

**Question for written answer E-004169/2026
to the Commission**
Rule 144
Irmhild Boßdorf (ESN)

Subject: Systematic gender-based violence on illegal maritime routes and the need for effective external border security

The majority of irregular migrants choose to travel by sea¹². The boats primarily carry young men, with their sights on protection status so they can bring their families over through the family reunification process³. Women and girls face widespread sexual violence along the routes, especially in transit countries such as Libya. According to UN reports, one in two women (almost 50 %) fall victim to abuse. Estimates based on the 2.7 million boat arrivals since 2013 indicate that well over 150 000 people have been affected⁴. Recent studies suggest the number of unreported cases is extremely high, with less than 12% of cases being recorded. Shame and the fear of stigmatisation or deportation prevent victims from coming forward. Women feel such despair that they take contraceptives before making the journey, knowing there is a risk they could be raped⁵.

1. What statistical data (by age group) does the Commission have on women and girls who have been victims of gender-based violence on maritime routes to the EU? What programmes does it have in place to combat such violence at the external borders?
2. In view of the documented reports of systematic violence against women refugees, what does it make of the lack of safe procedures at the external borders to protect women and children?
3. What specific operational measures will it take to strengthen the security and management of the external borders to strip human-trafficking gangs that systematically exploit women of their means of operation?

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¹ 'Refugee situations: Europe sea arrivals', UNHCR Operational Data Portal, 2026 – Total figure of over 2.7 million boat migrants since 2013.

² Di Stasio, I., 'Fleeing violence, facing violence: the gendered risks of irregular migration channels', King's College London, 5 November 2025 (<https://www.kcl.ac.uk/fleeing-violence-facing-violence>).

³ 'Flucht ist menschlich', Swiss Refugee Council, 2024 - analysis of strategic family decisions and the exclusion of women from primary routes.

⁴ 'A Deadly Journey for Children', UNICEF/DGVN, 2017/2024 – a representative survey on the 50 % incidence of violence on the Libya route.

⁵ 'The gendered risks of irregular migration channels', King's College London, November 2025 – a medical and qualitative survey on the preventive use of contraceptives among female boat migrants in Italy.