, parents, and teachers. These debates focus on the responsible use of social networks. See: [www.facebook.com/unavitadasocial](http://www.facebook.com/unavitadasocial).

42. See for example: [www.guvenlinet.org/gb/](http://www.guvenlinet.org/gb/).

### **Golden rules “Taking a safe approach to the digital media” (Switzerland)<sup>43</sup>**

**Intervention:** In Switzerland, the Youth and Media – National Programme for the Promotion of Media Skills (2011-2015) has developed a comprehensive website,<sup>44</sup> where parents, teachers and others can find advice on the ways in which they can mitigate the risks present in the media and help young children between the ages of 0 and 13<sup>45</sup> use electronic media safely. A wealth of information is available on the website, such as presentations and animated films for families, as well as leaflets and advice.

#### **The 10 golden rules on how to use the media safely**

- 1) Support is better than prohibition. In their forays into the digital world, children need their parents’ support. Talk to your children about their experiences with the digital media.
- 2) Children need media-competent role models. When it comes to using digital media, key carers act as role models for children and adolescents. It is therefore helpful to reflect on your own media habits.
- 3) The 3-6-9-12 rule. No screens under the age of 3, no gaming consoles under the age of 6, no Internet under the age of 9 and no unsupervised Internet under the age of 12.
- 4) Observe the age ratings. Both for films ([jugendundmedien.ch](http://jugendundmedien.ch)) and computer games ([pegi.ch](http://pegi.ch)).
- 5) Make joint decisions on screen time. Involve your children in the decision on how much time they may spend in front of screens per day or per week. Set clear limits and make sure that the children comply with your joint decisions.
- 6) Screens are not babysitters. Ensure that your child engages in leisure activities that do not involve digital media.
- 7) TVs, PCs and gaming consoles should not be kept in children’s rooms. Install such appliances in a common room. Keep an eye on smart phones and tablets.

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43. Swiss Federal Social Insurance Office: “Taking a Safe approach to the digital media”, at [www.jugendundmedien.ch/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Chancen\\_und\\_Gefahren/Flyer\\_goldene\\_Regeln\\_13\\_Sprachen/engl\\_goldene\\_Regeln\\_JuM.pdf](http://www.jugendundmedien.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/Chancen_und_Gefahren/Flyer_goldene_Regeln_13_Sprachen/engl_goldene_Regeln_JuM.pdf).

44. [www.jeunesetmedias.ch/fr/programme-national.html](http://www.jeunesetmedias.ch/fr/programme-national.html).

45. A number of rules are also applicable to adolescents.

8) Check who your child is chatting with. Children should meet online acquaintances only in public places and in the presence of their parents.

9) Warn your child not to enter personal data on the Internet. Tell your child that he/she may not enter any personal data, such as name, address, age and telephone number, unless this has been discussed with you.

10) Open discussions are better than filter software. Have age-appropriate discussions with your child on topics such as sexuality and violence. Filter software is sensible but does not guarantee complete protection.



# Conclusion

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**T**he private sector and the media play an important role in the everyday lives of most women and men: as employers, as workplaces and as producers of goods, services, media content and information technology. Among the women and men who work in the private sector and who are the consumers of goods and services there are likely to be victims, perpetrators, witnesses and others affected by the different forms of violence against women. The workplace and the media can also be spaces where violence against women is perpetuated, encouraged or, on the contrary, actively prevented, depending on the attitudes and actions taken by the different stakeholders. A multi-sectoral approach to preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence must therefore involve the private sector, including the information technology sector and the media.

The Istanbul Convention is a new tool for states parties to encourage the private sector, the information technology sector and the media to make use of their potential and participate in the prevention of violence against women and domestic violence. There are many good reasons for the private sector to get involved and many good examples to follow. Media reporting on domestic violence, rape, stalking and sexual harassment that is free of gender stereotypes and less sensationalist would help shed light on the real issue at stake, which is the inequality of women and men and the resulting unequal power dynamics in private and professional relationships.

Building on existing examples and expertise, and bearing in mind the roles and obligations of private versus public actors, as well as with due respect to the independence of the media, it is possible to design effective schemes and incentives to encourage the private sector to play its part in preventing violence against women and domestic violence.

# Checklist

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**A**rticle 17 requires states parties to encourage a broader involvement of private companies and the media in preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. The following checklist can be of help in designing and implementing comprehensive strategies to achieve this aim.

