

The influence of gender-based online violence on political and societal participation of women and girls

Briefing Paper



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Table of contents

5	Introduction
6	What is gender-based online violence?
8	What are different forms of gender-based online violence?
9	How does gender-based online violence show in the political and social sphere?
11	What are possible approaches to prevent and combat gender-based online violence?
13	How should gender-based online violence be dealt with in development cooperation in the future?
15	ANNEX 1: What is the current GIZ Portfolio?
18	ANNEX 2: What are other projects that address gender-based online violence?

List of abbreviations

AMWIK	Association of Media Women in Kenya
BMZ	Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development)
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CSO	civil society organisation
DEK	Digital Enquirer Kit
DHR	digital human rights
GBV	gender-based violence
GBOV	gender-based online violence
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GTI	Gender and Technology Institute
iCPA	Integrated Context and Human Rights Analysis
ICT	information and communication technology
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
LGBTQI	lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, non-binary, queer and intersex
MP	Member of Parliament
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SFF	Studien- und Fachkräftefonds (Study and Expert Funds)
VAWIE	Violence Against Women in Elections
WOUGNET	Women of Uganda Network

Introduction

In today's increasingly digital society, communicating and connecting via the internet and social media has become a fundamental element of political, societal and economic participation all over the world. Digital tools and technologies are used to connect with people, share information, exchange views and negotiate positions. This offers new scope for networking and action. Global movements and individual voices that go beyond national boundaries are now able to enter the field. The #MeToo movement has shown how social media can be used to transform the protest against sexual harassment and abuse of women into a powerful global feminist campaign. However, new challenges arise at the same time, influencing public discourse, the formation of political opinions, and voting decisions and impacting gender equality and participation in different ways. Some of these challenges are, for instance, the misuse of (personal) data, the restriction of freedom of information and expression, as well as the spread of false information, hate speech and online violence.

Against this background, more and more discussions focus on the role of digital transformation for development cooperation. While many development actors concentrate on the potentials and benefits of digital transformation, some also shed light on the risks and challenges involved and critically examine for instance the nexus between digital transformation and gender equality. Several projects, publications and initiatives within German development cooperation already focus on bridging the digital gender divide, for instance by promoting gender-equitable internet access, digital literacy and employment opportunities in the tech sector.¹ This paper aims to build on existing work in the field of gender-based online violence (GBOV) and its influence on political and societal participation.² A special focus is put on how GBOV can affect the political and societal participation of women and girls in all their diversity as well as other genders, and how this might be remedied. The objective is to provide German development cooperation with some background information on GBOV to raise awareness of the issue, including a taxonomy of the different forms of GBOV, as well as a first overview of implementation approaches to prevent and address the consequences of GBOV.

¹ For example, BMZ's [#eskills4girls campaign](#).

² For example, GIZ 2020: [Smart-Prevention. Digital approaches in the peace and security sector of development cooperation](#).

What is gender-based online violence?

Gender-based violence³ (GBV) refers to acts that intend to cause physical or psychological harm targeting people based on their gender. This includes violence against women, girls, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, non-binary, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) persons, who are disproportionately affected. GBV is recognised as a human rights violation. It has short-term and often also long-term psychological and physical health effects on GBV survivors. They often suffer from the social and economic consequences of the violence. In addition, GBV has a negative impact on gender and other societal relations, which represents a major constraint to countries' development. The increasing spread and use of digital tools and technologies has enabled new forms of GBV to emerge, which add a new quality and dimension to violence.

Characteristics of GBOV include that:

- barriers of space and time become secondary;
- anonymity and transnationality hinder the prosecution of perpetrators;
- data is not easily removable from the internet; and
- information can be spread rapidly.⁴

Online violence refers to the use of digital tools and technologies to engage in activities that result in physical, psychological or emotional harm to another person, including self-harm. One example is hate⁵ which can be transmitted to millions of people in the digital world in a matter of seconds. Abuse thus does not only take place online, but can be complemented by offline harassment, threats and violence such as vandalism and physical attacks. In this case, online and offline violence mutually reinforce each other.⁶



In the third **Gender Equality Report** of the Federal Republic of Germany, a distinction is made between different perpetrators according to the sphere in which GBOV takes place. The report states that online harassment against women in the political sphere is primarily committed by unknown perpetrators, while GBV in the social sphere is often perpetrated by people close to the victim. GBOV in the social environment includes, for example, surveillance using spy apps or harassment via email and messaging software.⁷

Women, girls and LGBTQI persons are particularly often targeted by perpetrators of online violence. As in the analogue world, the causes of gender injustice, that is the existing social norms of discrimination and inequality, are further legitimised, disseminated and perpetuated by GBOV. While many forms of GBV are legally banned and acknowledged as a human rights violation, the occurrence of GBOV takes place in a legal grey zone. GBOV is neither sufficiently nor uniformly criminalised. Violence in virtual spaces is generally underreported. What contributes to this is that national boundaries are not clear-cut in the digital world, and internet governance is increasingly complex. People from all over the world are connected in ways that renders them both potential perpetrators as well as targets of GBOV. Barriers to offline interaction, such as distance or time zones, do not exist and the opportunity to commit GBOV anonymously is widely used. While other forms of GBV, such as sexualised violence, are often carried out by perpetrators known to the survivors, GBOV is often committed by strangers.

