



“Revealing gender-based violence data the world round: The Special Rapporteur’s Femicide Watch Initiative”

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Introduction

On 5 October 2021, I presented the [report](#) of my predecessor, Ms. Dubravka Simonovic at the General Assembly of the United Nations, pursuant to its resolution 75/161 for its October 2021 session. The report took stock of the Femicide Watch Prevention initiative, which aims at fostering the creation of observatories or watch bodies to monitor and better inform Government’s response to and prevention of femicide or gender-related killings of women and girls.

The femicide watch initiative by the mandate was established on 25 November 2015, on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. States were urged to establish a Femicide Watch, and to publish on each 25 November the number of femicides or gender-related killings of women per year, disaggregated by age and sex of the perpetrators, as well as the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim or victims. The overall aim of the Femicide Watch Prevention initiative is to contribute to the prevention of femicide or intentional gender-related killings of women and girls through the collection of comparable data at the national, regional, and global level. In addition, it aims to contribute to their prevention through analyses of cases by national multidisciplinary bodies. Such analyses should be carried out from a human rights perspective and should detect shortcomings within national laws and policies. Such bodies should be mandated to recommend measures for prevention of similar cases, including on laws and their implementation.

Femicide has been defined by the Special Rapporteur as the killing of women because of their sex and/or gender; femicide and gender-related

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killing of women have been used interchangeably to name such killings (A/71/398). In doing so, the mandate has followed General Assembly Resolutions A/RES/68/191 and A/RES/70/176, which address action against gender-related killing of women and girls, while noting it is criminalized in some countries as femicide or feminicide. While each State will decide on the terminology used, this should not be an obstacle for the collection of comparable homicide data, based on the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. The mandate has recommended that States should collect data under three broad categories: intimate-partner femicide or family-related femicide, based on the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator, and other femicides, according to the local context.

The centrality of data collection and monitoring in State efforts to combat violence against women was reaffirmed by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, particularly its General Recommendation No. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence against women. In it, the Committee recommended that States parties establish a system to regularly collect, analyze and publish statistical data on the number of complaints of violence. This system should include information on the sentences imposed on perpetrators and reparations, including compensations, provided to victims. The Committee also recommended that data should be disaggregated by type of violence, relationships between victim and perpetrator and other relevant sociodemographic characteristics.

It is worth highlighting that since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become more difficult to get a clear picture of the potential increase in femicide because of the pandemic and the related lockdown measures. The pre-existing gaps in response to domestic violence and femicide are being compounded by gaps caused by this pandemic.

Support by UN Bodies

Several UN agencies and regional independent human rights mechanisms that form part of the EDVAW Platform have supported the mandate in this initiative. For example, on 25 November 2018, the platform issued a joint [call](#) for the intensification of international, regional, and national efforts for the prevention of femicide and gender-based violence.

In March 2019, during its 50th session, the UN Statistical Commission made a request to UN Women and UNODC to develop a statistical framework on gender-related killings of women, based on the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes (ICCS) with a close collaboration between both agencies.

At the regional level, an important initiative was carried out by the Follow-Up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI) and UN Women. In March 2019, the entities adopted the Inter-American [Model Law](#) on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of the Gender-Related Killing of Women and Girls.

Finally, and on occasion of his [statement](#) to the High-level meeting on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, on 1 October 2020, the UN Secretary General called for affirmative action to prevent violence against women, including femicide.

Progress in the creation of femicide observatories or femicide watch bodies

Significant progress has been made in the past five years towards the creation of different types of bodies with the purpose to monitor violence against women, and femicide in particulars. Below are some of the examples that were mentioned in the report (all submissions can be found [here](#)):

In **Georgia**, the Public Defender decided to set up a femicide watch in 2016. Since then, the Office of the Public Defender has published yearly reports on femicide in which it analyzes cases of gender-based murders, attempted murders, and suicides of women in order to identify gaps in the victim protection mechanisms and to make recommendations to the relevant agencies.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Women's Affairs of the State of **Palestine** set up a National Observatory for Violence Against Women.

In **Argentina**, the first National Femicide Registry was established in 2015 by the Supreme Court of Justice. In 2016, the Office of the National Ombudsman established a Femicide Observatory. In December 2019, the Observatory on Violence and Inequalities based on Gender was established. There are also several initiatives

by civil society to create observatories on violence against women and femicide.

