

Policy Brief

Addressing
Gender-Based
Hate Speech and
Disinformation on
Social Media

Recommendations
Based on the
Erasmus+ ScrollOff
Project



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1. Executive Summary

The digital environment of social media represents an important space for communication, self-expression, and civic participation for young people. However, gender-based hate speech, disinformation, and other forms of online violence are increasingly on the rise, negatively affecting mental health, participation, and social cohesion.

The [ScrollOff project](#), funded by the [Erasmus+](#) programme, responds to this challenge by building the capacities of youth workers, creating educational tools, analysing harmful online trends, and supporting young people exposed to online harms. Participating organisations from Sweden ([Internationella Kvinnoföreningen](#) and [Högskolan i Halmstad](#)), Cyprus ([Stando LTD](#)), Greece ([The Hive P.C](#)), and the Czech Republic ([Business & Professional Women CR z.s.](#)) identified key challenges, platform-specific differences, and gaps in existing policies.

This policy brief summarises the project's main findings and presents recommendations for policymakers, educational institutions, youth workers, and digital platforms. Its aim is to support the development of a safer, more inclusive, and democratic digital environment.

Key Recommendations

- Establish strategic frameworks at EU and national levels focused on youth digital safety and gender equality online.
- Integrate digital and media literacy into formal and non-formal education.
- Strengthen training and professional support for youth workers and teachers.
- Ensure psychosocial support for young people exposed to online harm.
- Promote accountability and transparency among digital platforms.

2. The ScrollOff Project

What is ScrollOff

ScrollOff is an international project co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme, aimed at combating gender-motivated hate speech, misogyny, disinformation, and toxic narratives on social media. Its vision is to empower young people aged roughly 18–30 – with an emphasis on equality, rights, critical thinking, and digital literacy – to recognize and resist harmful online content while being protected from the negative impacts of the digital environment.

Main Objectives of the Project

- **Education and support for youth workers** – to help them identify gender-based hate speech, stereotypes, disinformation, and manipulative content on social media, and to offer best practices for supporting young people.
- **Strengthening media and digital literacy among young people** – equipping them with critical thinking, online navigation skills, and the ability to respond to harmful content.
- **Prevention and support related to gender-motivated hate and disinformation** – helping those who encounter such content and offering mechanisms for support, dialogue, and solidarity.

What ScrollOff Offers

- A developed and openly accessible **reference handbook (“ScrollOff KeyBook”)** and methodological materials for youth workers — including analyses, case studies, recommendations, model scenarios, and practical tools.
- An **online platform** providing access to these materials, good-practice sharing, discussion, and support.
- **Workshops, trainings, and pilot activities** in partner countries to test and validate methods and tools for addressing online hate.

3. Objectives of the project

Social media has become a central space for communication, self-expression, and social interaction among young people, shaping their identities, relationships, and engagement with society. However, these platforms increasingly expose users to **gender-based hate speech, sexualised attacks, manipulative stereotypes, disinformation related to gender issues or feminism, and forms of cyber-violence that negatively impact mental health**. Such exposure can undermine self-confidence, increase anxiety and isolation, and reinforce societal inequalities. ScrollOff research shows that youth workers often lack the skills to recognise subtler forms of online harm, including **coded language, toxic memes, micro-aggressions, and algorithm-driven patterns of radicalisation**, which are often normalized in online culture and reinforced by peer dynamics.

These risks are further amplified by the design of social media platforms: **recommendation algorithms, rapid content virality, and limited user control over feeds** can intensify the spread of hateful or polarising narratives. As a result, young people are repeatedly exposed to harmful content, often without the tools or support to critically navigate it. Combined with insufficient institutional capacity and educational resources, this creates a digital environment in which young people are increasingly vulnerable, highlighting the urgent need for integrated strategies that connect youth services, education, and digital policy to prevent, mitigate, and respond to online harm.

4. Objectives of the policy brief

The primary objective of this policy brief is to provide actionable recommendations for preventing and countering gender-based disinformation and hate speech online, particularly among youth and social media users. It aims to raise awareness among stakeholders—including policy makers, youth workers, educators, and civil society organizations—about the risks and consequences of online gender-related disinformation, and to highlight effective strategies for fostering safer, more inclusive digital spaces.



