



## **STATEMENT**

### **Women's rights experts call for more recognition of the digital dimension of violence against women in human rights implementation efforts**

*GENEVA, 17 June 2022 – On the margins of the 50th regular session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, the Platform of Independent Expert Mechanisms on the Elimination of Discrimination and Violence against Women (EDVAW Platform) held its 13th meeting in Geneva, calling for more comprehensive efforts to respond to the growing digital dimension of violence against women.*

Gathering for the 50th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, states are discussing, among many other issues, the human rights of women and the effect of technical co-operation on the participation of women in public life and on the elimination of violence, with a view to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

This is an important occasion to draw attention to the many ways in which the human rights of women and girls are threatened or curtailed by the growing violence, sexist hate speech and discrimination perpetrated on the internet and through ICTs – limiting their participation online and in political or participatory processes. According to a study from 2015 by the United Nations Broadband Commission, almost three quarters of women online have been exposed to some form of digital violence which can range from stalking, sexual abuse, exploitation and threats of rape to murder, all of which have severe and far-reaching implications for those who experience it. Certain groups of women, including those with intersectional identities as well as human and women's rights defenders and activists, journalists and politicians are often systematically targeted by online and technology-facilitated attacks.

This violence is often accompanied by gendered disinformation and constitutes an effort to silence and intimidate women, thereby denying them the right to enjoy their fundamental human rights, including their freedom of opinion and expression. Furthermore, such violence threatens the fundamentals of democracy and democratic life itself and undermines the positive impact of measures adopted by states in different parts of the world towards achieving gender equality and participation.

Often, intimate partner violence has a digital dimension to it, which needs to be addressed. While the digital sphere provides women and girls with novel opportunities to expose human rights violations, mobilise their communities for action, connect with each other as well as seek and offer support and empowerment, it also exposes them to further risks of gendered online harassment, intimidation and violence.

With the growing recognition of the magnitude of the digital dimension of violence against women, women's rights treaty bodies and mechanisms around the world have begun to address this issue through their mandates.

Leading the way in this field with a thematic report in 2018, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its Causes and Consequences, addressed the challenges brought by online violence against women and invited state and non-state actors to respond to this phenomenon. During the Covid-19 pandemic, MESECVI offered strategies for increased cyber-security for women as well as a guide of basic concepts, digital security tools and response strategies with the Inter-American Committee Against Terrorism (CICTE). More recently, in 2022, the MESECVI has published a new report on cyberviolence and cyberbullying against women and girls in the framework of the Belém do Pará Convention under the Spotlight Initiative and has launched, in the Latin American and the Caribbean region, a free online course on digital security with a gender perspective, aiming to contribute to a better



understanding of the disproportionate impact of cyber threats on women and girls and provide tools for digital self-care. At the same time, GREVIO, the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, offered an interpretation of the legally binding treaty it monitors, the Istanbul Convention, demonstrating its relevance for the digital dimension of violence against women. Its General Recommendation No.1 offers a roadmap to preventing and combating violence against women in the digital world.

Complemented by the provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime (Budapest Convention), a sound legal basis exists to work towards solutions, which is explored in a comprehensive study demonstrating the dynamic ways in which these two specialist treaties complement each other. An online [thematic focus section](#) offers these tools to governments around the world.

The CEDAW Convention contains obligations of the states to eliminate discrimination against women in all its forms and in all fields. The digital area and dimensions of gender- based violence are explicitly mentioned in General Recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating General Recommendation No. 19. The CEDAW Committee addresses this problem systematically in its dialogues with the states parties and in its concluding observations and recommendations.

Even though the Maputo Protocol has no specific provision on online violence, it has extensive provisions on violence against women and girls. Under the umbrella of the Platform, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa highlighted to the Commission the relevance of digital dimension of violence against women.

Pooling its expertise and speaking with one voice, the EDVAW Platform calls on state representatives, intergovernmental organisations and civil society to double up efforts to ensure recognition of the digital dimension of violence against women and discrimination in human rights implementation efforts, technical co-operation, national strategies, programmes and action plans– in the same way that strategies, policies and measures on digitalisation need to ensure consideration for the digital dimension of violence against women and potential for discrimination.

The EDVAW Platform is committed to working towards a first-ever thematic paper on the topic of digital violence against women, tracing developments in the field of cyberviolence against women as well as existing international and regional legal standards that can be used to respond to such violence, and to offer insights into relevant laws and practices emerging from the expert mechanisms' respective regional and country-specific work.