Against the background of an increased speed of digitalisation, cases of GBOV have increased massively in recent years (see figure below).

³ From a sociological perspective, violence is a contested concept without an agreed definition. What actually constitutes violence or belongs to a related phenomenon (e.g. power, coercion, domination, aggression) varies considerably depending on the author. However, what links most definitions of violence is that its role in building, reinforcing, contesting and/or undermining political orders is almost universally acknowledged.

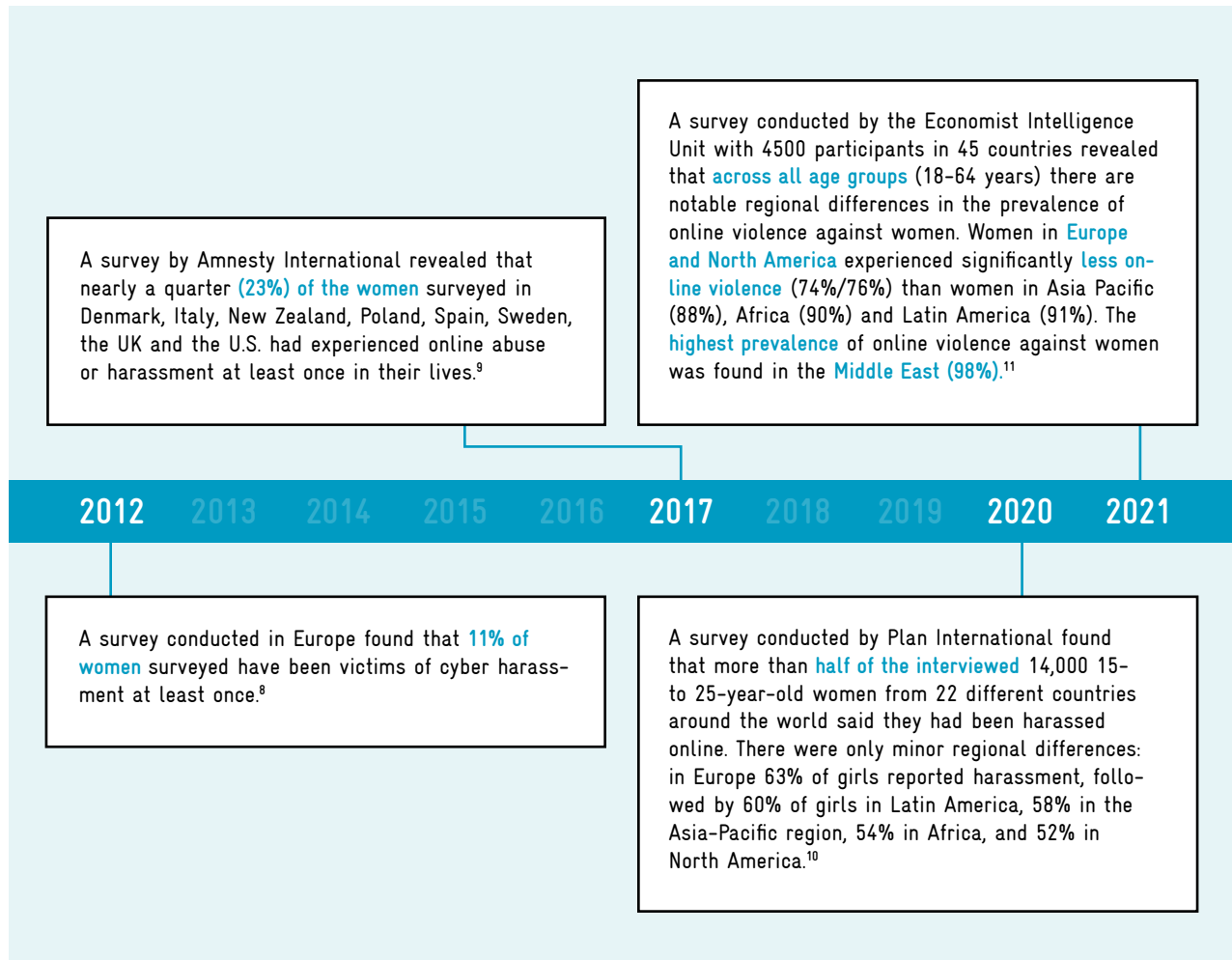
⁴ BMFSFJ 2021: [Digitalisierung geschlechtergerecht gestalten. Gutachten für den Dritten Gleichstellungsbericht der Bundesregierung](#).