Specifically, the brief seeks to:

1. **Inform and guide policy makers** on creating evidence-based policies and frameworks that address gendered online harm.
2. **Empower youth and youth organizations** with tools, resources, and educational approaches to critically navigate and challenge disinformation.
3. **Support victims of online gender hate speech** by recommending practical interventions and psychosocial support mechanisms.
4. **Encourage collaboration among stakeholders, including social workers, activists,** and digital platforms, to establish sustainable networks for prevention, education, and intervention.
5. **Promote digital literacy and media awareness** as a key means to build resilience against misinformation and online abuse, ensuring that young people are not only protected but also active agents in creating respectful online communities.

By addressing these objectives, the policy brief translates the insights and outcomes of the ScrollOff project into practical guidance, fostering systemic change that strengthens digital inclusion, gender equality, and youth empowerment in online environments.

5. Problem Definition / Problematization

Research cited in the ScrollOff KeyBook and international studies confirm the scope of the issue:

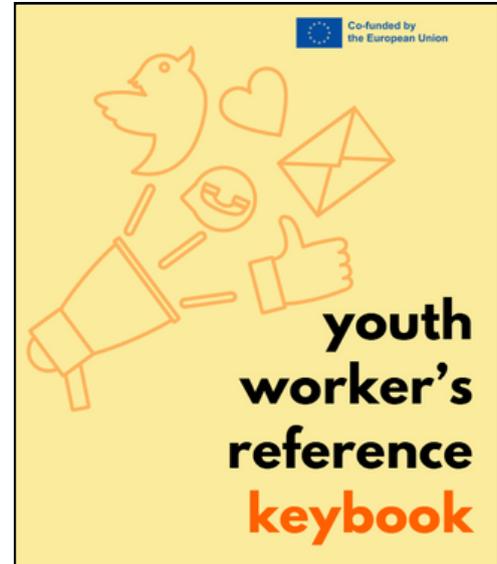
- **58%** of girls and young women (15–25) have experienced online harassment (Plan International, 2020).
- **23%** of women across eight countries have faced online abuse; 41% report subsequent psychological difficulties (Amnesty International, 2017).
- **59%** of teenagers have experienced cyberbullying, with girls much more commonly affected (Pew Research Center, 2021).
- **One in ten women in the EU** has experienced cyber-violence from the age of 15 (EIGE, 2021).

Psychological Impacts include anxiety, depression, and loss of self-confidence, often leading to feelings of threat and isolation, as well as the internalisation of stereotypes and self-censorship. These psychological consequences also influence **Social Impacts**, which manifest as a reduced ability to safely participate in online discussions, withdrawal from public space, and a deepening of gender inequalities in participation. At the same time, these factors translate into **Economic Impacts**, resulting in reduced employment and self-promotion opportunities, long-term reputation damage, and a higher risk of leaving digital professions, thereby creating long-term barriers to career development and participation in digital environments.



6. Need Analysis (based on WP2)

The rapid proliferation of social media has transformed how young people access information, engage in public discourse, and form opinions. However, this digital shift has also amplified the spread of gender-based disinformation and online hate speech, exposing young users to harmful narratives that reinforce stereotypes, discrimination, and hostility online. Empirical research across Europe and beyond shows that youth are uniquely vulnerable to misleading information and hostile digital environments: they often overestimate their ability to detect false content, struggle with critical assessment of online narratives, and are exposed to content that can undermine their trust and well-being.



Within this context, the ScrollOff project undertook a comprehensive evidence-gathering process to understand the manifestations and impacts of gendered disinformation. Partners conducted extensive qualitative research in their respective countries, interviewing dozens of young individuals aged 18–30 alongside psychologists, educators, youth workers, and civil society actors to collect firsthand insights into how disinformation and hate speech affect youth experiences online. This research formed the foundation for developing project outputs, including the ScrollOff Reference KeyBook—a practical resource compiling case studies, testimonies, theoretical insights, and actionable guidelines to support frontline practitioners. The KeyBook synthesizes this evidence into a user-centered toolkit designed to enhance understanding of the root causes, patterns, and consequences of gender-based hate speech and disinformation on social platforms. It offers targeted strategies for youth workers and educators to foster critical media literacy, build resilience among young people, and create supportive environments that challenge harmful digital narratives. This connection between empirical research and stakeholder guidance highlights the urgent need for systemic interventions that address digital harm at both individual and structural levels.

