

# **STOP** **VIOLENCE**



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**NATIONAL ACTION PLAN  
TO COMBAT ALL FORMS  
OF GENDER-BASED  
VIOLENCE | 2015-2019**

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# Introduction

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For many years now, Belgium has dedicated its efforts and resources to combating gender-based violence because it considers this issue an essential element in the equality between women and men. Since 2001, Belgium has pursued its policy to combat gender-based violence by means of a national action plan (NAP), supported by the federal government, the communities and the regions. This plan is coordinated by the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men. Several plans were drawn up: the first NAP 2001-2003, the second NAP 2004-2007, a third NAP 2008-2009 and a fourth NAP 2010-2014. This method of working is aimed at the continuous improvement of policy to support the ongoing fight against gender-based violence.

On an international level Belgium was commended for its coherent approach to gender-based violence and in Geneva the fourth NAP was nominated for the 2014 Policy Award by the World Future Council, the Inter-parliamentary Union and UN Women. This award calls attention to the best laws and policies combating violence against women and girls.

Despite the progress that has been made, gender-based violence remains an important concern to our country.

In 2014 the police registered 39,668 complaints pertaining to intimate partner violence. There were also 2,882 complaints about rape. According to a recent study by the European Union's Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) about violence against women<sup>1</sup>, 78% of the victims in Belgium did not report the most serious act of violence, committed by their partner, to the police or the authorities. Only 33% of the victims have talked about it with their doctor or in a care centre, 22% with the police, 18% in a hospital, 17% with a legal department or a lawyer and 10% with social services. According to the Security Monitor 2008-2009 only 7.2% of all sexual offenses (sexual assault, rape, indecent exposure, etcetera) are reported.

The FRA's study on violence against women reaches the same conclusion. According to the same study by the FRA, prevalence data concerning domestic and sexual violence are significantly higher than the number of complaints registered by the police. According to the data of this study, 24% of all women declare they have been the victim of physical and/or sexual violence by their (current or former) partner and 36% have been the victim of physical and sexual violence, irrespective of the perpetrator. Moreover, 13% of the women state that they have been the victim of sexual violence starting from the age of 15, and 14% before that age.

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<sup>1</sup>  
See <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/violence-against-women-eu-wide-survey-main-results-report>



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According to another of the Institute's studies from 2010 about women's and men's experiences relating to psychological, physical and sexual violence, 15% of all women and 10% of all men declare they have been the victim of violence by their partner or former partner during the last 12 months. This study also shows that women are more often the victim of more serious and more frequently occurring forms of intimate partner violence. However, it also shows that men are less likely to share their experiences with intimate partner violence (64.8% of the women compared to 39.2% of the men). The stereotypical (self-)image of men likely functions as something of a threshold in this regard, making it more difficult for them to reach out for help or to file a complaint. At any rate, more attention should be given to violence, both intimate partner violence and sexual violence, suffered by men, because it too often remains hidden.

Gender-based violence comprises more than just domestic and sexual violence. The prevalence study about circumcised girls and women risking gender-based violence, revised in 2014<sup>2</sup>, estimates that 13,112 girls and women "have in all probability already been circumcised" and that 4,084 girls and women "were at risk of being circumcised". As far as forced marriages and so-called honour-based violence are concerned, it is very difficult to obtain real prevalence data, considering the secret and familial nature of this type of violence. Even so, several studies show that instances of both types of violence are reported to organisations responsible for victim care. Moreover, they are often quoted as a ground for asylum requests.

All these studies and data show that all forms of gender-based violence are often kept under wraps. Furthermore, many victims find it difficult to acknowledge and to name the violent acts they have suffered and they still hesitate to talk about them with a third party.

<sup>2</sup>  
Dubourg D. et Richard F.,  
*Studie over de prevalentie van en  
het risico op vrouwelijke genitale  
verminking in België, 2014.*  
Geactualiseerd op 31 december 2012.  
FOD Volksgezondheid, Veiligheid van  
de Voedselketen en Leefmilieu.



# A. National action plan to combat all forms of gender-based violence 2015-2019

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With this action plan, then, Belgium wants to step up its efforts to prevent and combat all forms of gender-based violence against women and men, with particular attention to sexual violence.

This action plan is completely in line with the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (hereinafter called 'Istanbul Convention').

The Istanbul Convention is the first legally binding instrument for combating violence against women as well as domestic violence. Its objective is to help European countries take effective measures in four important domains: preventing violence, defending victims, prosecuting perpetrators and developing integrated, global and coordinated policies.

Although the Istanbul Convention's objectives primarily concern women, the NAP 2015-2019 will also pay attention to men who have become the victim of gender-based violence.

Certain forms of gender-based violence are already included in other national action plans, such as the National Action Plan 'Women, Peace and Security' 2013-2016 and the national action plan to fight human trafficking 2015-2019, which will add further emphasis to the gender dimension.

The national action plan to combat gender-based violence will therefore focus on the following forms of violence: intimate partner violence, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, honour-based violence and sexual violence.

With this action plan to combat gender-based violence, Belgium advocates a joint approach to the issue, based on the following six global objectives:

- I. pursue an integrated policy to combat gender-based violence and gather quantitative and qualitative data about all forms of violence
- II. prevent violence
- III. protect and support victims
- IV. investigate, continue and adopt protective measures
- V. incorporate the gender dimension in asylum and migration policy
- VI. fight against violence on an international level

Each global objective comprises a number of operational objectives and matches the aggregate of measures that will be implemented in 2015-2019.