⁵ The United Nations define hate speech as "any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor." (United Nations 2019: [United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech](#)).

⁶ See also GIZ 2020: [Smart-Prevention. Digital approaches in the peace and security sector of development cooperation](#).

⁷ BMFSFJ 2021: [Dritter Gleichstellungsbericht. Digitalisierung geschlechtergerecht gestalten](#).

THE INCREASE IN GBOV OVER THE LAST DECADE



⁸ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2014: [Violence Against Women. An EU-wide survey.](#)

⁹ Amnesty International 2017: [Amnesty reveals alarming impact of online abuse against women.](#)

¹⁰ Plan International 2019: [Free to be online? Girls' and young women's experience of online harassment.](#)

¹¹ Economist Intelligence Unit 2021: [Measuring the prevalence of online violence against women.](#)

What are different forms of gender-based online violence?¹²

A non-exhaustive ‘taxonomy’ of some forms of GBOV targeting women, girls and the LGBTIQ community includes the following:¹³

Violations of privacy, including:

- **Image-based sexual abuse/exploitation:** accessing, using and/or disseminating private images or video content without consent or knowledge, either via targeted communication (such as emails) or on social media platforms;
- **Doxing:** researching/manipulating and publishing private information about an individual without their consent;
- **Impersonation:** stealing someone’s identity to threaten or intimidate them, as well as to discredit or damage their reputation;
- **Hacking:** intercepting private communications and data, including via webcams;

Cyber-stalking: spying or compiling information about somebody online and communicating with them against their will;

Harassment, including:

- **Cyber-bullying:** repeated behaviour using textual or graphical content with the aim of frightening and undermining someone’s self-esteem or reputation;
- **Threats of violence:** including rape threats and death threats, directed at the victim and/or relatives, or incitement to physical violence;
- **Sending of sexual material** without consent;
- **Mobbing:** choosing and targeting someone to bully or harass through a hostile mob deployment, sometimes including hundreds or thousands of people;

Hate speech, including:

- **Sexist/gender-based hate speech:** expressions which spread, incite, promote or justify hatred based on sex or gender. Includes discrimination based on multiple characteristics such as gender + disability, gender + religious affiliation or gender + sexual orientation;
- **Posting and sharing of violent content:** portraying women as sexual objects or targets of violence;
- **Use of sexist and insulting comments:** abusing women for expressing their own views and for turning away sexual advances, including public shaming.

¹² This taxonomy is based in large part on a study by the European Parliament (European Parliament 2018: [Cyber violence and hate speech online against women](#)).

¹³ Other, more ‘direct’ forms of GBOV, such as grooming with the intent of human trafficking or child abuse, are also important to highlight, but have been excluded from this paper because they are not directly linked to political or societal participation. This narrow focus is intended to give the paper a clear direction and reduce complexity. However, it is in no way intended to be a statement on the importance of forms of GBOV not currently included. Furthermore, it is important to note that the terminologies around GBOV are still developing.

How does gender-based online violence show in the political and social sphere?

People of all genders and sexual orientations can be affected by GBOV. However, looking at statistics, it appears that certain groups of women, girls and LGBTQI persons experience GBOV more frequently than others. This includes human rights defenders, politicians, activists, journalists, bloggers, women belonging to ethnic minorities, indigenous women and women with disabilities.¹⁴ Some even experience multiple oppressions (i.e. intersectionality) due to their age, class, origin, sexual orientation, etc. The concept of intersectional discrimination can also be applied to the online sphere and GBOV.

GENDER-BASED ONLINE VIOLENCE TARGETING WOMEN IN THE POLITICAL SPHERE



- A [study on women in European parliaments](#) shows the prevalence of abuse and violence against female parliamentarians. Social media continues to be the main channel for threats and harassment. **58%** of respondents said they had been the [target of sexist online attacks on social networks](#). Furthermore, the study shows that female parliamentarians dedicated to fighting gender inequality and violence against women and younger female members of parliament (MPs) are more affected by certain forms of violence.¹⁵



- A study which analysed tweets of [women politicians in India](#) concludes that they are [targeted with abuse](#) online not just [for their opinions](#) – but also for their [gender, religion, caste, and marital status](#).¹⁶ Another study reveals that **60% of violent discourse and content in the political space in Zimbabwe** between January 2013 and April 2018 was [directed against women](#). The volume of GBOV has been progressively increasing since 2013 and spiked during election periods.¹⁷ Likewise, in [Uganda](#) a study on online violence against women political candidates during the January 2021 General Election revealed that [women candidates were more likely to experience trolling, sexual violence and body shaming](#) than their male counterparts.¹⁸ This is also evident in Germany, where chancellor candidate Annalena Baerbock received more toxic comments online than her male counterparts ahead of the 2021 federal election.¹⁹