The impact of such harmful online content extends beyond immediate emotional distress; it can erode trust, normalize discriminatory views, and marginalize vulnerable groups, with long-term effects on civic participation and democratic engagement. ScrollOff's findings underscore that without coordinated support structures, young people remain at risk of internalising and perpetuating online harms, making it critical for policy makers, educators, and youth professionals to act decisively.



7. Target groups

The ScrollOff project engages a diverse set of target groups, each essential to creating safer, more inclusive online environments and effectively combating gender-based disinformation and hate speech on social media. Central to the initiative are **youth workers**, who serve on the frontlines of digital education and support; they work directly with young people to identify harmful online content, intervene when incidents arise, and foster critical thinking and resilience in digital spaces. Closely connected to them are youth organizations, which provide the institutional frameworks and networks needed to disseminate training, resources, and best practices across communities.

At the heart of ScrollOff's mission are **young people aged 18-30**, a demographic both disproportionately targeted by online disinformation and uniquely positioned to act as digital change-makers. Because social media is a primary arena for communication, identity formation, and social engagement for young adults, empowering this group with awareness and media literacy is essential for sustainable impact. Similarly, **social media users exposed to media disinformation on gender** represent those at risk of absorbing and unknowingly spreading harmful narratives, making them a key audience for awareness-raising and education activities. Within this group, **victims of gender-hate speech** require tailored support, including psychosocial assistance and pathways to services that help mitigate the emotional and societal harms of online abuse.

To ensure systemic impact and long-term sustainability, the project also targets **policy makers**, whose engagement is critical for translating ScrollOff findings into institutional change, inclusive regulations, and supportive public policies. **Activists** contribute indispensable voices for advocacy, amplifying project messages within and beyond digital youth communities. At the same time, professionals such as workers in **existing support groups and social workers/psychologists** play a crucial role in providing ongoing care, mental health support, and specialised interventions for individuals affected by hate speech, disinformation, and online harm. Engaging these stakeholders helps build comprehensive support ecosystems that address both the immediate and structural challenges posed by gendered disinformation.

8. Project activities and findings

Partner organisations identified several key gaps:

Partner organisations identified several key gaps in the current response systems. First, there is a low level of awareness among youth workers regarding emerging and evolving forms of online harm, which limits their ability to recognise and effectively respond to these risks. This challenge is compounded by the lack of high-quality educational materials that meaningfully address the realities of the digital environment, leaving both educators and young people without adequate guidance. In addition, institutional frameworks for addressing online hate and disinformation remain weak, resulting in fragmented or inconsistent responses. There are also insufficient support mechanisms for young people who experience online attacks, meaning many are left to navigate these situations alone. Finally, the absence of a unified strategy that integrates education, youth services, and digital policy prevents a coordinated and systemic approach to prevention, intervention, and long-term resilience building.

Project Outcomes

- online **Portal** with educational modules,
- scenarios and model situations for youth work,
- methodological **KeyBook**,
- tools for developing digital competencies,
- **5 national workshops** in partner countries,
- **1 international laboratory** within the project.

9. Dynamics of Social Media

ScrollOff identified significant differences between platforms:

TikTok

- extremely rapid content spread,
- predominantly young audience,
- risk of normalising misogynistic trends.

