



Euro-Mediterranean Declaration on the Impact of Enforced Disappearances on Women

Women's Assembly

RAISING OUR VOICES, RESISTANCE, SHARED STRUGGLES

Istanbul, November 30, 2025



Preamble

Gathered in Istanbul within the framework of the Women's Assembly organized by the Euro-Mediterranean Federation against Enforced Disappearances (FEMED), we, associations of relatives of the disappeared, feminist activists, human rights defenders, lawyers, researchers, and members of civil society organizations, have drafted this Euro-Mediterranean Declaration on the Impact of Enforced Disappearances on Women.

This two-day assembly took place in a context of increasing political repression, marked by the criminalization of social mobilizations, restrictions on fundamental freedoms, and the persistence of impunity for serious human rights violations, particularly enforced disappearances. In these authoritarian contexts, women are specifically and enduringly affected by enforced disappearances, while also playing a central role in resistance and in the pursuit of truth, justice, and reparation.

The Women's Assembly provided a transnational space for meeting, solidarity, and exchange, enabling the sharing of experiences, analyses, and strategies in the fight against enforced disappearances. Through roundtables, participatory workshops, and strategic sessions, we highlighted the gendered, multiple, and often systemic impacts of enforced disappearances on women, as well as the leading role of memory transmission and collective mobilization.

Our reflections focused on key areas: the defense of human rights in repressive contexts; the use of international human rights protection mechanisms and their strategic application in the fight against enforced disappearances; and finally, the fundamental role of archives, memory, and documentation as essential safeguards against forgetting, erasure, and impunity.

This declaration is the result of a shared commitment to network women close to the disappeared and human rights defenders, to share collective tools and strategies, and to bring their voices and claims into relevant national and international spaces. It also reflects the determination of FEMED members to adapt and strengthen their modes of action in the face of repressive contexts.

Through this declaration, we affirm that the fight against enforced disappearances is inextricably linked to the struggle for women's rights. This collective act is part of the ongoing quest for a world where justice prevails and the dignity of all is respected.

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Disappearances on Women**
FEMED Women's Assembly
Istanbul, 30 November 2025

I. Context

Across the Euro-Mediterranean region, enforced disappearances remain one of the most serious and persistent violations of international human rights law. They occur in contexts of political repression, state-led security operations, internal armed conflicts, or activities carried out by armed and parastatal groups, all against a backdrop of structural impunity.

In Türkiye, these practices have been extensively documented since the 1980s. Evidence gathered by associations of families of victims, notably submitted before the European Court of Human Rights and UN mechanisms, reveals: arrests carried out by state or parastatal agents; a systematic refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty; the absence of effective investigations; and pressure, threats, and acts of intimidation against families. These elements establish the existence of a recurring pattern that disproportionately affects Kurdish populations in particular and has lasting consequences on their fundamental rights.

This situation, far from being isolated, is observed in other countries and contexts in the region, where enforced disappearances have left thousands of families in uncertainty, silence, and suspended grief.

II. Impact of Enforced Disappearances on Women: A Deeply Gendered Form of Violence

In the countries of the region, men constitute the overwhelming majority of disappeared persons. Women thus become the direct bearers of this violence, experiencing multiple repercussions.

While social norms traditionally assign women the responsibilities of care, family cohesion, and memory, enforced disappearance transforms these roles into public and political engagement. Mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, aunts, and grandmothers of the disappeared become investigators in the fight against enforced disappearances where the State remains silent; spokespersons where justice retreats; mobilizers where the rest of society remains silent;

central actors in documentation, international complaints, and the construction of collective memory.

Moreover, research shows that women confronted with the disappearance of a relative experience psychological suffering marked by uncertainty and impossible mourning, as well as social stigmatization, sometimes reinforced by patriarchal norms that call their respectability or family role into question. They also face heightened economic vulnerability, insecurity, and an environment of threat, intimidation, and re-victimization. To the violence linked to the disappearance are added intersectional discriminations based on ethnicity, socio-economic status, place of residence, migration, or other forms of exclusion. Kurdish women in Türkiye, already affected by multiple forms of marginalization, are particularly exposed to these dynamics.