In **Ecuador**, the Comprehensive Organic Law for the Prevention and Eradication of Violence against Women of 2018 provides for the creation of a National Observatory on Violence against Women, which is now being established and is expected to be operational by November 2021.

The Government of **Spain** established an Observatory on Violence against Women in its Ministry of Equality, which gathers data to support decision-making in elaborating or implementing policies.

In 2014, the Government of **Morocco** created its National Observatory on Violence against Women. that consists of the Government, NGOs, and academics.

In 2015, the Government of **Slovakia** established the Coordinating-Methodical Centre for Prevention of Violence against Women, responsible for annually gathering and evaluating administrative data on violence against women, including femicide.

The Government of **South Africa** launched its Femicide Watch in 2018, which consists of a repository of information for victims and stakeholders. It provides access to a risk assessment tool and resources for victims, as well as articles and information on femicide.

The report also underlined that in many countries, such as **Honduras, Romania, Canada, and Israel**, scholars and universities were at the forefront of efforts to create Femicide Watch bodies. In other countries, civil society has been key in gathering information about femicide and creating their own observatories. For example, in **Mexico**, the National Citizen Observatory on Femicide is a joint initiative of 40 organizations that monitors and systematizes information on lack of justice for the victims of femicide.

It is also worth mentioning the role of local Governments can play in creating these type of watch bodies. For examples, the department of Seine Saint Denis, in **France**, and the city of Iztapalapa, in **Mexico**, created local observatories on violence against women in 2002 and 2018, respectively, and combine roles

of monitoring and prevention with victim support and advisory to policy makers.

The Special Rapporteur has also received information on several other initiatives that, while not consisting of the watch bodies she has recommended, fulfil some of their roles, such as the task force on Domestic Violence and COVID-19 of the Government of **Switzerland**, and the Family Violence Death Review Committee of **New Zealand**.

Finally, it should be noted that, at the regional level, the Gender Equality [Observatory](#) of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean provides consolidated data on 21 countries of the region.

While the institutional design of the observatories may differ from one country to another, the mandate has recommended that they all have standard roles and functions which are: 1) that that data is collected according to the modalities recommended by the mandate, and is therefore comparable at the regional and global levels; 2) that data is analyzed and made public; 3) that cases are reviewed to identify gaps in protection, services and legislation; 4) that recommendations for improvement based on local trends can reach legislators, policy makers and the general public; and 5) that evidence-based legislation and policy reforms can be implemented.

Data collection on femicide or gender-related killings

The mandate has recommended that data collected should include three broad categories: intimate-partner femicide or family-related femicide, based on the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator, and other femicides or gender-related killings, according to the local context. The submissions received indicate that much progress has been made towards the collection and systematization of data on femicide, although with different methodologies and scopes.

One comprehensive initiative is carried out in **Argentina** by the judiciary. The National Femicide Registry includes information on cases which have led to judicial proceedings and includes data on violent deaths of women and girls for gender-related reasons. The Registry is inclusive of trans women and transvestites and contains socio-demographic information as well for victims and

perpetrators, such as age, marital status, occupation, as provided by legislation.

In **Slovenia**, the Police collects information with a focus on the categories of “gender” and “relationship between victim and perpetrator”, covering the following relationships: ex-spouse or intimate partner, intimate partner, child, parent, and spouse. Data includes cases of homicide and other types of violence against women, and the number of femicides is obtained from the number of murders and manslaughters of women when committed by perpetrators with those types of relationships to the victims.

In **Georgia**, the Public Defender analyzes data collected and published by the General Prosecutor’s Office. It divides all killings of women into domestic crimes and killings of women on other grounds; and it disaggregates domestic crime by type of relationship between victim and perpetrator and crimes committed by husband or former husband.

In many countries, efforts to collect data mainly focus on intimate-partner killings. For example, the e Gender Equality Ombudsperson of **Croatia** collects information on intimate-partner killings.

Femicide is sometimes monitored in the framework of domestic or family violence. In **Turkey**, data on femicide are collected by law enforcement, and includes women who lost their lives due to domestic violence.

