MARVOW 2.0
Coordinated Multi-Agency Response to Violence against Older Women



Unseen no more!

Policies and partnerships to protect older women from violence

Violence against older women
has long remained invisible — but not anymore.

Conference Report

Funded by the European Union

Through the EU-funded project MARVOW 2.0, experts, services, and policy makers from across Europe have worked together to build a coordinated multi-agency response to gender-based violence against older women. The project developed risk assessment tools, trained frontline professionals, and strengthened cooperation between agencies to better protect older women and ensure their voices are heard.

The conference "Unseen no more: Policies and Partnerships to Protect Older Women from Violence" held in Brussels on 3 February 2026 brought together policy makers, civil society and front line professionals to discuss how policies and partnerships can protect older women from violence.

Welcome & Opening remarks

Official greetings and setting the stage for "Unseen no more!"

Moderator: Alessandra Pauncz, WWP European Network

Speaker: Lisa Collste, European Commission

Moderator Alessandra Pauncz, Executive Director of the European Network for the work with perpetrators opened the conference by highlighting the urgent need for specialised resources for older women experiencing violence, drawing on her own professional experience. She shared the story of a woman in her seventies who endured decades of abuse, isolation, and fear, and whose case illustrated the profound gaps in support systems - particularly the lack of long-term, stable solutions for older victims. Her testimony underscored how ageism and sexism intersect to create unique vulnerabilities, and how essential human connection and tailored services are for recovery.

Lisa Collste, from the European Commission's Unit for Gender Equality, echoed this perspective in the institutional greetings from the European Commission, recalling her own early encounter with an older victim of violence whose suffering lasted a lifetime and could have been prevented with timely intervention. She stressed that even small actions - such as a doctor offering the right words or a referral- can significantly change outcomes. Collste situated the discussion within the EU's foundational values of dignity, equality, and human rights, noting the Commission's commitment to supporting civil society organisations through programmes such as CERV and the upcoming Daphne 2026 call. She warned of the current gender backlash and attempts to undermine frameworks like the Istanbul Convention, emphasising the crucial role of CSOs as frontline defenders of women's rights.

Both speakers called for stronger multi-agency cooperation, better awareness among professionals, and a transformative approach to ensure that older women are neither overlooked nor left to suffer in silence.

MARVOW 2.0 - coordinated multi-agency response to violence against older women

Shining a light on the efforts to protect older women from violence

Speaker: Martina Knoll, Association of Autonomous Austrian Women's Shelters

Martina Knoll, Coordinator of the Marvow 2.0 project, introduced the MARVOW 2.0 project, emphasising the urgency of addressing violence against older women. With demographic trends showing that by 2050 nearly 30% of the EU population will be older persons, the speaker stressed that violence does not stop with age. Data from the 2024 EU Survey on Gender-Based Violence revealed that 26% of women aged 65–74 have experienced violence in their lifetime, yet only 14% ever reported it. This highlights the need to address the intersection of gender, ageism, ableism, and socio-economic marginalisation, which often limits older women's access to support.

MARVOW 2.0 builds on previous work and brings together nine partner organisations across seven countries. Over three years, the project has focused on developing effective models to improve responses to violence against older women. It targets a wide range of professional groups - care services, social services, victim support, police, justice, and perpetrator programmes - recognising that no single institution can respond adequately. Coordinated, multi-agency cooperation is essential to address the complexity of these cases.

The speaker underlined persistent challenges: the topic remains insufficiently prioritised, data is scarce, reporting is low, and victim support organisations often lack tailored tools and resources. Similar gaps exist in addressing older perpetrators, further complicating interventions.

The project's four core objectives are: improving risk assessment for older victims; developing training programmes for professionals; introducing tested protocols for coordinated multi-agency systems; and producing policy recommendations to strengthen long-term frameworks. Methods included multi-stakeholder roundtables, desk research, an international survey, and capacity-building activities.

Key results show that age and gender dimensions are rarely integrated into existing systems. MARVOW 2.0 has produced practical tools to enhance detection and response, developed cooperation models grounded in real cases, and created comprehensive training modules for daily professional use. Policy recommendations were developed to ensure sustainability, with a strong call for continued funding to civil society organisations working on the frontline.

