



MARVOW 2.0

Coordinated Multi-Agency Response
to Violence against Older Women

Policy Recommendations

Austria



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Deliverable 4.2: MARVOW 2.0 Policy Recommendations

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In Austria, violence against older women is a serious yet underrecognized issue. Despite the country's commitment to gender equality and human rights, namely the ratification of Istanbul Convention, older women remain particularly vulnerable due to social isolation, ageism, and persistent gender stereotypes. They often receive less attention in public discourse and support systems, making them more susceptible to physical, psychological, and financial abuse (Lang, G., & Enzenhofer, E., 2011).

This violence is rooted in the same gender-based inequalities that affect women of all ages, but older women face added risks due to age-related discrimination and limited access to protection services. In Austria, very few older women seek help: in 2024, only 2% of women staying in AÖF (Austrian Autonomous Women's Shelters) were over 60, and just 5.4% of callers to the women's helpline in 2024 were in this age group (Annual Report AÖF, 2024).

According to AÖF's data gathered from media reports, the proportion of femicide victims aged 60 and over in Austria increased significantly—from 14% in 2019 to 51% in 2024 (Statistics AÖF, 2024). These significant figures indicate that older women are at risk, yet they are not yet fully taken into account in Austria's measures against gender-based violence.

That is why it shall be advocated for increased efforts to protect older women's rights and ensure a life free from violence, as outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015.

Research shows that globally, 15.7% of older adults experience violence, with psychological abuse being the most common (Eurostat, 2020). In Austria, however, a lack of targeted studies means the true scale of abuse remains unclear. Estimates suggest that only 1 in 24 cases is being reported (Lang, G., 2014).

The lack of data and awareness surrounding the needs of older women highlights a broader gap in Austria's approach to protecting this vulnerable population. This issue became particularly evident with the most recent publication of a Eurostat study (Eurostat, 2024), which revealed that older women were severely underrepresented in the available data. Such omissions not only hinder effective policymaking but also reflect a systemic neglect of age and gender considerations. To address this, there is an urgent need for systematic research, improved data collection practices, and the development of support services that are both age- and gender-sensitive.

Recommendations

1. National

1.1. Policy & Governance

- **Multi-Agency Collaboration Model should involve all relevant stakeholders and constant improvement of policies and procedures within the agencies involved**

Problem: There is currently a lack of regular, structured, and cross-sectoral coordination at the regional level to effectively address the specific cases of **violence against older women**. Existing efforts, such as the *Sicherheitspolizeiliche Fallkonferenzen (SFK)* are limited in scope to case management and exclude of actors relevant to cases of older women. There is also no relevant reflection structure which would lead to improvements in policies across agencies. Additionally, the specific needs of older women are not consistently integrated into training programs across institutions involved in protection and support.

Recommendations

1. **Establish regular system-wide reflection meetings**, modeled after the MARVOW 2.0 approach, where participating institutions can review their collaboration, discuss systemic challenges, and identify improvements on the levels of policy and internal procedures.
 2. **Secure and confidential communication channels** should be established to facilitate the sharing of tools and information that enhance understanding of the specific types of violence experienced by older women. In cases of doubt, victim protection must take precedence over data privacy concerns.
- **Launch a National Awareness Campaign Focused on Violence Against Older Women**

Problem: Violence against older women is not sufficiently recognized or addressed within Austria's national gender equality and elder protection strategies (*Pflege- und Betreuungsstrategie 2030*). There is a lack of public awareness and communication efforts that highlight the intersectional risks faced by older women, such as those related to age, gender, disability, and social isolation.

Recommendations

1. **The issue of violence against older women should be embedded into Austria's national gender equality and elder protection strategies** through sustained awareness and communication campaigns. The campaign must target older women, their families, and caregivers—including those who are socially or spatially isolated, such as women living in rural areas—to inform them about violence against older women and provide accessible information on how to seek help.
2. **These campaigns should be developed nationwide** in collaboration with the women's helpline against violence and other relevant stakeholders, advocating for the inclusion of violence against older women in professional training programs and media guidelines.