- Women journalists are similarly affected by online harassment. The latest [Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\) survey](#) shows the alarming increase in GBOV. **85% of female journalists surveyed said they feel less safe today** than they did five years ago. Harassment ranged from unsolicited sexual messages to threats of violence, rape or death, and included the online publication of reporters' private information.²⁰

GBOV has a chilling effect on gender relations online. It 'creates a hostile online environment with the aim of shaming, intimidating and degrading' its targets.²¹ GBOV is often intentionally used as a method to reinforce traditional gender roles and systematically limit the political and societal participation of targeted groups. Those affected by GBOV are often silenced, driven offline, and excluded from participation and the shaping of public opinion. Therefore, their ability to challenge or change power is undermined.

¹⁴ Men and boys are often affected by GBOV if they, for example, (i) do not conform to (mainstream) ideas of masculinity; (ii) express feminist views; or (iii) belong to the LGBTQI community. Violence against them is often carried out through gender-related defamation (e.g. insults that question the masculinity of the person attacked) (BMFSFJ 2021: [Dritter Gleichstellungsbericht. Digitalisierung geschlechtergerecht gestalten](#))

¹⁵ Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) 2018: [#MeToo: alarming levels of sexual abuse and violence found in parliaments](#).

¹⁶ Amnesty International 2020: [India: Women politicians face shocking scale of abuse on Twitter – new research](#).

¹⁷ International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) 2018: [Violence Against Women in Elections in Zimbabwe. An IFES Assessment](#).

¹⁸ Pollicy 2021: [Amplified Abuse. Understanding Violence against Women in Politics and Leadership. A study on the 2021 Uganda general Elections](#).

¹⁹ Democracy Reporting International 2021: [Election monitor Germany 2021. Research brief #2](#).

²⁰ OHCHR 2020: [Combating violence against women journalists. Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences](#).

²¹ Coalition Against online Violence 2019: [Learn More About Online Violence](#).



Svitlana Zalishchuk, a Ukrainian member of parliament, became a target of disinformation in 2017 when a fake tweet including a photoshopped picture began to circulate on social media claiming that Zalishchuk had promised to run naked through the streets of Kyiv if Russia-backed separatists won a critical battle.²⁶



Maneka Ghandi, the Indian Minister for Women and Child Development (2014–2019), had her Twitter account trolled as she denounced cyber-bullying and promoted a hotline that was aimed at encouraging citizens to denounce/report online harassment. Among the trolls was the Indian Prime Minister Modi himself.²⁸



Susan Kihika, a Kenyan Senator, experienced harassment on Twitter when she was demanded to post nude photos of herself 'to prove she was not a man'.²⁹

At the same time it has to be kept in mind that the proportion of women using the internet is already lower than that of men, for example by 12% in least developed countries.²² A survey by Amnesty International in eight countries found that 76% of women who have been harassed on a social media platform have changed their usage behaviour on the platform. 32% of women said they no longer post content expressing their opinions on certain topics.²³ The State of the World's Girls report 2021 shows how misinformation and disinformation restrict girls' activism: 26% of the surveyed girls feel less confident to share their views, while 20% stop engaging in politics or current affairs.²⁴ Figures from the Ugandan organisation Pollicy show that 14.5% of the women they surveyed deleted or deactivated their online accounts after experiencing online violence. 12.2% stopped using a digital service in general.²⁵

The consequences of GBOV also extend to the offline world. In the most severe cases they can lead to death, including femicides and suicides, if victims of online violence suffer severe psychological harm. Furthermore, 'increasingly extremist gendered disinformation risks legitimising offline violence against women'.²⁷ Targeted persons can also experience economic consequences. For many persons in public life, disconnecting their online profiles for an extended period is not an option because digital platforms are often closely tied to their ability to sustain an income. Persons targeted by GBOV, including their families and people close to them, often suffer severe sociopsychological consequences. They can feel insecure, persecuted and exposed, for example when private data and information are leaked, such as phone numbers and/or their place of residence.

GBOV thus not only threatens core democratic functions such as participation in discourses and decision-making processes and limits the diversity of opinions and perspectives. It also heavily influences the individual, social and economic well-being of targeted persons and consolidates and reinforces existing political orders of cis-male domination by undermining equal access to political power and leadership.

While the consequences of GBOV threaten persons and societies globally, they can have an even higher impact in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. The prevalence of violence in general can be increased and, in contexts with a history of violent conflict, the level of 'tolerance' of violent behaviour such as GBOV might be higher than in other contexts. Moreover, in contexts with fragile governance systems in place, the existence of adequate laws and regulations and the ability of state actors to effectively prosecute violence and to offer adequate social services to survivors is most likely severely limited. Since women are disproportionately affected by violence online and offline, and considering their important role in building peaceful societies and fostering security, it is ever more worrying that GBOV might limit their possibilities and willingness to participate in public discourse and to stand up for their positions.³⁰

²² International Telecommunication Union 2021: [Measuring digital development. Facts and figures 2021](#).