Instagram

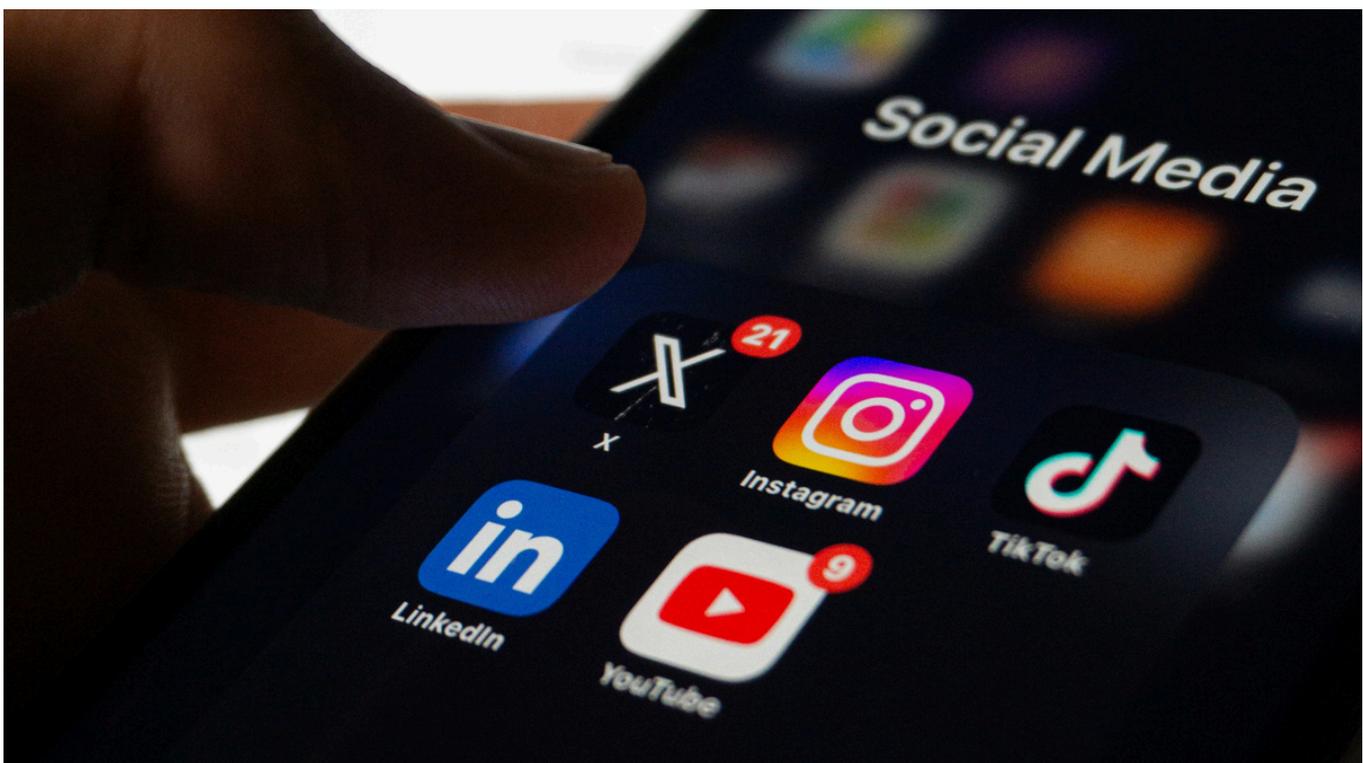
- influence of visual culture and influencers,
- memes as a vehicle for hateful narratives.

X (Twitter)

- polarisation and public confrontation,
- fast virality of toxic discourse.

Facebook

- closed communities fostering long-term radicalisation,
- subtle dissemination of disinformation.





10. Country Reports by Project Partners

Sweden – Internationella Kvinnoföreningen & Halmstad Universtiy

A. GENDER-BASED HATE SPEECH



Gender-based hate speech online in Sweden reflects offline power imbalances. While men and women are equally exposed to online hate, women are more often subjected to sexualized abuse, objectification, and threats (Bladini, Nordisk Samarbete, Nikulainen).

Women in public-facing roles, such as politicians, journalists, and activists, are mainly targeted, particularly when discussing feminism or human rights (Edström, 2016). Despite its impact, sexist online abuse is often trivialised, though scholars argue it belongs to the continuum of gender-based and sexual violence (Kelly, 1988; Bladini, 2020).