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The main guidelines for the current national action plan are as follows:

- expand and improve quality legislation and regulation to protect victims and to detect and punish offenders.
- expand and improve registration and gender statistics.
- focus on a victim-oriented, multidisciplinary and integral, holistic approach (focus attention on the victim and his environment, including the children who have witnessed violence).
- offer protection for victims and in particular for persons who, because of various reasons, do not reach out to existing structures and services and who are suffering in their situation ('outreaching approach').
- pay more attention to the battle against sexual violence.
- more involvement from new partners (media, private companies, youth associations) and new departments.
- more attention to early detection and risk factors.
- more attention to primary prevention, in cooperation with education services.
- more attention to training for professionals.



## B. Methodology

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The NAP was drawn up based on consultations with civil society and reports from Belgian and international organisations.

Civil society was consulted in September 2013 and asked to make a list of the bottlenecks in the battle against gender-based violence and intimate partner violence in particular. In October 2013 civil society was consulted again, this time specifically on the topic of so-called honour-based violence. After the meetings of the sexual violence working group, coordinated by the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men, a document was drawn up in February 2014 listing the lacunas and relevant recommendations relating to sexual violence.

In late February the Institute, in cooperation with the administrations and stakeholders, elaborated a state of affairs of all measures included in the update of the NAP 2010-2014. This document was approved in June 2013.

All these texts and procedures were taken into account while drafting the NAP 2015-2019. Finally the draft was presented and revised during several meetings with representatives of the relevant ministries.

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## C. Monitoring

The battle against gender-based violence is a transversal issue that calls for an integrated approach. It requires the political commitment of all responsible politicians, in particular the federal government, the communities and the regions, as well as the participation of several public servants. Given their expertise, the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men is charged with coordinating the implementation of the NAP, as article 10 of the Istanbul Convention calls for a coordinating body responsible for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and measures in the fight against gender-based violence.

Like with previous action plans, we will convene an interdepartmental group. The aim here is to bring together all governmental institutions involved in the implementation of the NAP, thus contributing to its audit, updates and eventual evaluation. The group will consist of representatives of the federal institutions and people from the communities and the regions that are involved in the battle against gender-based violence. The Institute for the Equality of Women and Men is responsible for coordinating this interdepartmental group.

In addition, the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men will also put in place expert groups, composed of representatives from organisations that are active in the field, aid organisations for victims and perpetrators, people from the academic community and specific experts (from the police, justice department and the psycho-medical-social sector). These expert groups will be responsible for exchanging scientific knowledge and good practices. They will also be asked to make recommendations about the state of affairs of the measures included in the NAP and they will look for blind spots in the text.

A steering committee will also be put together, made up of staff members of the ministers that are involved in the action plan. This group is tasked to give a midterm evaluation of the plan, based on a progress report from the interdepartmental working group. This evaluation will then be submitted to parliament.



## D. Priorities

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### **1. Pursue an integrated policy to combat gender-based violence and gather quantitative and qualitative data about all forms of violence.**

Pursue a general and coordinated policy by means of an efficient cooperation between all partners.

The battle against gender-based violence is a transversal matter and requires an integrated approach. It also requires the commitment of all responsible politicians in the federal government, the communities and the regions, as well as the participation of local administrations. Cooperation and institutionalised coordination between these partners and stakeholders is essential to the successful development of all measures proposed.

Belgium is fully aware of the need for efficient and responsible control structures. For this reason, there has been an interdepartmental working group in Belgium for years now, responsible for bringing together all actors involved in the battle against gender-based violence, to attain a joint, considered and coherent policy. The group consists of representatives from the federal, community and regional institutions involved in the battle against gender-based violence. The Institute for the Equality of Women and Men is charged with coordinating this interdepartmental group.

Through this action plan, Belgium aims to draft and draw up a coordinated and integrated strategy. The common circular concerning the criminal policy on intimate partner violence (COL4/2006) represented a step in the right direction because it prioritised the improvement of intersectoral cooperation between the justice department, police and aid agencies. Pilot projects focusing on this multidisciplinary approach, with a free flow of information and deliberation between the services concerned, have demonstrated that victims are assisted better, cases dealt with more efficiently, and knowledge about the issues is significantly higher.

It is therefore all-important to tackle the battle against all forms of gender-based violence in a multisectorial manner. Different professionals come in contact with victims, perpetrators and members of their families in many different fields, but in the often complex situations they are confronted with, no one professional can provide an adequate and comprehensive solution.

As such, the mainstay in this action plan is the multisectorial and holistic approach to gender-based violence, which centres around the victim. Any intervention must be tailored to the victim's needs, taking into account the individual, familial, social, cultural and economic aspects of his or her situation, but also the context at large.

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D. PRIORITIES

1. PURSUE AN INTEGRATED POLICY TO COMBAT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND GATHER QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA ABOUT ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE
  - > PURSUE A GENERAL AND COORDINATED POLICY BY MEANS OF AN EFFICIENT COOPERATION BETWEEN ALL PARTNERS

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During this process adequate consideration must be afforded to the victim's safety and well-being. In the same spirit, it is also important to offer the victims and the children accompanying them long-term care, to make sure that they pull through and can reintegrate in society, and to avoid repeated victimhood. It is essential we keep developing and implementing multidisciplinary services and make them available and accessible to all victims of violence, and specifically the most vulnerable groups. At the very least, and whenever necessary, this multisectorial approach should effect an operative coordination and cooperation between police and justice department and guarantee succour to victims (including shelters, psycho-social auxiliary services and legal aid) as well as health services. In the same context, it is also crucial to draw up a map of potential new partners, such as public centres for social welfare, national health services, etcetera.

