



Gender-Based Hate Speech Online: EU's Ongoing Battle Against Discrimination and Bias



In the digital age, gender-based hate speech has emerged as a pervasive issue across online platforms, disproportionately affecting women and marginalized communities. This form of abuse encompasses misogynistic language, harassment, and incitement to violence, contributing to a hostile online environment.

Prevalence and Impact

A 2023 report by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) highlighted that women are the primary targets of online hate speech, often facing abusive language and threats of sexual violence. Additionally, individuals of African descent, Roma, and Jewish communities frequently encounter negative stereotyping and harassment online.

Eurostat data from 2023 revealed that nearly half (49%) of EU citizens aged 16 to 29 encountered online messages deemed hostile towards specific groups or individuals. Notably, 32% of young adults faced hate speech targeting the LGBTQ+ community, while 30% encountered racially charged hate messages.

EU's Legislative Response

To combat this growing concern, the European Union has taken significant legislative steps. In January 2025, the revised Code of Conduct on Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online was integrated into the Digital Services Act (DSA). This integration mandates major tech companies, including Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, TikTok, and others, to assess and act upon at least two-thirds of hate speech notifications within 24 hours. The code also emphasizes transparency, requiring platforms to provide data on the reach of illegal content and the role of recommendation systems in its dissemination .

Furthermore, the European Commission's "No Place for Hate" initiative underscores a comprehensive approach to combating all forms of hatred, both online and offline. This initiative calls for collaboration among politicians, civil society, and citizens to address the alarming rise in hate speech and hate crimes across the EU.

Challenges and the Way Forward

Despite these efforts, challenges persist. The FRA report noted that automated content moderation tools often fail to detect hate speech accurately, with over half of hateful posts slipping through initial filters. Moreover, the lack of a universally accepted definition of online hate speech complicates enforcement and moderation efforts.

To enhance the effectiveness of these measures, the FRA recommends increased transparency from online platforms, improved guidance on identifying hate speech, and the inclusion of civil society in monitoring efforts. Testing moderation technologies for bias and ensuring access to platform data for independent research are also crucial steps toward creating a safer online space for all users.

In this context, the ScrollOff project, co-funded by the European Union through the Erasmus+ program, plays a pivotal role in combating gender-based hate speech online. Launched in January 2024, ScrollOff focuses on empowering youth workers across Europe to support young individuals exposed to misogynistic rhetoric and disinformation on social media.

Through the development of comprehensive resources like the Youth Workers' Reference KeyBook and the ScrollOff Portal, the project provides practical tools and training to recognize and address harmful content. Additionally, ScrollOff fosters critical thinking and awareness of gender equality among youth, aiming to create a safer and more inclusive digital environment.

By bridging the gap between young people and supportive networks, ScrollOff contributes to the EU's broader efforts to mitigate online hate speech and promote human rights.

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