A call to action for European policymakers

Recommendations on policies and partnerships to protect older women from violence

Speaker: Apolline Parel, AGE Platform Europe

Apolline Parel delivered a strong call to action for European policymakers, urging them to address the persistent invisibility of violence against older women. She highlighted that such violence is often normalised, overlooked, and insufficiently prevented, with major gaps in protection mechanisms and a striking lack of age- and gender-disaggregated data. Current EU data collection stops at age 74, leaving the experiences of the oldest women almost entirely undocumented. Parel called for systematic data collection that includes women aged 75+, thematic EU-wide reporting, and methodological guidance for gathering sensitive data from older populations, including those in institutions.

She stressed the need for an intersectional approach that recognises how ageism, sexism, ableism, and lifelong inequalities shape older women's vulnerability. Ageism often undermines their credibility, reframes violence as "care issues" or "family matters," and contributes to structural neglect in long-term care settings. EU policies on violence against women still focus predominantly on younger women, leaving older women marginalised.

To address these gaps, Parel urged the adoption of an EU Action Plan to Combat Ageism, which would integrate age systematically into legislation, funding, data collection, and monitoring. Such a plan would strengthen a human-rights-based approach and provide coherent guidance to Member States.

She concluded by emphasising the need for a coordinated EU response that recognises violence against older women as a serious, gendered, and age-specific human rights violation—one that can no longer remain unseen.

European policy perspectives on violence against older women

Relevance and impact of directives, strategies and conventions for older women victims of violence

Moderator: Bridget Penhale, Older Women's Network Europe

Speakers: Evin Incir, European Parliament; José Antonio Moreno Díaz European Economic and Social Committee; Lisa Collste, European Commission

The panel explored how current EU policies, legal instruments, and institutional strategies address violence against older women, and what further action is needed to ensure their protection. Speakers included Lisa Collste, legal officer at the European Commission's Unit for Gender Equality at the Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers; Evin Incir, Member of the European Parliament and Rapporteur for the directive on combatting violence against women and domestic violence for the Committee of Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs; and José Antonio Moreno Díaz, member of the European Economic and Social Committee and rapporteur for the Committee's opinions on "Combatting violence against women" and "Violence against women as a human rights issue".

Key EU Frameworks and Legal Instruments

Lisa Collste highlighted the significance of the Istanbul Convention, ratified by the EU in 2022, as a landmark step for preventing violence and protecting victims across all ages. Although the Convention does not single out older women, it explicitly includes age and sex as grounds for discrimination, enabling targeted action. The 2024 Directive on Combating Violence Against Women is central to implementing the Convention. It strengthens victim protection, promotes multi-agency cooperation, improves age- and sex-disaggregated data collection, and embeds an intersectional approach. Member States must implement the Directive and report to the Commission by 2027. Collste noted that 23 Member States already acknowledge older women as a group at increased risk.

The EU Gender Equality Strategy and the Roadmap on Women's Rights provide the overarching framework for these actions.

Evin Incir described the challenging negotiation process, marked by political resistance and far-right narratives denying the gendered nature of violence. The Directive ultimately secured strong provisions on cyberviolence, intersectionality, and victim pathways to safety. Although a consent-based definition of rape could not be fully achieved due to a blocking minority in the Council, the Directive

obliges Member States to promote a consent-based culture. Incir stressed that recognition of older women as victims is essential to make their experiences visible.

José Antonio Moreno Díaz outlined the European Economic and Social Committee's opinions from 2022 and 2024, which emphasised a feminist and human-rights-based approach. Key recommendations included: adopting a gender perspective in all policies, ratifying the Istanbul Convention, addressing all forms of violence, recognising violence against women as a Eurocrime, and ensuring older women can remain in employment. The 2024 opinion reiterated the need to address institutional violence, prostitution, vicarious violence, and to criminalise rape based on lack of consent. Moreno Díaz also warned of growing extreme-right opposition to gender equality.