Close cooperation between the widest possible range of partners can only be achieved by means of cooperation and/or intervention protocols between the various services, on a federal, provincial or local level. Consultative and exchange structures between professionals involved in combating gender-based violence are a must when creating a strong and functional network on the ground. The provincial coordinating structures and local administrations play a key part in this, as they provide the link between field experts and the political world. These representatives regularly meet the organisations, pressure groups and experts, and they deal with these issues on a daily basis. They also safeguard the local dissemination of initiatives driven by the federal and provincial governments and often kickstart innovative pilot projects.

Among such innovative and inspiring projects in the battle against domestic violence is the C03 'safe house' project in Antwerp (C03 project). This first multidisciplinary initiative on partner violence is a Client-based Organisation involving 3 partners, in which the family takes centre stage. The three partners, police and justice department, assistance and care services and local administrations, work together in a chain-based model to ensure that their various activities complement each other another in a joint plan of approach that starts from a joint risk assessment, case deliberation and case coordination. In addition, an holistic method is used: the focus is not only on the acts of violence, but also on the problems behind them, such as drug abuse, a precarious situation of residence, stress, poor accomodation, as well as on the promotion of protective measures.

This action plan wants to consider the implementation of similar positive pilot projects in the battle against domestic violence.



## Collect data and conduct qualitative and quantitative research

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The effort against gender-based violence begins with a thorough understanding of the phenomenon. It is therefore essential that we continue to collect qualitative and quantitative data broken down by gender and age, harmonise the existing data and develop qualitative and quantitative indicators to improve the perception and the understanding of the phenomenon, and evaluate the impact of the violence on its victims and perpetrators.

Apart from statistical data, more research should be conducted into the phenomenon to get a better picture of the root causes and consequences of gender-based violence, the profile of offenders, the evolution of the number and severity of complaints, as well as of the efficiency of the measures, the protective factors and the degree and causes of recidivism.

Consequently, new data about prevalence, causes and consequences of violence will be collected, analysed and distributed, in particular through the following measures:

1. Conduct new prevalence studies on experiences concerning physical, psychological and sexual violence, based on the methodology of the European FRA study on violence against women.
  2. Conduct a study on offender profiling and recidivism in cases of intimate partner violence.
  3. Carry out an extensive investigation into the reach of violence against disabled women and girls, in cooperation with organisations of disabled people and with academia.
  4. Conduct scientifically sound research on the prevalence of male victims of intimate partner violence and sexual violence to determine the scale of the problem and their actual needs.
  5. In the context of gender mainstreaming, the institutions involved will make every effort to collect gender statistics on all forms of violence outlined in this NAP. These data will be systematically provided to the IEWM, which will receive a special mandate for this. The IEWM will elaborate a gender matrix on the matter.
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### Efficient cooperation with non-governmental organisations and civil society

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The NAP will support the immediate and constructive participation of civil society in the elaboration, implementation and monitoring of the adopted measures and strategies.

When drafting the NAP, the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men initially consulted the various groups of experts on the ground, social societies and the academic world, so that it would be in keeping with the issues in reality. This group of experts will also be involved when elaborating the actions in this action plan and when necessary, they will be consulted beforehand.

Throughout the NAP, Belgium commits itself to support the work of the relevant non-governmental organisations and of civil society and to keep developing an efficient cooperation with these organisations.

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## 2. Prevent violence

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Awareness campaigns for the general public or specific target groups

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In the last few years, there have been major efforts on a federal level, as well as in the communities, regions, provinces and municipalities, to break the taboo on violence, to inform victims and offenders and to support them with all available means.

The fight against violence requires the complete commitment of society as a whole. It is therefore vital that all civilians, whether they be a victim, witness or indeed an offender, are informed about the various courses of action open to them when they are confronted with violence.

Awareness campaigns or programmes for the general public play a key role in this.

It is also important to raise awareness among specific target groups that are regularly confronted with specific forms of gender-based violence. This calls for close cooperation with experts in the field.

This NAP will highlight specific awareness campaigns related to sexual violence. The main focus will be on encouraging victims to promptly report the facts in order to furnish proof and aid as quickly and as efficiently as possible.

The professionals who come in contact with the victims or the perpetrators of gender-based violence also have a crucial role to play. It is very important that they are able to identify victims and potential offenders, give them the appropriate support and refer them to the qualified services if necessary.

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To encourage the reporting of violence, regardless of type or place of occurrence, and to prevent violence, the following measures will be taken:

1. Organise awareness campaigns observing the international day for the elimination of violence against women on 25 November, the international day for the elimination of FGM on 6 February and V-day 14 February.
2. Raise awareness about the battle against sexism and stereotyping as a way of preventing gender-based violence.
3. Start campaigns that are targeted to and involve the input of (young) men, to solicit their contribution in the battle against gender-based violence.
4. Develop awareness and prevention projects about violence in relationships of young people.
5. Raise awareness among ethnic and cultural minorities about gender-based violence, possible approaches to the issue and the gamut of available aid agencies.
6. Systematically raise awareness with the general public and inform them about certain forms of gender-based violence through the websites [www.partnergeweld.be](http://www.partnergeweld.be), [www.verkrachting.be](http://www.verkrachting.be), [www.1712.be](http://www.1712.be), [www.ecouteviolencesconjugales.be](http://www.ecouteviolencesconjugales.be), etcetera.

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### Educational campaigns about equality between women and men

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Promoting equality between women and men and the fight against violence in relationships should be discussed from a early age and be made a recurring theme of education. This way children and youngsters will be able to fully participate in a society with more gender equality and they will become more aware of the fact that violent behaviour is impermissible.

Our education system plays a key role in preventing violent behaviour, for instance in strengthening students' resilience. Encouraging these principles from the very beginning, a first and important barrier of prevention against gender-based violence is put in place across the entire education system.