There is a lack of public awareness and communication efforts that highlight the intersectional risks faced by older women, such as those related to age, gender, disability, and social isolation.

1.2. Justice & Law Enforcement

- **Integrate Age-Sensitive Protocols in Police and Judicial Procedures**

Problem: Cases involving older women often face challenges due to a lack of age- and gender-sensitive approaches within the justice system. Police officers, prosecutors, and judges may not be adequately trained to recognize or address the unique physical, cognitive, and emotional vulnerabilities of older victims. This gap can lead to insensitive handling of investigations and legal proceedings, undermining the safety, dignity, and autonomy of older survivors. Consequently, this results in lower reporting rates, diminished trust in the justice system, and fewer convictions in cases involving elder abuse or violence against older women.

Recommendations:

1. It is imperative to implement mandatory training programs for professionals, including judges and prosecutors, as aligned with the recommendations of GREVIO. The trainings should also specifically address issues related to violence against older women.
2. Standardized, age- and gender-sensitive protocols and guidelines must be developed and integrated into the work of all justice system professionals. Training should cover ageism, elder abuse dynamics, and trauma-informed approaches to ensure that legal procedures prioritize the safety, dignity, and well-being of older survivors throughout the judicial process.

- **Enhance Accessibility and Support for Older Victims within the Justice System**

Problem: Older women often face significant barriers when trying to access justice, including physical, logistical, and emotional challenges. These obstacles can make it difficult for them to participate fully in judicial proceedings, leading to lower engagement, inadequate support, and increased vulnerability.

Recommendations:

1. Provide age-friendly infrastructure and services within police stations and courts, including accessible facilities, transportation support, and flexible scheduling to accommodate the needs of older women.
2. Establish dedicated liaison officers or victim advocates trained specifically to support older women throughout the justice process, ensuring continuous and empathetic assistance.

1.3. Procedural Aspects

To improve responses to violence against older women in Austria, standardized age-sensitive procedures must (SOPs) be developed and applied at every stage—from reporting to follow-up. Law enforcement, healthcare, and social services should follow trauma-informed procedures that respect older survivors' dignity and autonomy. Mandatory, regularly updated risk assessments and streamlined referral pathways between agencies as developed with the MARVOW 2.0 Risk Factor Checklist and Case Management Tool will ensure tailored, continuous care. An ongoing exchange to maintain consistency and sensitivity should be integrated into regional system-wide meetings, as demonstrated in the MARVOW 2.0 Project.

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1.4 Framework for Multi-Agency Cooperation: Health, Social, and Justice Services

- **Increase efforts to improve reporting rates among older women through expanded resources, targeted training for healthcare providers, and ensuring dignified, accessible care.**

Effective protection of older women from violence requires seamless collaboration across multiple sectors. Healthcare services play a vital role by identifying signs of abuse early and providing necessary medical and psychological care. Social services contribute by addressing the social and environmental factors that increase vulnerability, offering tailored support, and facilitating access to community resources. Support services, including women's shelters and helplines, provide safe spaces and crisis intervention tailored to the unique needs of older survivors. Meanwhile, law enforcement ensures immediate safety and pursues legal accountability. When these sectors work together through structured multi-agency platforms, sharing information and coordinating interventions, the response becomes holistic and more effective.

2. Regional

- **Adopting regional, age-sensitive policy framework that addresses both systemic and cultural barriers tailored to each specific region of Austria.**

Problem: Older women face unique and often overlooked barriers when attempting to access women's shelters or violence support services in Austria regionally. Deeply rooted traditional gender norms, strong emotional and financial ties to family members, and lifelong roles as caregivers can discourage them from reporting abuse or seeking help.