In the absence of data produced by official sources, civil society organizations and academia initiatives seek to compensate that gap by gathering publicly available information from other sources on femicide, particularly the media. Media monitoring is also the strategy adopted by the civil society organization

The report also highlighted that although much progress has been made, many challenges remain to ensure comprehensive, comparable data on femicide is produced and made available. One obstacle frequently pointed out in the submissions received is the lack of existence in criminal legislation of a specific offence of femicide. This should not be an impediment to the collection of data, however. As the mandate had pointed out in its previous report, UNODC utilizes the International

Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes, which is based on behavioral descriptions instead of legal codes. Femicide falls under the classification of intentional homicide. Any Government may collect information on femicide by applying those criteria and categories. Likewise, the existence of a criminal offence of femicide does not exclude the need to collect disaggregated information on the crime, including the relationship between victim and perpetrator.

Another issue to be noted is restrictive definitions of femicide that are sometimes adopted in the production of data. While domestic violence, family violence and intimate-partner violence are all relevant categories for understanding the phenomenon of femicide, none of them is sufficient as a standalone proxy for femicide.

Studies on femicide and evidence-based policy and legislative responses

In the past few years, a growing number of studies has shed light on the different dynamics of femicide. They have consistently pointed out that women are the primary victims of intimate-partner killings and the prevalence of a prior history of violence leading up to the femicide.

Ecuador is an example of the cumulative results of a few investigations and studies on femicide. Starting in 2010, different State institutions started producing studies and indicators on femicide. As a result of the increased visibility of violence against women brought about by these studies, the Comprehensive Organic Law for the Prevention and Eradication of Violence against Women was passed in 2018. Ecuador has also implemented in November 2020 a mechanism to monitor the deadlines and terms in which judicial proceedings are carried out in the crime of femicide and violent deaths of women.

Some countries have put in place interesting initiatives to identify protection gaps and propose improvements. For example, the Departmental Observatory of Seine-saint-Dennis in **France** studied 24 cases of femicides in the area in 2008, and came to important findings, such as that in half of the cases the women were killed by their spouses in the context of visitation or custody arrangements.

Based on those conclusions, several measures were put in place, including measures to prevent contact between women and their aggressors in the context of visitation of children.

Conclusion and recommendations

States' obligation to prevent and combat violence against women, whether perpetrated by State or non-State actors or private persons, is well established in international human rights law. The due diligence obligation to have legal provisions and a system in place to address gender-based violence against women committed by private actors evidently includes femicides or gender-related killings of women.

Collecting and disseminating data is not an end in itself, but a powerful tool to assess the level of gender-based violence against women and improve legislation and policy responses to violence against women. When duly taken into consideration, the trends exposed by data may inform better responses, tailored to national and local contexts, and increase capacity to prevent the escalation of violence into femicides. Comparable data on femicide or gender-related killings of women and girls should be an integral part of the data on violence against women collected and published by States each year.

As this 2021 report demonstrates, while much progress has been made in putting in place violence against women observatories, or femicide watch bodies, dedicated to the issue of femicide or gender-related killings of women, it has been uneven. While some countries and regions have put significant resources into setting up their Femicide watches, in others there is very little progress, if any. Data are not yet comparable as in many cases the modalities proposed by the mandate are not observed. It is also problematic that, in some countries, data on femicide or gender-related killings of women and girls are limited only to intimate-partner violence. A comprehensive approach should include all types of femicides relevant to a particular context, including intimate-partner and family-related killings and others in which, while there is no relationship between victim and perpetrator, there is a gender motive.

In the report, the mandate reiterated that the existence of criminal law provisions establishing the crime of femicide (as a standalone offence or as an aggravating circumstance to homicide) is not a prerequisite for the

collection of data. Furthermore, when such legal definitions of femicide as a specific crime are in place, often only prosecuted cases are counted; in those States, data collection should be broader and encompass all gender-related killings of women.

The report also called on States to establish femicide watches or observatories on violence against women, if one has not yet been created, and collect and publish each year comparable data on femicide or gender-related killings of women as part of data on violence against women. It further encouraged State to strengthen collaboration with civil society organizations, National Human Rights Institutions, academia, and all other entities in collecting data and producing information on femicide. Finally, States were reminded to strengthen the gathering of data on gender-based violence and femicide or gender-related killings of women during the COVID-19 pandemic and conduct a comparison between femicide data collected before and during the COVID -19 pandemic.

Regarding UN agencies, the report recommended that they continue and expand their support to States in the setting up of information systems on femicide or gender-related killings of women, femicide prevention watches or observatories and analyses of cases with recommendations for their prevention.

Finally, the report called on both States and UN bodies to collaborate with the EDVAW Platform mechanisms and provide institutional and financial support for the activities of the Platform of independent expert mechanisms on the elimination of discrimination and violence against women, including on femicide.