For this reason, the focus will be on sexual, relational and reproductive education and primary prevention within the context of healthy sexual behaviour among young people. Education must also develop measures that avoid sexist stereotypes and promote a culture of gender equality, respect for human rights and nonviolence. Moreover, these principles should be promoted in informal educational structures as well as in sport, culture and leisure and the media.



## Training of professionals

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Merely raising awareness is not enough to prevent violence. Organising training on this matter is crucial in the policy to inform the specific groups that are confronted with victims and perpetrators of acts of violence in a clear and precise way.

For instance, some people who intervene in these matters may be misinformed or confused about conflicts or violence between partners. Furthermore, people do not always know how to take care of victims of gender-based violence, or counsel them properly, especially in cases of sexual violence that require specialist skills to deal with the immediate consequences of violence, such as post-traumatic stress disorder. Support for the victim and perpetrator benefits from improved knowledge and awareness, more expertise in detecting violence, and more efficient care. Moreover, collecting medical, psychological or legal evidence often plays a key role in the arrest and sentencing of the offenders.

The training should also devote special attention to the development of intercultural skills, especially in relation to gender-based violence against immigrants, honour-based violence, female genital mutilation and forced marriage. Certain crimes are so specific that victims require the help and counsel of properly trained experts.

Again, it is important to emphasise the multidisciplinary and intersectoral character of the approach. A successful intervention calls for the cooperation of different professionals across different domains. This training will be tailored to the multidisciplinary approach to gender-based violence to ensure effective referral and coordination.

As far as sexual violence is concerned, more efforts will be made to improve the education of the police and justice sector (the first interrogation of adult victims of a sexual offence, use of the Sexual Assault Forensic Evidence kit, etcetera). More advanced training will be provided to all professionals in the health care sector, such as general practitioners, gynaecologists, urologists, nurses, etcetera. This is a direct response to the appeal of the World Health Organisation, which has championed the unremitting education of all health-care providers in the field of sexual violence.

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In short, Belgium commits itself to the introduction, development and strengthening of training for professionals who may come into contact with victims or perpetrators of gender-based violence by taking the following measures:

### **Initial training**

Strive for public support to include the knowledge of different forms of gender-based violence in the initial training of all categories of future professionals deemed relevant.

### **Basic training**

Strive for public support to include the knowledge of different forms of gender-based violence in the basic education of categories of specialised professions (psycho-medico-social sector, police sector, judicial sector, etcetera) by organising extra training days.

### **Advanced training**

1. Strive to organise specific advanced and separate training concerning forced marriage, honour-based violence, intimate partner violence, sexual violence and female genital mutilation for professionals in the sectors involved (psycho-medico-social sector, police sector, judicial sector, etcetera). For all these advanced trainings methodical frameworks will be developed for each form of violence and each target group separately. These trainings will be organised in an interdisciplinary, interinstitutional and multicultural way, taking into account the existing tools (for risk assessment) and reporting codes.
2. Encourage the integration of specific advanced training on 'sexual offences' in all police academies.
3. Provide a two-day compulsory training about intimate partner violence for second year judicial trainees.
4. Continue the training 'train the trainers' in hospitals on the topic of intimate partner violence and sexual violence.
5. Investigate the need for a specific training to become a forensic expert, able to recognise injuries of sexual violence and intimate partner violence.
6. Organise trainings for general practitioners, based on recommendations concerning the detection of intimate partner violence.
7. Sharing know-how and networking to provide quality support of 1712 and 106 employees and to enable them to refer victims efficiently.
8. Provide professionals in the support network of FEDASIL with training about the issues of FGM and sexual violence, with particular attention to prevalence and consequence, risk assessment and risk management.

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### Specific tools

1. Include a component about intimate partner violence and one about children who have witnessed violence. These components should fit within the CAW's global methodological framework for dealing with violence and abuse.
2. Provide professionals concerned with risk assessment tools and reporting codes about intimate partner violence.
3. Make recommendations to doctors about dealing with sexual violence, analogous to the recommendations concerning intimate partner violence.
4. Follow-up of the Mechelen project, concerning the creation of a local centre of expertise on honour-based violence, with a view to a potential nation-wide deployment. Integrate the issue of loverboys in this project.

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### Preventive programmes for intervention and treatment of perpetrators

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The measures taken against perpetrators of honour-based violence must be efficient and, if necessary, treatment options must be put forward to avoid that this violence reoccurs.

The existing prevention programmes for intervention and treatment of perpetrators of intimate partner violence will therefore be coordinated, streamlined and strengthened within the available budget to provide appropriate treatment, voluntarily, by court order and in the penitentiaries.

The treatment programmes to prevent perpetrators of punishable acts from relapsing, in particular with respect to crimes of a sexual nature, will also be geared to one another, based on the evaluation of cooperation treaties concerning the counsel and treatment of sexual offenders.

In all these prevention and treatment programmes for offenders, the safety, support, and rights of the victims remain an absolute priority, as well as the sharing of relevant information. Such programmes will be developed in cooperation with services that specialise in victim care.

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1. Make an inventory of the available programmes (judicial (including prisons) and non-judicial) and crisis centres for offenders
2. Evaluate the supply of offender programmes and gear them to one another, within the available budget.
3. Check how the available aid initiatives for sexual offenders can be streamlined, based on the recommendations of the evaluative report of the cooperation treaties regarding the counsel and treatment of sexual offenders.
4. Improve the accessibility of aid and treatment programmes for mentally disabled sexual offenders.

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#### Participation of the private sector, the public sector and the media

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The private sector, the public sector, the ICT sector and the media must be involved in the battle against gender-based violence, in particular by elaborating guidelines and self-regulating standards.

The battle against intimate partner violence often begins at the place of work. Whether you look at it from an ethical, a logical or an economic point of view, such a hands-on approach will benefit everyone.