Panel discussion

All speakers agreed that older women face specific barriers due to the intersection of ageism and sexism. Incir stressed the importance of professional training and awareness-raising to ensure adequate support. Moreno Díaz highlighted the digital divide, cultural norms that encourage silence, and the need for specialised training in health services. Collste pointed to the Directive's explicit recognition of older women, improved reporting mechanisms, and mandatory age-disaggregated data collection.

The panel identified several needs:

- Stronger implementation of existing frameworks.
- Dedicated funding and visibility for older women in awareness campaigns.
- Training for professionals in care institutions, where violence often remains hidden.
- Educational pathways promoting a culture of respect and consent.
- Effective accountability mechanisms for older perpetrators.

Speakers emphasised the EU's role in supporting implementation, facilitating exchange of best practices, and strengthening prevention networks involving policymakers and civil society. Multi-sectoral collaboration - across health, social care, justice, and housing - was seen as essential to ensure older women are not left behind.

Reflections from European civil society

Perspectives from civil society organisations on advancing protection for older women

Moderator: Stephanie Futter-Orel, Women Against Violence Europe

Speakers: Marine Uldry, European Disability Forum; Ann-Katrin Orr, Mental Health Europe; Sandra Jovanović Belotić, WWP European Network; Video from Ilaria Todde, EuroCentralAsian Lesbian Community*

This panel brought together key European civil society organisations to discuss how to strengthen protection for older women experiencing violence. Moderator Stephanie Futter-Orel (WAVE) highlighted that gender-based violence does not stop with age and is deeply connected to lifelong inequalities, poverty, and structural discrimination. She emphasised the need for age-disaggregated data, intergenerational approaches, and policies that recognise violence against older women as structural violence, as reflected in the upcoming EU Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030.

Sandra Jovanović Belotić (WWP European Network) stressed that violence cannot be addressed without tackling perpetrators. Older women's experiences often remain invisible, and perpetrators remain in the shadows. She highlighted the need for gender-sensitive perpetrator programmes, noting that older perpetrators are particularly overlooked. Without early intervention, many women only reach safety once the perpetrator dies. She called for integrated cooperation between perpetrator programmes, victim support, and social services.

Ann-Katrin Orr (Mental Health Europe) underlined that mental health is shaped by social context, discrimination, and violence. Stigma - especially for older women - remains a major barrier to seeking help. She emphasised the need for prevention, rights-based mental health services, and adequate housing solutions, which are essential for escaping against violence. She also noted the lack of a single EU-wide helpline for victims and called for increased funding for social priorities in the next EU budget.

Marine Uldry (European Disability Forum) highlighted the specific vulnerabilities of older women with disabilities, including violence in institutions and care settings. The European Disability Forum advocates for stronger implementation of the Directive on combating violence women and campaigns against forced sterilisation. She stressed that data alone is insufficient - policymakers must act on it - and called for stronger collaboration with civil society. She also proposed appointing an EU

coordinator on ending violence against women to ensure intersectional groups, including older women, are not overlooked.

A video contribution from **Ilaria Todde (EuroCentralAsian Lesbian Community)*** highlighted the invisibility of older lesbian and bisexual women. Data from the Fundamental Rights Agency shows major gaps in reporting and research. A lifetime of discrimination increases vulnerability to violence and reduces trust in institutions. Older LGBTIQ women often face economic insecurity, housing barriers, and forced institutionalisation, sometimes at the cost of hiding their identity.

Key Themes from the Panel Discussion

- Improving EU and national policies: Speakers stressed the need for policies that reflect the realities of older women, especially those from marginalised communities. This includes recognising psychological violence, addressing violence in care settings, and ensuring adequate funding for specialised services.
- Strengthening perpetrator accountability: Civil society highlighted the lack of data on perpetrators and the need for specialised programmes for older perpetrators. Stereotypes such as assuming older men cannot be violent lead to misdiagnosis and missed interventions.
- Enhancing multi-agency cooperation: Effective collaboration requires commitment, resources, and guidance. GREVIO (Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence) evaluations were cited as a useful tool. Civil society called for stronger links between legal, social, and health systems, and for EU-level coordination.
- Empowering older victims: Examples included survivor groups within the European Union of the Deaf and high-profile cases such as Gisèle Pelicot, which helped raise awareness. Empowering survivors to speak out can shift public recognition and policy responses.
- Knowledge sharing and good practices: Organisations stressed the need for EU-level forums, coordinated data collection, and mechanisms to gather and disseminate good practices across Member States.