²³ Amnesty International 2017: [Amnesty reveals alarming impact of online abuse against women](#).

²⁴ Plan International 2021: [Welt-Mädchenbericht 2021. Umfrage in 26 Ländern: Schulen versagen bei Vermittlung von digitaler Medienkompetenz](#).

²⁵ Pollicy 2020: [Alternate Realities, Alternate Internets. African Feminist Research for a Feminist Internet](#).

²⁶ World Policy 2017: [How Disinformation Became a New Threat to Women](#).

²⁷ Heinrich Böll Stiftung 2021: [Gendered disinformation. 6 reasons why liberal democracies need to respond to this threat](#).

²⁸ Di Meco 2019: [#SHEPERSISTED. Women, Politics & Power in the New Media World](#).

²⁹ KICTANet 2020: [Trends of Online Violence against Women in Politics During the COVID19 pandemic in Kenya](#).

³⁰ OHCHR n.d.: [Women's human rights and gender-related in situations of conflict and instability](#); United Nations Association of Germany (DGVN) 2019: [Taking Online Gender-Based Violence Seriously](#).

What are possible approaches to prevent and combat gender-based online violence?

There are a range of different approaches that German development cooperation, together with its partners, could include in its portfolio and projects to support the prevention of GBOV and help targeted persons, survivors and societies to deal with the consequences. These approaches include, for example:

Individual level

- Building up peer-to-peer support networks for those affected;
- Strengthening the skills of those affected to protect and defend themselves against GBOV through trainings (e.g. (digital) media training);
- Working with (former) perpetrators of GBOV and their peers/social environment to achieve behavioural change;
- Increasing the awareness of GBOV and promoting sensitive consumption of online media and the values of gender equality, for example by holding gender trainings to counter power imbalances and gender stereotypes (e.g. civic education on GBOV in primary and secondary schools);

Organisational level

- Strengthening public institutions such as ministries, administrative bodies and/or local/national parliaments to develop and implement support programmes for people affected by or at risk of GBOV;
- Improving the dialogue and cooperation between different public institutions on GBOV topics, such as ministries for digital affairs, justice, women, and/or education, and/or parliaments;
- Strengthening law enforcement agencies in investigating and prosecuting GBOV as well as implementing victim-sensitive human rights-based approaches, including for police, prosecutors and judges;
- Improving access to social services, for example by:
 - Strengthening existing or supporting the establishment of mental health and psychosocial support structures that can assist victims of GBOV;
 - Supporting the development and implementation of programmes for the resocialisation of perpetrators of online violence/promotion of behaviour change;
- Strengthening civil society organisations' (CSOs) capacities for mainstreaming the issue of GBOV, implementing awareness-raising campaigns and conducting advocacy for better prevention efforts;
- Strengthening local civil society actors who give advice to, and support people affected by or at risk of GBOV;

- Strengthening the skills of journalists working in both traditional or online media on issues such as counter speech, fact-checking, positive storytelling, etc.;

Policy and societal level

- Establishing dialogue formats and joint learning platforms to promote exchange on GBOV topics, for example between ministries, parliaments, journalists, think tanks, universities and social media platforms;
- Advising on the development/adaptation of legal criminal (and/or civil) frameworks for GBOV, including a focus on the liability of social media platform providers;
- Increasing the availability of gender-disaggregated data and tracking of GBOV and misinformation, especially during elections/campaigning, to understand the phenomenon and adapt measures to fight GBOV accordingly.

How should gender-based online violence be dealt with in development cooperation in the future?

In view of the increased spread and usage of digital tools and technologies, not least due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and resulting digital transformation processes, the issue of GBOV will likely further intensify and affect an increasing amount of people in partner countries of the German development cooperation in the years to come. We see democratic backsliding in all regions of the world.³¹ Autocratic regimes and movements as well as other actors use internet shutdowns, targeted disinformation and GBOV as a method to target their (political) opponents. Anonymity, trolls, bots and algorithms can contribute to a rapid and widespread dissemination of online violence, which can lead to silencing of diverse voices and exclusion of already underrepresented groups. If not properly prevented and combatted, GBOV threatens core democratic functions such as participation, formation of public opinion and decision-making processes. As a result, existing political orders of cis-male domination as well as unequal access to political power and leadership are reinforced.