The policy combating gender-based violence will investigate which part the private sector can play, mainly by means of financial support to various initiatives, by the elaboration of partnerships with social organisations, by raising awareness among members of staff, and so on.

The public sector also contributes to the prevention of violence, for instance through projects aimed at improving people's safety in public places and on public transport. There will also be an investigation into strategic and operational goals and concrete actions concerning the prevention of sexual intimidation / unwanted sexual behaviour and sexual misconduct in public transport and into the possibility of including those goals and actions into future management contracts with the NMBS and other public transport services.

Equality between women and men, the battle against discrimination and the battle against violence will also receive special attention in the public media, advocated through specific programmes and audiovisual content in line with the network's general objectives and policy statements, and also in a transversal way as part of a more comprehensive media policy.

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The following measures will be taken:

1. Include awareness about gender-based violence with the general public in future management contracts with RTBF/VRT.
2. Include the battle against sexism in the media in the recommendations concerning advanced media training (mission of the high council for media training).
3. Draw up codes of conduct concerning gender-based violence for professionals in the media, in cooperation with the Raad voor Journalistiek (council for journalism) and the Conseil de déontologie journalistique (council for ethical journalism).
4. Raise awareness with existing partners within private companies public enterprises.
5. Draw up a list of good practices combating and preventing gender-based violence, developed by companies.
6. Include awareness programmes about gender-based violence and sexual misconduct in future management contracts with NMBS, subway, tram and bus companies.
7. Cooperate with travel agencies and the tourism industry and organise campaigns to make tourists aware of the issue of sex tourism (in cooperation with EPCAT and the Tourism Industry Federation) and expand the existing website ([www.ikzegstop.be](http://www.ikzegstop.be)).



### 3. Protecting and supporting victims

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#### Inform victims

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Proper information must be made available to victims of gender-based violence, in a language they can understand. This information focuses on the legal measures, the aid services and the crisis centres for victims. Among other things, it is important to organise specific information campaigns which will encourage victims to file a report or a complaint and which will inform them about their rights.

Only by distributing information about the seriousness of the issue as widely and as continuously as possible will victims acknowledge their plight and be moved to take action. By informing victims they can broach the subject and they can be persuaded to report these acts of violence when they occur.

New information tools will be developed, preferably in multiple languages when they are intended for immigrants. At the same time, several information measures that have already been implemented on a federal, a community and a regional level (leaflets, brochures, websites, etcetera) will be reinforced.

The following measures will be taken:

1. Inform reunited partners about the existing (assistance) structures and programmes concerning integration and aid in case of violence.
  2. Encourage victims of sexual violence to go to the police and report the facts as quickly as possible.
  3. Distribute the 'prevention kit' FGM in schools, hospitals, ONE (Office of Birth and Childhood), Kind en Gezin, Kaleido, PSE and CLB centres, SAJ, SPJ, etcetera.
  4. Incorporate training about the gender dimension, sexual and reproductive rights, existing assistance and existing criminal laws (intimate partner violence, honour-based violence and female genital mutilation) and awareness programmes into the trajectory of recent arrivals, including practical information to better arm women against gender-based violence.
  5. Elaborate measures which will make multilingual information tools available to immigrant women and men.
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## General support services

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Accessible services should be available to victims of gender-based violence to facilitate their recovery. These services can take up the following tasks: judicial and psychological advice, financial help, housing, basic and advanced education and assistance when looking for a job. These services will devote more attention to methodology and a proactive outreach, adopting a hands-on approach when making contact with potential target groups.

Health and social services will also be available. They have the wherewithal and expertise to assist victims and refer them to the appropriate services.

This chapter will focus on outpatient services that are not typically geared to victims of gender-based violence but that can nonetheless take care of them and refer them.

The following measures will be taken:

1. Exchange information about existing projects, evaluate and start pilot projects relating to Family Justice Centers, where victims of gender-based violence have access to a range of essential police, justice and care services.
  2. Organise a 'cell or reference person intimate partner violence' within the various public Centres for General Welfare Work.
  3. Develop a prevention program for female genital mutilation based on the tasks of ONE (Office of Birth and Childhood), Kind en Gezin and Kaleido.
  4. Evaluate and bring up to date the cooperation treaty between the federal state (Interior Affairs and Justice) and the Flemish Community regarding victim care, dating from 7 April 1998.
  5. Evaluate the three protocol agreements regarding victim care concluded on 5 June 2009 between the federal state on the one hand and on the other hand the French Community, the Walloon Region, the German-speaking Community and – for Brussels-Capital Region – the Flemish Community, the French Community, the French Community Commission and the Common Community Commission (Belgian Official Gazette 5 Juli 2009).
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### Specialist support services and appropriate shelters in sufficient numbers

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It is important that services for immediate care are geographically distributed and available in the short and in the long term for all victims of any form of gender-based violence .

At the moment, specialist shelter exists mainly for victims of intimate partner violence. However, victims of other forms of gender-based violence such as forced marriage or honour-based violence do not have access to specific support. While the existing shelters and support services for victims of intimate partner violence can also accommodate victims of other forms of gender-based violence, several scientific studies have demonstrated that specific types of violence demand specific support and specialist intervention.

Accessibility of care and support services for foreigners will also be improved. These people are often not familiar with the existing structures, or do not know them well enough, and they often come up against (mainly linguistic) obstacles. This is why outpatient services with an important intercultural knowhow will be involved and why a specific awareness and information campaign should focus on this target group.

Sufficient and easily accessible shelters should also be provided for victims of gender-based violence, in particular for women and their children, to provide them with safe accommodation and to help them in a proactive way. According to the minimum standards for support services as stipulated by the Council of Europe, there should be accommodation for 1 family per 10,000 inhabitants (a place where a woman and her children can find refuge and shelter).

