



Violence against women and girls is both a cause and a consequence of inequality between women and men. At its root lies sexism — the system of beliefs, norms and power relations that sustains male dominance and women’s subordination across society.

Rather than isolated incidents, violence against women must be understood as a continuum of male violence against women and girls, ranging from sexist hate speech, street harassment and online abuse to domestic and sexual violence, trafficking and sexual exploitation, prostitution systems, and femicide. These forms of violence are interconnected because they stem from the same structural inequalities and patriarchal power relations.

Addressing this reality therefore requires more than criminal justice responses. It demands structural change and sustained political action to achieve substantive equality between women and men.

The Portuguese Platform for Women’s Rights works on violence against women and girls through a feminist and women’s human rights framework, combining advocacy, policy monitoring, shadow reporting, awareness-raising, and European and international cooperation.

Our work is grounded in key international instruments, particularly the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence — the Istanbul Convention — whose full implementation remains a central political obligation for Member States. We also closely follow the implementation of the new EU Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence, which strengthens common standards across the European Union.

Civil society monitoring is a core part of our work. The Platform regularly contributes to shadow reports under CEDAW, GREVIO, Special procedures of UN Human Rights Council, specifically the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and Girls, its causes and consequences, Reem Alsalem, and other international mechanisms,

helping to identify gaps between legislation and implementation, as well as persistent barriers faced by women survivors of violence.

Transnational cooperation, particularly between Portugal and Spain, is also a key area of action. Comparative experience — including Spain's developments in specialised judicial responses and integrated protection systems — provides important lessons for strengthening national frameworks.

Within this context, the Portuguese Platform for Women's Rights has coordinated and participated in several European projects aligned with the four pillars of the Istanbul Convention — prevention, protection, prosecution and coordinated policies — including:

- the EXIT project, addressing the links between prostitution, trafficking and sexual exploitation as part of the continuum of male violence against women and girls, and contributing to policy proposals for Portugal in line with the Equality Model;
- the bE_SAFE project, focused on digital violence against women and girls, with emphasis on prevention, platform accountability and victim protection;
- and the VIOLET project, addressing sexual harassment in the workplace.

among others.

Violence against women evolves with social and technological change, but its root causes remain constant: structural inequality, sexism and unequal power relations between women and men.

For this reason, feminist and women's rights organisations remain essential actors in prevention, protection, advocacy and democratic accountability. Ending male violence against women and girls requires not only laws and policies but sustained political will and a consistent commitment to women's human rights.

Ana Sofia Fernandes, Secretary-General | 20.05-2026