

CSW69 – SIDE-EVENT

Threats and Opportunities of Digital Technologies: Women in the Public Eye

*A side event of the sixty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69), organised by the Council of Europe within the framework of the **Luxembourg Presidency of the Committee of Ministers***

Co-organised with the Permanent Mission of Luxembourg to the United Nations

10 March 2025, 3:00 PM – 4:15 PM

ECOSOC Chamber - General Assembly Building, United Nations, New York

Digital technologies unlock vast opportunities yet also pose profound risks. They are intrinsic to the professional, personal or social lives of countless women, especially among younger generations. While they are powerful tools for advancing gender equality and strengthening democracy, they can also be weaponised to work against them. The online environment, facilitated by the speed of the internet, enables the widespread dissemination of misogynistic narratives ranging from gender biases and stereotypes to overt hate speech and incitements to violence sometimes under the shield of anonymity. Using technology-facilitated violence to silence women's voices is a manifest attack on democratic values.

National authorities, institutions, civil society and the private sector have a crucial role to play to keep all women safe and prevent the normalisation of this increasing type of violence. Although the number of female public figures is increasing, they bear the brunt of technology-facilitated violence because of entrenched gender biases which are as prevalent online as offline. Women in the public eye are prime targets and disproportionately bear the consequences, which include harm on their safety, mental health, dignity and reputation.

The event will explore promising initiatives and measures in the public and private sectors to prevent and combat digital violence against women and to facilitate its reporting in line with the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) and General Recommendation No.1 on the digital dimension of violence against women. Bringing together political leaders, journalists, international partners, tech industry representatives and civil society, the side-event will examine how to prevent the normalisation of digital violence and ensure the voices of high-profile women engaged in public or political activism are heard.



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Background

The use of digital technologies, communication tools and social media are intrinsic to our everyday life but while they can drive inclusivity and empower women in the public eye, technology can also be used to muzzle them. The online abuse of women reflects the systemic issues within social media platforms. It not only silences women on online spaces, it also diminishes their engagement in public and political life, democratic processes, and leadership roles. It is a threat to democracy and robust prevention, protection and accountability mechanisms must be established in cyberspace.

Digitally driven media and platforms are the reflection of society and influence societal norms and attitudes. They can reinforce gender stereotypes and contribute to an environment that tolerates targeting women and girls. High-profile women such as politicians, journalists, bloggers, human rights defenders, activists, academics, athletes and others are significantly exposed to technology-facilitated violence, such as trolling, verbal abuse, sexist hate speech, sextortion, non-consensual sharing of intimate image(s), manipulation of photos, cyberstalking, doxing, hacking, or threats of rape and violence on their family.

While these forms of violence exacerbate existing crimes or offences, they remain largely unreported and unpunished in practice because women, and in particular young women, tend to adopt non-confrontational strategies to deal with the harassment, and to ignore or delete the content or block the offender. If the intensity and severity escalate, some women choose to take themselves offline. The root causes of underreporting must be addressed as it leads to the impunity of perpetrators, to increased digital violence and ultimately to its normalisation.

While various international and national frameworks and policies address digital violence, the scale is difficult to establish. How can digital technologies be used to facilitate the identification and reporting of TFVAW? How can platform providers safeguard women and girls from TFVAW and prevent it? Are the root causes of underreporting being addressed and is the criminalisation of TFVAW alone a solution? Are there effective national and international legislative and non-legislative measures to protect women from TFVAW and to prosecute the perpetrators? How can we avoid TFVAW from becoming the new norm for younger generations?

The Council of Europe response

As Europe's foremost human rights organisation, bringing together 46 member States, the Council of Europe has been actively promoting gender equality, combating violence against women and girls, and preventing and combating sexism, including in the field of technology-facilitated violence against women and girls. Key instruments include Council of Europe **Istanbul Convention**, in particular its Article 3a, as interpreted by the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) **General Recommendation No.1 on the digital dimension of violence against women**, which states that the digital dimension of violence against women encompasses a wide range of behaviour that falls squarely under the definition of violence against women set out under this Article; Recommendation **CM/Rec(2019)1** on preventing and combating sexism which underlines the importance of avoiding potential risks of technology perpetuating and exacerbating sexism by including women and girls in the development of algorithms; and Recommendation **CM/Rec(2022)16** on combating hate speech which highlights the need to ensure mechanisms for the reporting of cases of online hate speech to public authorities and private actors. More recently, the place of men and boys in gender equality policies and in policies to combat violence against women, as highlighted in the new **Guidelines**, emphasises that misogynist online and offline spaces that oppose or challenge standards and principles in the area of gender equality and women's rights are a growing phenomenon and that appropriate measures are needed to counter this resistance.

The Council of Europe pays particular attention to preventing and combating violence against women and girls and domestic violence and achieving balanced participation of women and men in political, public, social and economic life, as outlined in its **Gender Equality Strategy 2024-2029**.



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