



“From awareness to accountability: END GENDER BASED VIOLENCE NOW!”

***Joint statement in observance of the
International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women
on November 25, and the accompanying
16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, 2022***

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Since the full-scale invasion by the Russian Federation into Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the conditions in which we address gender-based violence have dramatically altered. The number of victims have increased, impacting women and men, boys and girls.

We are appalled by the numerous reports of conflict related sexual violence committed by Russian armed forces in Ukraine and support efforts at Ukrainian national and international level to hold those responsible for war crimes, including for conflict related sexual violence, accountable.

Even in conditions of war, Ukraine has shown its commitment to ending violence against women and domestic violence by ratifying the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, often called the Istanbul

Convention. We congratulate Ukraine for taking this step and encourage its effective implementation.

The European Union has welcomed Ukraine as a candidate EU country and we applaud the Ukrainian authorities for their steps towards implementing European Human Rights and Gender Equality standards, as well as their progress in meeting EU accession requirements. The publication of the Victim and Witness-Oriented Strategy for Prosecution of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Crimes is an important development as well. We also congratulate Ukrainian authorities for their commitment to include women's organisations and other CSOs in key decision-making processes. We wish to acknowledge the work of women's rights organisations, who have stepped forward to fill the gaps that have emerged and for their activism.

Unfortunately, the stigma of GBV and conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) has remained high in Ukraine. Addressing stigma and guilt is an essential element in assisting victims, as it can prevent reporting cases to law enforcement agencies. This will take time but cannot wait. Stigma is fostered in communities in which victims live, so it is important to address the issue at a local level.

We are honoured to assist Ukraine in building inclusive communities, which can support traumatised persons and survivors of GBV. We stand with Ukraine in (re-)building social infrastructure which is necessary to address the traumatic effects of GBV, whether it is domestic violence or sexual violence. The Istanbul Convention requires prevention of violence against women, protection of victims, effective prosecution of perpetrators and co-ordinated policies. This includes adequate and respectful services for victims, which puts their priorities and wishes at the centre of any actions.

Effective and accountable law enforcement agencies are also required, where officers have access to services for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This would allow them to do their difficult job in trying circumstances, including in newly liberated areas. It includes a trusted judiciary that addresses all cases of GBV/CRSV professionally and effectively; we strive for accountability for all perpetrators and the prevention of secondary stigmatisation of survivors. Promoting gender equality and combating gender stereotypes and sexism are also crucial elements of ending and preventing gender-based violence against women and girls. Gender mainstreaming all policies by Ukrainian institutions will contribute to this goal.

We commend the efforts that have been made already, as this will enhance trust and resilience in Ukraine. We acknowledge that Ukrainian society is now dealing with old and new aspects of gender-based violence.

In observance of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women on November 25, and the accompanying 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, the EU Delegation to Ukraine, the EU Advisory Mission for Civilian Security Sector Reform (EUAM Ukraine) in Ukraine, and the Council of Europe Office in Ukraine reaffirm our commitment to defend the rights of women and girls in Ukraine, and for all Ukrainians to live free from gender-based violence and all violence.