The German Government and other multilateral and bilateral donors already support a range of measures revolving around governance, gender equality and digital transformation. However, it is crucial for international cooperation to invest not only in projects trying to scale the opportunities and benefits of digital transformation, but also to invest resources in measuring the impact of digital transformation, especially for marginalised groups, and addressing the risks and challenges, including investing in measures on preventing GBOV and mitigating its consequences. This will be critical for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Furthermore, the human rights-based approach commits German international cooperation to take GBOV seriously. Germany as well as most of the partner countries have acknowledged their obligations under international law (e.g. Art. 7 of the CEDAW)³², regional conventions³³ (e.g. the Istanbul Convention)³⁴ and national legal frameworks to work towards gender equality (e.g. LGBTI Inclusion Strategy by the German Government).³⁵

A first recommendation is to include the issue of GBOV in context analyses during project planning and implementation, for example in the integrated context and human rights analysis (iPCA) as one component of the GIZ **Safeguard+Gender Management System**. By doing so, the focus is not only put on the potentials of digital tools and technologies, but also the challenges and risks that appear at the same time, impacting gender equality and participation in different ways. Communicating and connecting via the internet and digital tools and technologies such as social media have become fundamental elements of political and societal participation all over the world. Against this background, we need to better analyse how challenges such as the spread of false information, hate speech and GBOV influence our

³¹ Alizada et. al. (V-Dem Institute) 2021: [Autocratization Turns Viral. Democracy Report 2021](#); International IDEA 2021: [The Global State of Democracy 2021. Building Resilience in a Pandemic Era](#); Repucci & Slipowitz (Freedom House) 2021: [Freedom in the World 2021. Democracy under Siege](#).

³² The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979. The Convention establishes not only an international bill of rights for women, but also an agenda for action by countries to guarantee the enjoyment of those rights.

³³ The Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) recently drafted a [general recommendation on the digital dimension of violence against women](#). GREVIO draws attention to the need to acknowledge violence against women in its digital dimension as a continuum of violence against women offline, which forms part of GBV against women.

³⁴ Council of Europe 2011: [Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#).

³⁵ The German Federal Government n.d.: [LGBTI Inclusion Strategy. Federal Government LGBTI Inclusion Strategy for Foreign Policy and Development](#).

projects, the development and state of democracy, core democratic functions and social cohesion. Moreover, we need to invest resources into better understanding how the combination of access to technology, social (gender) norms and the level/acceptance of violence in different societies influence the prevalence of GBOV and what this would mean for prevention and counter-measures.

A second recommendation is that we need to include specific measures to prevent and combat GBOV in our projects. This is especially the case for projects in the field of governance aiming at promoting democracy, participation and peaceful societies. Besides a human-centred approach that leaves no one behind, we need multi-stakeholder cooperation in this regard: state and civil society actors, the private sector (especially tech companies) and international organisations should be involved in the implementation to address the subject of GBOV holistically. As GBOV often takes place on private infrastructure and platforms such as social media, approaches to prevent and combat the issue also touch on questions regarding how to hold social media platforms accountable and how the internet evolves and is governed.³⁶

The implementation of both recommendations can contribute to better mainstream, monitor and address the risks and negative consequences of digital transformation processes in development cooperation projects. This is essential to achieve the SDGs in line with the inclusive implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

³⁶ A consultation series by the World Wide Web Foundation revealed, among other things, that content moderation by tech companies focuses too often on Europe and the United States of America and does not consider the needs and experiences of women from marginalised communities and different regions around the world (World Wide Web Foundation 2021: ['Women shouldn't be expected to pay this cost just to participate'. What we learned from our online gender-based violence consultations](#)). The same applies to complaint/abuse reporting mechanisms of several online platforms. Some platforms' policies are not translated into all languages. Moreover, categories offered by the platforms do not always correspond to the way young women would classify what happened to them.

ANNEX 1: What is the current GIZ Portfolio?

In general, GIZ does not yet have a lot of experience in implementing measures to prevent and combat GBOV. However, through innovative pilot measures, some projects have gained valuable experience and practical expertise in tackling GBOV. Some of these approaches are highlighted below.

Country
Madagascar

Project
Local Development and
Decentralisation (Pro-DéCID)

Pilot duration
Aug. 2019 – Sept. 2020

DIGITAL AGENTS OF CHANGE

The internet presents many opportunities for women and girls in Madagascar, for example regarding their economic empowerment, networking and access to information. However, the country is also struggling with the negative aspects of digitalisation: Child pornography, prostitution, abuse and harassment on the internet and especially on social media are a growing challenge, mostly for girls and young women. Child pornography and prostitution rings openly recruit minors, especially girls, and offer child pornographic material on Facebook, while offline prostitution, sex tourism and the sale of girls abroad have become a big business on the island.

With the help of the Digital Agents of Change project, young people in Madagascar started to take a stand against (gender-based) online violence. Online campaigns, training, awareness-raising sessions and workshops informed children and youth as well as their parents about digital security practices, data protection, privacy rights and participation in the digital world. At events such as Safer Internet Day, young people met the operators of online platforms and the cyber security officers in the police force. Playful activities were designed to show how girls and boys can be better protected online. At the same time, the project provided further training for political representatives and police officers so that they can better protect children and youth from dangers and crime on the internet in the future. Representatives of telecommunications companies and owners of internet cafés were also involved. In its many activities, the project relied on a 'role model approach', empowering girls in particular through positive testimonies from young women who have successfully launched careers in the technology and digital startup sector.