- ❑ Have strategies and measures been introduced and implemented in order to encourage the private sector and media organisations to take an active role in preventing violence against women and domestic violence?
  - Are the private sector and the media encouraged to engage in the prevention of violence against women as a part of their branding, ethical standards or corporate social responsibility?
  - Are there political and leadership initiatives to engage with private stakeholders in violence prevention?
  - Is the language of communication adapted to address the private sector's role in preventing and combating violence against women with a "business approach"?
  - Do the incentives targeting the private sector and the media take into account the different roles that these stakeholders may have? Are they targeted at businesses in their roles as employers, producers of goods and services, advertisers, shapers of attitudes, as well as members of the wider community?
  - Do government policies and communications give guidance/provide tools on how to avoid sexist and stereotypical language?
  - Is financial support made available to develop strategies and raise awareness on violence prevention within the private sector and the media?
  - Are clear policy frameworks and complaint mechanisms in place to ensure the withdrawal of sexist and harmful content in the media?

- ❑ Have incentives been set to encourage the private sector and the media to take part in the prevention of violence against women?
  - Have incentives been introduced such as tax breaks, award schemes, non-violence prizes or gender equality labels to stimulate violence prevention in the private sector and in media/advertising?
  - Do mechanisms exist to supervise, monitor, follow up and evaluate employer initiatives regarding violence prevention?
- ❑ Are there government measures to raise awareness about violence against women targeted at the private sector as well as media organisations?
  - Is government-generated data on the frequency and costs of violence against women and domestic violence as well as government strategies to prevent it produced and made available to the public and disseminated specifically to the private sector and the media?
  - Are information and figures produced and provided on how employees are affected by gender-based violence in the workplace and to what extent?
  - Are information and figures produced and provided on how gender-based violence negatively affects business, productivity and economic growth in the form of direct and indirect costs?
  - Does awareness raising include information on the economic and social advantages for the private sector and the media to combat violence?
  - Do the private sector and the media have easy access to information about good practices in combating violence against women and domestic violence at work, at home and in the wider community?
  - Are violence against women and domestic violence presented as an issue of workplace safety?
- ❑ Are measures taken to encourage employers to introduce workplace policies to prevent and respond to violence against women?
  - Is targeted information material on violence against women, especially workplace-related violence, made available to employers?
  - Are employers encouraged to make information and support available for employees who are victims of forms of violence against women, such as sexual harassment, stalking or domestic violence?
  - Are employers encouraged to introduce workplace policies against sexual harassment (taking into consideration the provisions of the applicable legal framework)?

- o Are examples given to employers of how to counsel victims of sexual harassment, stalking or domestic violence to seek professional help through human resources, posters, Intranet, etc.?
- o Are examples given to employers on how to integrate victim support services into the employees' benefits scheme, such as psychological, medical, legal and economic support?
- Is training on the prevention of violence against women encouraged and made available for the private sector and the media?
  - o Are employers made aware of the fact that the private sector is concerned by violence within as well as outside the workplace?
  - o Are employers provided with skills to encourage their employees to discuss violence at work? (This can be done, for example, through training on how to have a conversation about violence and on recognising signs of violence at the workplace or that a colleague may be suffering at home).
  - o Is the importance of engaging both men and women in violence prevention emphasised?
  - o Is the training aimed to focus not only on victims of gender-based violence but also on the possibility of perpetrators within the organisation?
- Is the creation of partnerships, networks and alliances between the private sector, the public sector and the media encouraged?
  - o Are employers' unions and trade unions encouraged to engage in the prevention of violence against women and domestic violence?
  - o Have links and partnerships been facilitated between the private sector and the media and state and non-state organisations working specifically on violence against women?
  - o Is the exchange of good practices, as well as effective methods, tools and policies, encouraged?
  - o Have round tables or conferences been organised to facilitate this kind of networking?
  - o Are private actors encouraged to take part in fundraising and providing financial support for services for victims of violence and other initiatives to address violence against women?
  - o Is the business sector encouraged to develop products and marketing strategies with the purpose of directly or indirectly contributing to violence prevention or awareness raising?

- Is the importance of the private sector and the media as shapers of attitudes in society stressed in government efforts to combat gender-based violence?
  - Are the private sector and the media encouraged to overcome stereotyping and gender blindness?
  - Are companies encouraged to adhere to regulated and self-regulated standards to refrain from the use of sexist content in media and advertising?
  - Are actors in the private sector made aware of the fact that goods and services themselves can contribute to the perpetuation of violence and to a distorted picture of gender roles and violence against women?
  - Do government initiatives involve reaching the private sector and the media through awareness-raising campaigns and complaint mechanisms among consumers?
- Do government initiatives to combat violence specifically target media organisations and encourage them to become involved?
  - Is media reporting on violence against women encouraged to contextualise the crimes and analyse gender-based violence as a structural problem at societal level?
  - Are the media encouraged to adhere to regulated and self-regulated standards regarding the depiction of violence against women?
  - Are measures taken to establish and strengthen independent media regulatory bodies?
  - Do awareness-raising measures and training target journalists and journalists' training institutions and associations in order to promote a non-sensationalist and non-stereotypical reporting on violence against women?
  - Is the use of non-stereotypical and non-sexist language in journalism encouraged?
  - Is the avoidance of violent and sexual advertising through self-regulation encouraged?
  - Is the design of effective media campaigns on gender-based violence encouraged in addition to the use of the media to raise awareness about violence prevention?
  - Do government initiatives recognise the potential of social media as a platform for mobilisation against gender-based violence?