The number of shelters must therefore be adapted to the existing needs. Research will show if specific and specialist shelters are necessary for victims of forced marriage and honour-based violence.

Finally, a study should establish if there is a need for shelters for male victims of gender-based violence, in particular intimate partner violence.

The following measures will be taken:

1. Check if financing of the existing shelters for adults in difficulties, especially victims of violence, can be expanded and used for other accommodation and shelters.
2. Make the existing support services more accessible to immigrants and other vulnerable groups that are victims of gender-based violence, perpetuate and strengthen those services.

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3. The CAWs will expand their (residential) assets for care and counseling of victims of violence, taking into account the available resources, and based on welfare needs and necessities within their scope of action.
4. Conduct an investigation into the need for shelters for male victims of intimate partner violence.
5. Draw up a decree for the continuation of the outpatient services specialised in caring for victims of violence.
6. Evaluate projects for support of victims of honour-based violence.
7. Implement the Walloon decree of 27 March 2014 to create care and support services for prostituted people, by accepting a decision of the Walloon government.
8. Provide support for victims of loverboys.

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### Round-the-clock telephone helplines

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At the moment, Belgium does not have a round-the-clock, national phone number dedicated to victims of gender-based violence. On a regional level, there are helplines (106, 107, 108), but these are primarily intended for people seeking a more general social or personal support.

There is a specific phone number for intimate partner violence in the French Community (0800/300.30) and an emergency number for any form of violence (intimate partner violence, child abuse, violence against the elderly) in Flanders (1712). Recently, the French Community started a new helpline for forced marriages (0800/90.901).

However, none of these numbers is available 24/7. It is our aim to make these numbers more accessible, providing an open and confidential helpline that people can call about all forms of gender-based violence, at any time of the day.

The following measures will be taken:

1. Expand the existing primary telephone assistance or make it more accessible, so that they are available 24/24 and 7/7.
2. Expand the familiarity, the approachability and the accessibility of 1712 and 0800/30.030, for instance by means of awareness campaigns, by making the website more suitable for children and by creating more ways for disabled people to reach 1712 and 0800/30.030.
3. Expand the existing primary telephone assistance with a chat service.





## Support victims of sexual violence

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The Istanbul Convention asks for the creation of new specialist urgent assistance centres because they make it possible to:

- provide lasting support such as advice and therapy, individual conversations, conversation groups and referral to other services;
- support victims during legal procedures by offering legal counsel and practical help.

The convention emphasises the need for multidisciplinary centres that offer primary care for victims of sexual violence. These centres are specialised in offering acute primary care, forensic analysis, trauma care and aid to victims. The convention stipulates that there should be one victim centre for every 200,000 inhabitants and that the centres are distributed geographically to include both rural and urban areas. For this reason, we have commissioned a feasibility study that will look into the establishment of 'sexual assault referral centres' (SARCs) throughout Belgium.

Hospitals also have to provide round-the-clock care and permanence by staff members specialised in caring for victims of sexual violence. It is crucial that as many hospitals as possible have multidisciplinary teams on stand-by who can take proper care of victims of sexual violence and know how to work with the sexual aggression set. Based on the results of the aforementioned feasibility study, a SARC pilot project will be launched. We will also investigate the need for a specific interuniversity education programme relating to trauma after sexual violence. Finally, we will compile a list of psychologists specialised in traumas caused by sexual violence, and provide this information to victims of sexual violence.

The following measures will be taken:

1. Conduct a feasibility study about starting Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) in Belgium. Based on the results of the feasibility study, elaborate a SARC pilot project, involving staff specifically trained in the matter of sexual violence, who are available 24/7.
2. In the context of the feasibility study of SARCs, investigate how a specific interuniversity education programme for trauma psychologists in the matter of sexual violence might be established. Make a list of expert trauma psychologists and provide that list to victims of sexual violence through the various professional channels.
3. Expand the number of cooperation protocols between the public prosecutor and hospitals regarding the use of the sexual aggression set (SAS) and formalise this in the circular concerning SAS (COL 10/2005).

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4. Validate and formalise the medical certificate 'sexual violence', for instance through the efforts of the board of procurators general in the context of the revision of the circular concerning the sexual aggression set (COL 10/2005).
5. Improve general practitioners' care for victims of sexual violence, so that they can recognise the signals, make the violence a subject of discussion and refer victims appropriately.

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#### Protect and support child witnesses to gender-based violence

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When protecting and counseling victims, the rights and the needs of children who have witnessed any form of gender-based violence should always be taken into account. In particular, psycho-social care should be made available and adapted to the child's age, taking into account the interests and experiences of the child. This is a fundamental part of the multidisciplinary holistic approach endorsed in these pages.

According to the study on violence against women, conducted by the European Union's Fundamental Rights Agency, 73% of all women who have experienced violence by their current or former partner say that the children living with them were aware of this violence.

Several studies show that exposure to similar forms of violence can have a serious and long-lasting impact on the child's development. Frequently cited among the psychological traumata are deep-seated depression and fear, feelings of sadness and agitation, a greater dependency on adults, an inferior self-image, learning disabilities and, last but not least, a large number of health problems.

Children who have witnessed gender-based violence must receive adequate post-traumatic care, support and monitoring in the care centre where they reside. The quality of the counsel they receive immediately after the facts plays a crucial role in their further development.

In this regard, the emphasis will be on improved training for the caregivers who will take charge of these children and provide succour. Finally, there will also be efforts in education to discern and deal with children who have had similar experiences.