Country
Uganda

Project
Governance and Civil Society
Programme

Implementing partner
betterplace lab & Future Challenges

Duration
May 2019 – March 2022

DIGITAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAB

The [Digital Human Rights Lab](#) is a unique project commissioned by BMZ under the Digital Africa Initiative. It is implemented by a consortium of German organisations – betterplace lab and Future Challenges with GIZ support – to further human rights protection in the digital age. The lab is a collaborative space, both virtual and physical, in which human rights defenders come together to support each other's initiatives in strengthening and promoting human rights in a digitalised world. Structured along thematic communities of practice, the DHR lab bundles knowledge and expertise and supports innovative ideas, including on GBOV and its human rights implications. Regarding GBOV, the lab leverages peer-to-peer support, innovation, research, and digital security capacity-building to combat GBOV.

For instance, lab member organisations – Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET), Digital Literacy Initiative, DefendDefenders and Encrypt Uganda – conducted an assessment of women's safety in the digital space. WOUGNET also organises events on aspects of GBOV, for example on online safety for gender-sensitive journalism in Uganda or the non-consensual sharing of sexual images or videos ('revenge porn'). More generally, WOUGNET promotes the safe use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) by women and girls and the closing of the gender digital divide. [Encrypt Uganda](#), another Ugandan digital rights organisation, aims to provide protection measures to different cyber security threats, including gender-specific ones, which is why it (together with other partners) launched the #SayNoToOnlineGBV campaign. They have also published a policy brief and conducted a workshop on this topic and continue to address related aspects, such as the online safety of children.

Country
Zimbabwe

Project
Promotion and Enforcement of Human
Rights and Principles of Good Governance (SFF measure)

Pilot duration
Aug. 2019 – Aug. 2020

PROMOTING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE PROCESSES THROUGH INNOVATIVE TOOLS

Despite considerable progress regarding gender equality and women's rights, women in Zimbabwe still face discrimination at all levels. They are especially underrepresented in decision-making positions. This is partly due to conditions not being favourable to women's participation in policymaking, but also due to traditional beliefs and attitudes in the Zimbabwean society that do not recognise women as leaders and categorise politics as a 'men's game'. Additionally, (cyber) harassment and intimidation are widely used as strategies to discourage aspiring female leaders.

The aim of the Promoting Women's Participation in Governance Processes Through Innovative Tools project was to contribute to increased societal acceptance of the participation of women in leadership positions in governance and decision-making processes. Another objective was to address the harassment of women in the public sphere, including through (online) hate speech. The project mainly worked with female parliamentarians (the Zimbabwe Women Parliamentary Caucus). 63 members of the Caucus as well as eight staff members of the Secretariat of Parliament were coached in the skillful use of traditional media as well as the use of new and social media platforms for improved branding and effective communication. Furthermore, the MPs were trained in the use of existing media complaints mechanisms to better report cases of GBOV. Additionally, 16 journalists were trained on gender and ethical reporting, with the aim of increasing the media coverage of gender issues and the work of Zimbabwean women legislators. The activities have led to an improved and more self-confident media presence of female MPs who now comment with authority on issues of national interest.

Country
Worldwide

Project
Digital Enquirer Kit

Pilot duration
Aug. 2020 – Dec. 2022

SUPPORTING WOMEN IN THE POLITICAL SPHERE AGAINST GENDER-BASED ONLINE VIOLENCE //

MODULE 5 OF THE DIGITAL ENQUIRER KIT

Over the past year, misinformation and hate speech surrounding COVID-19 have spread rapidly in the digital space. This also includes GBOV, which continues to be a horrifying reality throughout the world. Due to social stress, isolation measures and increased use of digital technologies, GBV continues to increase not only in analogue spaces but also in the digital.

Some groups are particularly vulnerable in this context: female-read politicians, female-read journalists, gender activists and human rights defenders. Various forms of online harassment as well as massive intimidation on the internet lead to psychological, social and mental health impacts, reduced access to online services, and the silencing of their voices and reduced participation in societal and political discourses as active digital citizens.

The Digital Enquirer Kit (DEK) aims to offer women in the political sphere, journalists, civil society actors and human rights defenders the opportunity to learn about tips and strategies for identifying and countering misinformation around COVID-19 through targeted online trainings. The fifth module of the DEK focuses in particular on GBOV. It aims to equip affected groups with knowledge about existing forms of cyber violence/ gender-based hate speech and empowers them to combat it effectively. This is done through concrete solution mechanisms and strategies to protect/defend themselves as well as their created online content from GBOV. The target group of the Gender Module are mainly female politicians at all levels, gender and human rights activists, as well as women and girls. Like the other learning modules of the DEK, it will be made available as an e-learning course via the [Atingi](#) platform.