- o Do government initiatives encourage media organisations to cooperate with state bodies to promote (social) media awareness and literacy, in order to promote skills among children, parents and educators on how to deal with degrading content of a sexual or violent nature in the media?
- o Are different stakeholders encouraged to take part in research and awareness raising about harmful information and abusive behaviour in social media and online?

# Key resources

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## United Nations

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Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 34/180 of 18 December 1979 entry into force 3 September 1981.

Handbook for Legislation on Violence against Women (2009).

Handbook for National Action Plans on Violence against Women (2012).

## Council of Europe standards and resources

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Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention, CETS No. 210, 2011).

Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention, CETS No. 201, 2007).

The Council of Europe, through its Committee of Ministers and its Parliamentary Assembly, have issued the following **recommendations** regarding equality between women and men, eliminating violence against women and regarding gender equality in the media:

Recommendation Rec (2006)12 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on empowering children in the new information and communications environment.

Recommendation Rec (2002)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the protection of women against violence.

Recommendation No. R (84) 17 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on equality between women and men in the media.

Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 1751 (2010) and Recommendation 1931 (2010) on combating sexist stereotypes in the media.

Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1882 (2009) on the promotion of Internet and online media services appropriate for minors.

Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1799 (2007) on the image of women in advertising.

Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1555 (2002) on the image of women in the media.

Council of Europe information leaflet on the Istanbul Convention.

Overview of Studies on the Costs of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (2012).

Council of Europe Internet Literacy Handbook (2009).

## **Other international legal obligations and recommendations**

### **Employment**

There are various international legal obligations and recommendations concerning gender equality as well as health and safety where employment is concerned. The well-being of employees in the workplace is particularly targeted by these international instruments. The promotion of equality at work involves violence prevention as well as the improvement of rights and support for women and girls who are subjected to violence.

### **European Union**

Directive 2006/54/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006, amending Council Directive 76/73/ECC on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation.

### **International Labour Organization**

Convention concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers (Convention No. 189), 2011.

Convention concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries (Convention No. 169), 1989.

Recommendation concerning HIV and AIDS and the World of Work (Recommendation No. 200), 2010.



Code of practice on workplace violence in services sectors and measures to combat this phenomenon, 2003.

Resolution on equal opportunity and equal treatment for men and women in employment, 1985.

International Women's Day 2013: Stop Violence at Work. Background paper.

Statement by the ILO at the 57th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

### **European Agency for Safety and Health at Work**

Workplace Violence and Harassment: a European Picture (2010 Report).

## **Goods and services and audiovisual media**

### **European Union**

Directive 2004/113/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2004 implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services.

Directive 2007/65/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Directive 89/552/EEC on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the pursuit of television broadcasting.

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European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014), "Violence against Women: an EU-wide Survey".

Fairbairn J. *et al.* (2013), *Sexual Violence and Social Media. Building a Framework for Prevention*, Crime Prevention Ottawa.

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Zero Tolerance (2012), *Handle with Care: A guide to responsible media reporting of violence against women*.

## **Cited websites**

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[www.avonfoundation.org](http://www.avonfoundation.org)

[www.apcwomen.org](http://www.apcwomen.org)

[www.caadv.org.uk/](http://www.caadv.org.uk/)

<http://everydaysexism.com/>

<http://feministfrequency.com/>

[www.ifj.org/fr/themes/egalite-des-sexes/](http://www.ifj.org/fr/themes/egalite-des-sexes/)

[www.takebackthetech.net/](http://www.takebackthetech.net/)

[www.thebodyshop-usa.com](http://www.thebodyshop-usa.com)

[www.vodafone.com](http://www.vodafone.com)

## Article 17 – Participation of the private sector and the media

1. Parties shall encourage the private sector, the information and communication technology sector and the media, with due respect for freedom of expression and their independence, to participate in the elaboration and implementation of policies and to set guidelines and self-regulatory standards to prevent violence against women and to enhance respect for their dignity.

2. Parties shall develop and promote, in co-operation with private sector actors, skills among children, parents and educators on how to deal with the information and communications environment that provides access to degrading content of a sexual or violent nature which might be harmful.

[www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int)

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, 28 of which are members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

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