From risk to response - multi-agency collaboration tools

Risk assessment, training modules and do's and don'ts

Speakers: Natacha Henry, Psytel; Daphne Demetriou, Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies; Nicholas Spetsidis & Sophia Thanasoula, Union of Women Association of Heraklion

The session brought together three core components of the MARVOW 2.0 project - risk assessment, professional training, and multi-agency operational protocols - showing how each contributes to improving protection for older women experiencing domestic violence.

Natacha Henry presented the project's risk assessment checklist, developed to help frontline professionals - especially those without specialised domestic-violence training - assess age-specific risk factors in cases of violence against older women. The checklist is to be used alongside pre-existing domestic violence risk assessment tools that do not take age-related factors into account. It is based on what the frontline professional will have seen/noticed/heard while visiting or attending to the victim. If a level of risk is indicated, the frontline professional should proceed with the MARVOW 2.0 case management tool.

Daphne Demetriou then described how the training modules were developed in close collaboration with frontline workers to ensure they reflected real-world needs and constraints. The training focused on case management in multiagency teamwork, the risk assessment checklist, work with older perpetrators and coordination and data protection issues. Over 6 months, 31 training sessions were held in 7 countries, reaching 415 professionals from police, social welfare, civil society, healthcare, women's specialist services and with a legal background. During the trainings, it emerged that practitioners often have a lack of topic awareness and multi-agency collaboration is often a low priority. Systemic gaps may discourage professionals and leave limited time for specialized trainings. Nevertheless, professionals described the experience as a rare chance to build cross-agency connections, have time to reflect on their own work and collaboration and ask honest questions in a safe environment.

Finally, Nicholas Spetsidis and Sophia Thanasoula presented the project's multi-agency manual of operation. They emphasised that while multi-agency collaboration is difficult, it remains the only effective way to respond to domestic violence, particularly in cases involving older women. Older victims often depend on perpetrators for care, mobility, or finances, and face significant barriers to

reporting due to stigma, fear, and isolation. The operational manual developed through the project provides practical guidance for coordinated action, grounded in victim-centred, age-sensitive, and trauma-informed principles. It outlines clear roles for agencies, safe information-sharing practices, and the importance of integrating victims' voices into decision-making. Pilot implementation showed that professionals must understand their local support ecosystem, that burnout is a major risk, and that care centres play a crucial role. Above all, multi-agency work must be mainstreamed rather than treated as an optional add-on.

The session concluded with a Q&A that explored practical challenges. Participants discussed who should deliver training - there is no fixed profile, but trainers must inspire confidence and understand local systems. Approaching victims requires subtle, non-threatening questions that open the door to disclosure. Decision-making structures must adapt to regional realities, and holding older perpetrators accountable remains complex due to stereotypes, health issues, and limited resources. Speakers also noted that media narratives sometimes portray femicide of older women as "mercy killings", a framing that must be actively challenged.

Overall, the presentations underscored that protecting older women requires early detection, well-designed training, and strong multi-agency coordination. When these elements come together, professionals are better equipped to identify risk, support victims, and deliver sustainable, rights-based responses to domestic violence.

Multi-agency collaboration in practice

Sharing evidence, experiences, and lessons learned from Bulgaria, Italy and Spain

Speakers: Svetla Sivcheva & Nina Nikolova Association NAIA; Giusy de Grazia (by video) & Andrea Vignoli, Anci Lazio; Heinrich Geldschläger, Conexus

This session brought together experiences from Bulgaria, Italy, and Spain, illustrating how different institutional contexts shape responses to violence against older women and how MARVOW 2.0 has helped strengthen multi-agency cooperation across diverse systems.