CONSIDERING THAT enforced disappearances in the Euro-Mediterranean region constitute a serious and ongoing violation of international law, affecting women in differentiated and often exacerbated ways;

CONSIDERING THAT women (mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, aunts, and grandmothers) play a decisive role in the search for disappeared persons, often at the risk of their own safety;

CONSIDERING THAT their engagement exposes them to specific forms of violence, including threats, criminalization, stigmatization, and gender-based violence;

CONSIDERING THAT the legal vacuum surrounding the status of the disappeared places women in a situation of prolonged vulnerability, without effective access to their economic, social, and family rights;

CONSIDERING THAT women are essential actors in processes of truth, justice, and reparation, and that their experience and demands must be recognized and integrated into public policies;

CONSIDERING THAT structural discriminations — notably those based on ethnicity, rurality, language, or socio-economic status — worsen their marginalization and hinder access to justice;

CONSIDERING THAT women's mobilization provides a fundamental contribution to peacebuilding, memory preservation, and the strengthening of a democratic society;

CONSIDERING THAT the State, in accordance with its international obligations, must guarantee prevention, search, truth, protection, and reparation, giving particular attention to the specific needs of women;

The Euro-Mediterranean Federation against Enforced Disappearances (FEMED), representing its member associations, within the framework of the Women's Assembly held in Istanbul on 29 and 30 November 2025 on the role of women in the fight against enforced disappearances and the gendered impact of this crime;

Calls upon the States of the region to,

I. Truth and Justice

1. Establish an independent search and truth mechanism with a clear mandate, investigative powers, and sufficient resources, systematically incorporating a gender perspective.
2. Conduct effective investigations and prosecutions to identify and hold perpetrators accountable.
3. Protect the integrity of public archives, including those of police, military, and intelligence institutions, and ensure effective access for all stakeholders involved in the search for the disappeared.
4. Protect and end the criminalization of women's collectives, peaceful demonstrations, and search actions, and guarantee freedom of expression, information, and the press.
5. Guarantee an effective right of association for all associations of relatives of disappeared persons.
6. Ensure immediate, impartial, and effective investigations into every case of enforced disappearance, including gender-sensitive protocols.
7. Guarantee the participation of women in all processes identifying needs, methods, and priorities, as well as in peacebuilding.
8. Include the crime of enforced disappearance in penal codes as a continuous and non-prescribing crime.

9. Enact specific laws to protect migrants, ethnic minorities, sexual and gender minorities, and other vulnerable groups from enforced disappearances.
10. Allow the opening of mass graves, the exhumation of bodies in line with international standards, and the immediate implementation of an independent identification program.
11. Allow the creation of a central DNA database to enable genetic matching when bodies are found.

II. Reparation

12. Establish gender-sensitive reparation programs; ensure the full and effective participation of women at all stages of public policy, including in decision-making and governance roles, particularly within legal and judicial institutions.
13. Set up specialized psychosocial and legal support services that account for the specific impacts on women.
14. Establish compensation and reparation mechanisms for relatives of the disappeared.
15. Guarantee support for resolving blocked administrative procedures such as inheritance, children's education, social rights, access to family property, and civil rights.

III. Guarantees of Non-Repetition, Dignity, and Memory

16. Include enforced disappearance in public memory policies, explicitly recognizing the role of women.
17. Document disappearances by enabling active participation of families and organizations.
18. Guarantee the participation of women in the establishment of transitional justice mechanisms, as well as their representation within these bodies.
19. Implement structural reforms in state institutions to prevent the recurrence of practices enabling disappearances and the re-victimization of women fighting against enforced disappearances.
20. Include a module on enforced disappearances in school and university curricula.
21. Promote the fight against enforced disappearances as a fight against the destruction of the social fabric.
22. Promote legislation on archives, access to administrative information, and data protection that complies with international standards.

IV. Prevention

17. Publicly acknowledge the existence of enforced disappearances, their systemic nature, and their differentiated impact on women.
18. Adopt legislative and regulatory measures guaranteeing the absolute prohibition of enforced disappearances.
19. Prioritize the ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Resolution A/RES/57/199).
20. Train security forces, judges, and justice auxiliaries on international instruments and mechanisms for preventing enforced disappearance, with particular attention to gender perspectives.
21. Guarantee the immediate protection of women, notably through alert mechanisms, legal assistance, and physical security measures.
22. Create a legal status for the disappeared, allowing women to exercise their fundamental rights, particularly economic and social rights, without being forced to declare the death of their relatives.

V. Cross-Cutting Gender Perspective

23. Systematically integrate gender analysis and perspective into all policies relating to enforced disappearances: prevention, documentation, search, investigations, reparation, and memory.
24. Support women's networks and collectives as key actors in social transformation, documentation, and prevention of violations, while creating new networks and working groups between women's associations fighting enforced disappearances and feminist organizations promoting women's rights.

Istanbul, 30 November 2025