ANNEX 2: What are other projects that address gender-based online violence?

Country

Sri Lanka, Ukraine, Zimbabwe

Donor/ Implementing agency

Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS) Technical Leadership Award, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Department for International Development (DFID), Global Affairs Canada/International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)

Pilot duration

2018 – 2019

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS ONLINE SOCIAL MEDIA ANALYSIS TOOL

Women candidates in electoral processes are particularly affected by online harassment or threats. This is especially damaging as it silences women's voices and prevents them from exercising their political rights. Documenting is the first step to increasing accountability for online intimidation.

IFES has therefore developed an adaptable social media analysis tool called the Violence Against Women in Elections (VAWIE) Online Social Media Analysis Tool. The main purpose of this tool is to identify trends and patterns of online violence in election periods. The tool allows users to analyse the scope and intensity of VAWIE online. Using artificial intelligence-based data analysis, the VAWIE Online Tool quantifies and categorises social media data to identify and differentiate between various forms of online violence. A [manual](#) for CSOs has been published, which explains

step-by-step how to mainstream social media in relation to VAWIE.

The tool was piloted in Sri Lanka, Ukraine and Zimbabwe in 2018 and 2019. The Sri Lankan pilot was funded by the CEPPS Technical Leadership Award. The pilot in Ukraine and Zimbabwe were implemented through a collaboration and funded by DFID, Global Affairs Canada and USAID. However, the VAWIE Online Tool can be applied in any country where social media is actively used and is free from state control or shutdown.

Country

Worldwide

Donor/Implementing agency

Knight Foundation, Digital Trust Foundation/Hollaback!

Duration

Ongoing

BYSTANDER INTERVENTION – ONLINE PLATFORM HEARTMOB

[HeartMob](#) is an online platform for victims of online harassment. It was developed by Hollaback!, a non-profit organisation that works to address harassment in public spaces. HeartMob provides real-time support to individuals affected and empowers bystanders to act.

In a first step, victims can report an incident on a web-based platform. They can choose to make the incident public (on the platform) and explain how they want their bystanders to support them (via support messages, etc.). After reporting the incident, victims receive information material on online harassment laws, safety planning, details on how to report harassment, and, upon request, also references to organisations that offer counselling or legal advice.

GENDER AND TECHNOLOGY INSTITUTE

Country
Worldwide

Donor/Implementing agency
Entities including Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the European Union, GIZ and Tactical Tech in collaboration with local partners

Project
Tactical Tech's Gender and Tech Project

Duration
Ongoing

[Tactical Tech's Gender and Tech Project](#) aims to support women by giving them the technical skills and practical know-how needed to teach one another and create their own networks. The main project component is the Gender and Technology Institute (GTI), which is a series of events. It targets female human rights defenders and aims to address the contexts, risks and attacks faced by activists. The objective is to support these women in building capacity in their local communities. The series of events took place between 2014 and 2018 in Ecuador, Germany, Malaysia, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Spain, Sri Lanka and Uruguay.

Each GTI further developed specific facilitation methods and training content in collaboration with local and international organisations. As a result of the GTIs, there were hundreds of follow-up initiatives and events as participants took what they learned back to their own communities. A [training curriculum](#) was developed in English, Portuguese and Spanish. It provides learning material and covers more than 20 topics such as Hacking Hate Speech, Resistance Strategies, Creative Use of Social Media, and Technological Sovereignty. Furthermore, participants of the GTI created a [Wiki](#) in collaboration with the Tactical Technology Collective.

WOMEN@WEB

Country
East Africa

Donor/Implementing agency
DW Akademie in collaboration with local partners, e.g. KICTANet

Duration
Ongoing

The [Women@Web](#) project is a DW Akademie regional initiative covering Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. In Kenya, [KICTANet](#) has partnered with Siasa Place and the Association of Media Women in Kenya (AMWIK).

Women@Web seeks to raise women's voices on various online platforms on a wide range of issues. Therefore, KICTANet has conducted advocacy campaigns and training on digital safety and literacy in Kenya. The training of female university students covered the topics of digital security and literacy. Participants were taught to create content and engage on different internet platforms. Through digital responsibility lessons, students took practical steps to protect their privacy and safety online. Moreover, they could improve their digital literacy skills, including how to evaluate content for accuracy, perspective and motive. With regard to policy advocacy, KICTANet supported women to participate in the Kenya School of Internet Governance. Furthermore, they will be launching a policy brief on the underlying factors that affect online content creation. Additionally, the project supports the broadcast of the series Take on Tech, in which they focus on topics including the gender gap in the tech industry. Take on Tech is a television programme that explains technology policy issues for ordinary citizens. Take on Tech is aired weekly on KBC (Kenya Broadcasting Corporation), a Kenyan national television station.



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