



Seldom has the butterfly effect metaphor been more apt than when used to describe the #MeToo movement, which started in the United States but has rocked many European countries during the 16 days of activism to fight gender-based violence.

The #MeToo campaign pushed violence against women to the top of the agenda in many European countries on Human Rights Day, which marks the end of the annual 16 days of activism, including in Iceland where there was a live transmission on national television featuring women's stories about sexual harassment from #MeToo social media groups.

"The viral #MeToo social media conversation was unprecedented in opening up revelations of sexual violence and abuse in both private and public sectors," wrote UN Women Executive Director, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka in her blog.

"The world is waking up to the fact that violence is not just 'out there' – it's also right here. In fact, it's everywhere, hidden in plain sight, normalized so we didn't even see it," she added.

French President Emmanuel Macron kicked off the 16 days of activism on 25 November, the International day to eradicate violence against women, with an announcement of a major initiative. President Macron, said that French society was “sick with sexism,” and gender equality and combating violence against women would be top priorities of his government. Under a new plan to fight sexual violence, measures will be taken to facilitate pressing charges. 123 women were killed by spouses in France in 2016, or one every three days.

While there have not been many “famous scalps” in France the #MeToo campaign has brought down, or lead to, public shaming of prominent politicians in the United Kingdom, including the Michael Fallon, the Secretary of Defense.

The butterfly effects of the #MeToo initiative have not only taken different forms, but also been felt to quite varying degrees in European countries.

Germany has been relatively quiet, according to media reports and several commentators have been openly suspicious of the movement, questioning whether the deeds match the outrage “Why should we discuss offensive comments that happened decades ago?”, asked Tamara Wernli in an op-ed. Commentators in the Weekly Die Zeit have criticized, what they call “online feminism” and suggest that the act of identifying oneself as a victim (“The joy of revelation”) is a key driver behind the #MeToo-campaign.

The Nordic countries are often seen as quite homogenous from the outside but there have been considerable differences from one country to the other. While there have been “famous scalps” in Denmark, notably in the film industry, the debate has been louder and wider in neighbouring Sweden.

It only took 24 hours for #MeToo to explode on Swedish Twitter channels after US actress Alyssa Milano started the movement on 15 October with her call to women to include #MeToo as a status on social media if they had been sexually harassed or assaulted.

#MeToo quickly spread to the Royal Opera, the judiciary, the music industry, the media and even the sex industry. 1,300 women in politics signed and published an appeal against sexism

and sexual harassment.

In Norway and Finland, #MeToo, got off to a slower start but may be catching up, with former Finnish President Tarja Halonen, one of the women who have spoken up about their personal experiences of sexual harassment and violence.

In Iceland, the annual torch-light parade of UN Women on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, was led this time by three women whose campaign brought down the Icelandic government in September on a sexual violence related issue. The new coalition that took power after elections in late October, promised to increase financing the struggle against gender based violence.

“It has helped to publicly expose the scale and reach of sexual violence, and with that awareness, made us all responsible for change,” wrote UN Women’s Mlambo-Ngcuka in her blog about the impact of #MeToo.