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The following measures will be taken:

1. Continue the range of care available to child witnesses of violence and organise training to support youth welfare workers in dealing with stressful situations.
2. Raise awareness with social societies, schools and professionals who come into contact with children so that they can recognise the signals and can properly refer child witnesses of domestic violence.
3. Support services and organisations within welfare, education, youth and sports in achieving a specific, proactive and reactive integrity policy.
4. Compulsory introduction to divorce mediation and elaboration of a parenting plan in case of a divorce and when there are children. In the case of divorce mediation there will be a particular focus on the issue of child witnesses of domestic violence.

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### Professionals reporting acts of violence

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In view of society's responsibility vis-à-vis gender-based violence, everyone who witnesses an act of violence, has serious reasons to believe such an act has been committed or fears new acts of violence, must be encouraged to report this to the relevant organisations or authorities. Professionals' confidentiality rules should not be an obstacle in this context. The importance of early detection will be a priority of this NAP.

In Belgium, the act of 23 February 2012 amending Article 458bis of the Criminal Code has expanded the list of punishable offenses that gives holders of a duty of professional confidentiality the limited and conditional right to speak and report acts of domestic violence to the Public Prosecutor. This provision has come into effect 1 March 2013.

In the context of their training, new care professionals (in particular social workers, psychologists and doctors) are taught a restricted view of professional confidentiality and the right to speak. The training in this matter will therefore be adapted to the new legal possibilities.

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However, the question of professional confidentiality and reporting acts of domestic violence raises numerous questions during an intervention, such as weighing the observance of professional discretion against the duty to assist a person in need.

Therefore, special guidelines will be elaborated regarding the approach to all forms of gender-based violence for professionals bound by professional confidentiality. The Dutch model implemented by the Law 'Wet Meldcode Huiselijk Geweld en Kindermishandeling' can serve as an inspiration here.



## 4. Investigate, continue and accept protective measures

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Prompt and appropriate reaction by law enforcement

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The circular from the Minister of Justice and the Board of Procurators General concerning the criminal justice policy of partner violence (COL 4/2006) has strengthened the existing services to combat partner violence. This has led to the elaboration of a uniform criminal justice policy in the context of partner violence.

The circular COL 4/2006 is a good tool to protect victims of partner violence and deal with the offenders. Its main aim is to prevent recidivism and it is not only repressive. Its implementation caused a positive change in attitude. Police now systematically registers all forms of domestic violence and magistrates of the office of the public prosecutor attach more importance to this form of violence.

In 2015 COL 4/2006 was improved and revised. The revised circular follows the same intervention logic as the original document, and it is based on the conviction that the sooner an offender comes up against a government reprimanding him, the sooner this type of violence can be limited and escalation can be prevented.

COL 4/2006 shows the need to react promptly and appropriately to all forms of gender-based violence and the need to provide victims with adequate and immediate protection. For this reason, the circular concerning the sexual aggression set (SAS) will be revised as well. Simultaneously, a specific circular concerning honour-based violence will be drafted.

In addition, combating gender-based violence (in particular intimate partner violence and sexual offenses) will remain a priority of the national security plan (and accordingly of all local security plans) and of the 'Kadernota Integrale Veiligheid' (framework memorandum integral security). These tools determine the overall police and justice framework relating to gender-based violence and they will be incorporated into the current plan and the principles of the Istanbul Convention.

The following measures will be taken:

1. Include sexual violence and domestic violence as crime phenomena that should be combated with priority in the 'Kadernota Integrale Veiligheid' (framework memorandum integral security), in the national security plan and in local security plans.
2. Elaborate an integrated approach to the issue of loverboy girls with police, justice and welfare, both to protect the victims and to deal with the offenders.

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3. When revising the circular concerning the sexual aggression set (COL 10/2005), include a specific point of interest, stating that magistrates must clearly explain to victims their motivation when they decide not to have samples of sexual violence analysed.
4. Draw up the circular about the judicial policy relating to honour-based violence.
5. Collect national and international good practices of judicial policy vis-à-vis perpetrators of gender-based violence and distribute the results among all magistrates.
6. In the context of an ankle monitor as a way of serving a sentence, evaluate and if necessary revise circular COL 11/2013 to improve the sharing of information between the office of the public prosecutor and all other services involved, so that protection of the victim can be sufficiently guaranteed.
7. In the context of revising mediation in general by the courts, particular attention should be afforded to the phenomenon of possible previous intimate partner violence and/or future harassments in the case of a divorce.
8. Ensure continuity of ViCLAS (Violent Crime Linkage Analysis System) for instance by approving the relevant directive.
9. Encourage all police stations to use ViCLAS efficiently and to systematically enter all data in the database.
10. In the context of the reform of criminal law: check if sexual criminal law still shows lacunas; categorise all sexual offenses under the denominator of 'crimes against persons'; investigate when or if the relevant laws need additional aggravating circumstances; adapt the periods of limitation to reality.
11. Conduct a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the various causes of under-reporting of rapes with police and justice, of the reasons why public prosecutors dismiss cases and of the current sentencing rate.



## Risk assessment and risk management in cases of violence

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Belgium does not currently have a risk assessment and risk management tool for cases of intimate partner violence, tailored to the various professionals. This is why Hogeschool Thomas More Kempen has elaborated such a document in cooperation with the National Institute for Criminalistics and Criminology (NICC) and the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men. This risk assessment and risk management tool for cases of intimate partner violence will be distributed among police, the justice department and relief workers.

There have been efforts to develop risk assessment tools and lists of signals relating to honour-based violence as well as forced marriages. They will improve the ability of professionals (who frequently come into contact with potential victims) to identify and track this sort of violence.

Finally there will be an investigation into the optimal monitoring of sexual offenders who are released conditionally.