Bulgaria, presented by Svetla Sivcheva and Nina Nikolova, outlined recent amendments to the domestic violence law, including extended protection timelines, the recognition of online violence and

a coordination mechanism, yet major gaps persist: Bulgaria has not ratified the Istanbul Convention, the law remains gender-neutral despite women being the overwhelming majority of victims, and no official gender-disaggregated data or joint institutional protocols exist. In practice, NGOs continue to fill these structural voids, driving coordination, advocacy, and case management. MARVOW 2.0 strengthened local cooperation through training, new partnerships, and the evolvement of coordinated multi-agency case management meetings, which will continue beyond the project. The initiative also increased public awareness and media attention, helping make violence against older women more visible.

Italy, represented through a video message by Giusy de Grazia and follow-up by Andrea Vignoli, highlighted the country's rapidly ageing population, with older women facing high levels of dependency, chronic illness, and social isolation. Despite a solid legal framework—including the "Red Code" law—older women remain largely invisible in public discourse, data collection, and awareness campaigns. The Marvow 2.0 Rome pilot revealed structural challenges: limited resources, procedural rigidity within law enforcement, insufficient age-specific expertise in anti-violence centres, and low awareness of mandates across health and social services. Its integration into the M.A.R.A. network led to the adoption of a multi-agency protocol explicitly addressing older women's needs - a significant step toward more inclusive practice.

Spain, presented by Heinrich Geldschläger, benefits from comparatively strong data and established multi-agency structures. National reports show that 40% of older survivors have endured violence for more than four decades, yet reporting rates remain far lower than among younger women. A survey of 93 professionals revealed that most services are not adapted to older victims, and specific services are largely absent. Barcelona's gender-based violence roundtables provided a solid foundation for implementing MARVOW 2.0, improving coordination across public services. However, private elder-care services remain outside the gender-based violence framework, reinforcing the divide between ageism and gender-based violence. A major achievement was the inclusion of older women as a target group in the Barcelona Plan for the Eradication of gender-based violence 2025–2030, which introduces specialised training and capacity-building measures. Key priorities ahead include bridging the gap between gender-based violence and elder-abuse policies, expanding training to all relevant sectors, and developing safe housing alternatives for older survivors.

During the Q&A, speakers reflected on media engagement, noting that journalists respond strongly to human-centred, hopeful narratives. Advocacy priorities included breaking down silos between ageing and gender-based violence policies, improving coordination among key actors, and addressing the critical shortage of long-term housing solutions. Civil society organisations emphasised the need for clearer national frameworks, stronger police involvement, and greater investment in social services. Participants also called for EU initiatives that explicitly name older women as a target group, helping ensure they are not overlooked in broader gender-based violence strategies.

Closing - unseen no more

Final reflections and commitments to EU institutions and organisations

Moderator: Alessandra Pauncz, WWP European Network

In her closing remarks, Alessandra Pauncz shared the story of how an older male perpetrator with the help of a perpetrator program was able to successfully change a decades long pattern of violence. Bringing the day's discussions together she highlighted the core issues that urgently require policy attention: the persistent invisibility and normalisation of violence against older women, the lack of adequate prevention and protection mechanisms, the scarcity of reliable data, and the continued absence of coordinated multi-agency responses. She emphasised that MARVOW 2.0 directly addresses these gaps through three key tools: a Risk Factor Checklist to help frontline professionals identify age-specific risks; a comprehensive capacity-building training programme for practitioners across essential services; and a Manual of Operation offering a practical framework for organisations supporting older women affected by violence.

Reflecting on the day, the moderator underscored two recurring themes - how communication shapes visibility, and the chronic lack of resources across systems. She concluded with a call to EU institutions and organisations to raise public awareness, invest in tailored prevention and victim-centred responses, fund specialised interdisciplinary services, support the development of training and assessment tools, encourage Member States to integrate gender- and age-sensitive approaches into their national action plans, and ensure that older persons' and women's organisations are meaningfully involved in policy design and monitoring.