Recommendations:

- 1. Implement targeted awareness and outreach campaigns.** Public initiatives should challenge gender norms that pressure older women to stay in abusive situations, such as caretaking expectations or preserving family unity. Partnering with senior centers,

healthcare providers, and community organizations can help reach and support at-risk women in trusted settings.

2. **Expand and tailor professional training programs.** Each Austrian federal state (Bundesland) should offer specialized training for healthcare workers, police, social services, and shelter staff on trauma-informed, age- and gender-sensitive responses to violence against older women. These topics must also be integrated into basic and ongoing education for all relevant professionals.
3. **Establish regular system-wide meetings** taking place on the regional level, modeled after the MARVOW 2.0 approach, where participating institutions can review their collaboration, discuss systemic challenges, and identify improvements on the levels of policy and internal procedures.

- **Secure Dedicated Funding for Age-Inclusive Support Services**

Problem: Current funding mechanisms for women’s shelters and transitional housing do not adequately address the specific needs of older survivors of violence. There is a lack of age-specific support options, such as mobility-accessible spaces and trauma-informed elder care, within Austria’s existing frameworks. As a result, many older victims almost never reach shelters and are diverted to hospitals or psychiatric institutions instead of receiving support in specialized violence protection services, further marginalizing their experiences and needs which became clear from the empiric data gathered from MARVOW 2.0 Project in Austria. Women living in rural or hard-to-reach areas face even greater barriers due to insufficient mobile support services.

Recommendation:

1. Shelters and support services should expand their collaboration efforts with mobile care providers to better include older women. Regional public funding must support necessary structural adaptations and inclusive service models.
2. Integrate age-specific shelter funding into regional policies. Austria’s National Action Plans on violence against women and aging policies should include dedicated funding for age-appropriate shelter and housing support. Earmarked federal, regional, and local budgets are needed to fund transitional housing and shelters that meet older women’s specific needs, such as accessibility and elder care.
3. Creation of housing opportunities for older women victims of violence and for older men perpetrators of violence. The creation of safe, age-appropriate housing opportunities specifically designed for older women who are victims of violence should be prioritized, ensuring access to supportive services that address their complex physical, emotional, and health-related needs. Simultaneously, tailored housing or transitional accommodation should

be made available for older men who are perpetrators of violence, accompanied by integrated interventions such as behavioral therapy, social reintegration programs, and age-sensitive accountability measures.

3. Local

Raising awareness about violence against older women must become a core priority in local communities. Targeted outreach through neighborhood groups, health clinics, community centers, and local police can help challenge age-related stereotypes and improve recognition of abuse. Initiatives like StoP – Stadtteile ohne Partnergewalt, led by Austria’s Autonomous Women’s Shelters, are strong examples of how community-based interventions can increase visibility of violence against older women and actively engage residents in prevention and support.

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Communities must be equipped with resources to support older women directly in their neighborhoods.

4. General

Violence against older women in Austria is a serious yet often overlooked issue that demands urgent, coordinated action across all levels of governance and service provision. The evidence highlights that older women face unique vulnerabilities stemming from social isolation, ageism, and inadequate institutional responses, resulting in a high prevalence of physical, psychological, and financial abuse. Despite this, existing support structures and legal frameworks frequently lack the sensitivity and resources required to effectively protect and empower this growing demographic.

To address these challenges, a multi-dimensional policy approach is essential. At the national level, strengthening the institutional framework through standardized, age-sensitive protocols and fostering system-wide coordination will create a unified foundation for response. This includes expanding regular multi-agency meetings, and prioritizing awareness-raising efforts to challenge societal stereotypes and improve reporting and intervention. Regional and local implementation of these policies must be supported by clear mandates, streamlined bureaucratic procedures, and tailored funding for women's support services.

Ending violence against older women requires not only improved policies and institutional mechanisms but also a cultural shift that recognizes the dignity, rights, and specific needs of older women. Comprehensive, sustained political commitment combined with practical, coordinated interventions will ensure that older women in Austria can live free from violence, with access to the protection and support they deserve.

5. References

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