The following measures will be taken:

1. Create a 'risk assessment / reporting code' for the medical sector, care workers and all other professionals bound by professional confidentiality.
  2. Investigate how sexual offenders can be optimally monitored when they are set free, for instance by implementing a tool for assessing the risk of recidivism.
  3. The federal police will investigate the creation of a traveling sex offender profile and will use this profile in cooperation with customs / federal police at airports and with the police of the countries of origin.
  4. Create a risk assessment tool for police and public prosecutor and guarantee its inclusion in the future circular about criminal policy concerning honour-based violence.
  5. Develop a tool intended for municipal officers, to detect and report cases of forced marriage, for instance by revising the circular of 6 September 2013 relating to marriages of convenience.
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### Emergency barring, restraining or protecting orders

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In cases of immediate danger, the authorities must apply emergency barring orders, preventing the perpetrator of intimate partner violence from entering the victim's house. Belgium has a procedure for removal from the family home in cases where no violence has been committed yet, with the possibility to impose a quick cooling down period on the offender to temporarily neutralise the threat, independent of eventual criminal prosecution of the case.

In the near future, legislation will be evaluated to improve the scope of this measure. This evaluation will take into account the recommendations of the stakeholders.

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### Protect the rights and interests of victims

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It is crucial to provide protective measures and care options for the victim in any phase of the violence. The victim must never feel alone and must be efficiently counseled and protected.

Tools must therefore be made available to offer appropriate care and enable the continuation of police and justice procedures in the best possible circumstances: also to avoid the risk of intimidation, reprisals or new victimisation, inform victims during all stages of the judicial proceedings, guarantee proper assistance, provide victims with interpreters, etcetera.

As such, all necessary measures will be taken to improve the victim's position, in particular in the legal field.

The following measures will be taken:

1. Optimise the free availability of interpreters to victims of gender-based violence when they come into contact with the police.
2. Look at the possibility of creating a pool of intercultural mediators and interpreters who have had specific training concerning FGM, forced marriages and honour-based violence.
3. Create guidelines for police services to make sure they provide victims with the correct information (see circular 4/2006 concerning domestic violence) and that they make the connection with the victim's residence status (see article 11 of the Law of 1980) when they are confronted with people without a valid residence permit.

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4. Distribute the scenario 'sexual offenses' amongst all police zones, place it on the intranet and emphasise its importance.
5. Evaluate the circular 'audiovisual interrogation' and revise it where necessary.
6. Investigate to what extent an expertise network and a permanence system for interrogating underage victims of sexual violence can be developed. These must consist of police officers who have taken the advanced training 'sexual offenses'.
7. Encourage the appointment of contacts within immigrant organisations to guarantee frequent interaction with the police and to help victims of violence find protection, assistance and rehabilitation services.
8. Create cooperation protocols between police services and public centres for social welfare about cooperation when dealing with crisis situations that arise during the weekend.

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**STOP**  
VIOLENCE

## 5. Take into account the gender dimension in asylum and migration policy

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In the context of gender-based asylum requests, the Istanbul Convention repeats the necessity of recognising gender-based violence against women as a form of persecution as defined in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and as a form of grievous harm that gives rise to complementary/subsidiary protection.

Moreover, the Convention requires gender-sensitive interpretation be given to each of the Convention grounds and stipulates that when fear for prosecution on the basis of one or more of these grounds has been established, applicants shall be granted refugee status according to the applicable and relevant instruments.

Finally, the Convention asks for the necessary legislative or other measures to develop gender-sensitive reception procedures and support services for asylum-seekers as well as gender guidelines and gender-sensitive asylum procedures, including refugee status determination and application for international protection.

In this context, Belgium will continue to play an active role in including the gender dimension in asylum and migration policy in three distinct areas: the assessment of asylum requests which depends on the Office of the Commissioner General for refugees and stateless persons (CGVS), the asylum procedure which depends on the CGVS and the Immigration Office and finally the reception of people requesting asylum which depends on FEDASIL or similar centres.

The following measures will be taken:

1. Execute Directive 2013/32/EU on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection (recast of the minimum standards in Belgian Law).
2. Guarantee quality social and medical assistance for vulnerable asylum seekers, as well as meticulous monitoring of the asylum procedure.
3. Draw up directives for domestic violence and sexual and gender-based violence (including sexual abuse by relief workers) to strengthen the deontological code.
4. Introduce and finance counseling measures to prevent sexual violence during the reception of asylum seekers, in particular in the emergency shelters.
5. Introduce specific mechanisms to detect FGM in the reception structures: inclusion of a reference to the acts of violence – including FGM – the victim has been subjected to in the form for the medical intake interview, socio-medical follow-up of the victim, information about FGM in the Belgian context and reference to specialised organisations.



## 6. Combat violence on an international level

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The Istanbul Convention contains various regulations on an international level, including international cooperation in civilian and criminal matters, judicial assistance in criminal matters, the integration of the prevention of, and the battle against, gender-based violence in development programmes, and finally the exchange of information between states in cases when people are in danger.

In light of the Belgian development cooperation, equality of women and men is considered a transversal theme. More specifically, the battle against all forms of violence against women (the battle against forced marriage, female genital mutilation and other harmful acts, as well as the battle against sexual violence as a weapon of war) is included as the main theme.

The following measures will be taken:

1. Belgium will keep promoting development programmes and measures preventing, reducing and penalising gender-based violence, with a particular focus on the physical integrity of refugee women and girls.
  2. Belgium will also support initiatives by international, Belgian and local NGOs devoted to the protection of women and battle against sexual violence, for instance by means of an integrated treatment of medical and psycho-social care, by providing socio-economic reintegration of the victims and by offering sufficient protection and accommodation.
  3. Belgium will also champion initiatives contributing to the elaboration and implementation in third countries of a national legislation punishing sexual violence and encouraging women and girls to file a complaint when they become the victim of sexual violence.
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