

CONCEPT NOTE: Peer-learning webinar: Towards a Safer Digital Space for Women and Girls Combatting Cyber Violence.

Topic

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a global crisis that extends far beyond physical environments. The rapid expansion of digital technologies and online platforms has given rise to new forms of gender-based violence, while long-standing patterns of misogyny and abuse continue to thrive in these environments. Online spaces, which should foster learning, expression, connection, and safety, have instead become breeding grounds for violence, hate, and intimidation.

Evidence consistently demonstrates that women are disproportionately affected by online abuse compared to men. An Amnesty International cross-regional study covering Europe and the United States found that 23% of women aged 18 to 55 had experienced some form of digital abuse. Young women and girls, as the most active and connected online users, are particularly vulnerable, with 58% reporting experiences of online harassment according to Plan International. Women in public roles face even greater risks: UNESCO reports that 73% of women journalists have encountered online violence during their work.

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence manifests in many forms, including through AI, pornography, child sexual abuse, grooming, non-consensual sharing of intimate pictures, deep fakes, online sexual harassment, cyberstalking and online misogynistic hatred.

In the digital age, the majority of sexual or domestic violence incidents involve a digital element, for example, abusive control through digital applications, covert recording of abuse, or the use of cameras for surveillance in domestic settings.

Such violence not only silences and isolates women and girls but also severely threatens their physical safety, mental health, and ability to engage fully in public, professional, and political life. This underscores the urgent need for concerted action to protect women's rights, dignity, and safety in online spaces.

The borderless nature of online violence complicates legal accountability, as it transcends national jurisdictions and exploits gaps in enforcement. This imperative is especially pertinent following the recent adoption of the EU Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence, which Member States are now required to implement, alongside regulations such as the Digital Services Act and the Artificial Intelligence Act. Addressing technology-facilitated violence against women aligns with the European Women's Lobby's (EWL) core values of equality, dignity, and justice by challenging digital impunity and upholding women's rights and safety online.

Goals of this Peer-learning

The online webinar aims to raise awareness on the growing threat of online sexual violence and highlights the stakes of past and current European discussions inside the Parliament and the Council of Europe to address this issue. It will explore gaps in regulation and the lack of accountability of digital platforms. Participants will discuss feminist strategies for advocacy at EU and international levels.

In the context of the aftermaths of the international symposium on online sexual violence and exploitation which took place in February and involved EWL and several of its members as partners, the goals of this issue group are to:

- Maintain and grow the momentum created during the symposium, to build a coalition or network able to proactively advocate for better protection of women and girls online;
- Identify additional policy recommendations aligned with EWL's values and positions;
- Involve EWL and its members in concrete ongoing advocacy actions around the issue;
- Raise awareness on this crucial issue among EWL's membership and shape a shared vision for a safe digital space.