Impacts

Sweden faces a dilemma between freedom of speech and gender equality. The dominant interpretation of freedom of expression as a negative right, where any regulation risks being seen as censorship, limits efforts to protect women online (Bladini, 2020).

As a result, many women withdraw from public discourse, fearing threats and reputational attacks. This silencing undermines democratic participation and erodes gender equality in public life (FRA, 2025).

B. DISINFORMATION

Gendered disinformation is increasingly recognised as a form of violence. It involves false or manipulated content that targets women based on gender, race, or sexuality, reinforcing harmful stereotypes and blaming victims. This tactic aims to discourage women's political participation and public engagement. Female politicians, journalists, and activists are especially vulnerable, as coordinated disinformation campaigns often driven by trolls, state-linked media, or organised networks seek to undermine their credibility by spreading false claims about their competence, morality, or personal lives. Social media algorithms often amplify such content unintentionally, allowing misogynistic narratives to spread quickly and reach broad audiences, thereby normalising discrimination.

In Sweden, gendered disinformation follows similar patterns, frequently targeting women's competence and private lives and using sexist language to silence them. This undermines their participation in key public arenas such as politics, journalism, and civil society ([Sjoholm 2024](#); FRA 2025). Although Sweden's high institutional trust makes blatant falsehoods less effective, more subtle and fragmented disinformation remains influential. According to DISA's 2025 analysis, malicious actors often build fake but credible online personas to erode trust and shape debate gradually. As noted in Sweden's 2024 social media guidelines, such misinformation and online hate are reshaping public discourse and societal norms. These shifts reinforce gender stereotypes, particularly among youth, and present a long-term threat to democratic values and inclusive participation ([Genderisonline 2024](#)).



C. LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

1. Violence Against Women: National and International Commitments

Sweden has endorsed key international frameworks on gender-based violence, including the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993), the Istanbul Convention (2014), and the Council of Europe's Gender Equality Strategy (2014–2017), which links online sexist abuse to violence against women (Bladini, 16–17). However, these are mostly non-binding and lack legal enforceability.

Nationally, relevant frameworks include:

- The Swedish Criminal Code (SCC)
- The National Strategy to Combat Men's Violence Against Women
- The 2024 Gender Equality Policy, which highlights online threats against women in public roles

However, none of these explicitly recognise online gender-based abuse as a form of gender-based violence, nor do they address its silencing effect on women's participation in public life (Bladini, 19ff).

2. Legal Gaps in Addressing Online Sexual Violence and Privacy Violations

The Swedish Criminal Code includes provisions that can apply to online abuse, such as sexual molestation, unlawful threats, harassment, defamation, grooming, and breach of privacy (Bladini, 22f).

However, the legal system struggles to address modern forms of digital violence, including non-consensual image sharing and cyberstalking, as existing laws are often outdated (Bladini, 23; Nordisk Samarbete, 44).

Efforts to regulate online abuse are further complicated by Sweden's strong commitment to freedom of expression, which can limit legal action against harmful speech (Bladini, 29–30).

3. Hate Speech Legislation: Gender Still Excluded

Sweden has no specific offence for online hate speech ("näthat"). Such cases are typically prosecuted under general crimes like unlawful threats, harassment (ofredande), or hate speech (hets mot folkgrupp).

However, gender is not included as a protected category in hate speech legislation. Current laws cover hate based on race, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation, but not sex or gender (Edström, 98; Nordisk Samarbete, 52). As a result, misogynistic and sexist abuse cannot be prosecuted as hate crimes, even when severe.

4. European and International Developments

International attention to gendered online abuse is increasing:

- The EU Gender Equality Strategy (2020–2025) identifies online violence as a barrier to women's participation in public life (Morini, 26).
- A proposed EU Directive on Violence Against Women aims to criminalise online sexual harassment (Morini, 31–32).
- The Council of Europe's ECRI Recommendation No. 15 and the 2017 Parliamentary Assembly Resolution explicitly recognise sexist hate speech online as unacceptable and harmful (Morini, 20–22).

These initiatives could lead to future reforms in Swedish law, especially if EU legislation becomes binding.



D. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Legally Recognise Online Gender-Based Abuse as Violence

Amend the Swedish Criminal Code to explicitly recognise online hate speech and harassment targeting women as forms of gender-based violence, aligning with the Istanbul Convention and future EU directives.

2. Include Gender in Hate Crime Legislation

Reform the hate speech and hate crime provisions to include gender and sex as protected categories, ensuring that misogynistic abuse can be prosecuted as a hate crime.

3. Strengthen Protections for Women in Public Roles

Provide enhanced legal and workplace protections for women in media, politics, and activism, including legal aid, crisis support, and institutional reporting mechanisms.

4. Reinterpret Freedom of Speech as Dual Obligation

Promote a balanced understanding of freedom of expression—where protection from censorship coexists with the state’s duty to ensure equal participation and prevent the silencing of vulnerable voices.

5. Enhance Media and AI Accountability

Require social media platforms and AI systems to:

- Detect and suppress gendered disinformation and hate
- Increase transparency around content moderation
- Limit algorithmic amplification of misogynistic content

6. Improve Reporting and Legal Awareness

Invest in training for police and prosecutors to recognise and address digital gender-based violence. Simplify reporting procedures and conduct public campaigns to raise awareness about legal rights and support systems.

7. Address Youth Exposure and Long-Term Norms

Target youth through education and online literacy campaigns that:

- Challenge gender stereotypes
- Promote respectful online behaviour
- Explain the legal and societal harms of online gender-based abuse

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Greece – The Hive P.C



A. GENDER-BASED HATE SPEECH

a. Gender-based hate speech online in the Greek context

Gender-based online abuse is a growing problem in Greece and follows global patterns in which offline patriarchal power imbalances are reproduced and amplified online. Female public figures (politicians, journalists, activists) and women who challenge traditional gender roles receive high volumes of sexualized abuse, threats, doxxing, and humiliating narrative campaigns. This behavior is frequently downplayed as “trolling” or joked about in public discourse, yet it functions as targeted gender-based violence that discourages women’s civic and political participation. Evidence from civil-society monitoring, national research and Ombudsman reporting points to coordinated attacks, frequent use of intimate-image threats, and repeated harassment of women in public life (FRA, 2024).

b. Individual & societal consequences of gender-based hate speech in Greece

- **Silencing & self-censorship:** Women withdraw from online debate or moderate their public presence to avoid sustained harassment, reducing pluralism and diversity in public discourse (FRA, 2024)
- **Psychological & practical harms:** Threats and image-based abuse produce fear that affects personal safety, career decisions and participation in public life.
- **Democratic impact:** Gendered online violence erodes the ability of women to participate equally in democracy and can be instrumentalized by anti-gender movements to push back on policy gains. (EC, A roadmap to women’s rights, 2025)

B. DISINFORMATION

a. (Gender-based) disinformation – overview

Gendered disinformation uses fabricated stories, manipulated images, deepfakes and smear campaigns to attack women’s credibility and to entrench stereotypes (for example, “unfit leader,” “immoral woman,” or false allegations about private life). Such disinformation is often coordinated, amplified by platform algorithms, and weaponized by partisan or extremist networks. These tactics reduce women’s willingness to participate in public life and distort public debates about gender equality (EC, A roadmap to women’s rights, 2025).

b. (Gender-based) disinformation in Greece

In Greece, gendered disinformation targets politicians, journalists, academics and civil-society actors, particularly around polarizing topics (migration, education, LGBTQI+ rights). Fact-checking NGOs and research groups document repeated smear campaigns run through social media and messaging apps that are widely used in Greece. Coordinated anonymous networks and fractionated information tactics make detection and attribution difficult, allowing attacks to persist and spread. (FRA, 2024)

c. Individual & societal consequences of disinformation in Greece

- **Erosion of trust** in institutions and media (FRA, 2024)
- **Reinforcement of conservative gender norms** that undermine equality objectives in national policy (GREEK NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR GENDER EQUALITY 2021-2025)
- **Chilling effect** on women’s civic engagement due to risk of reputational damage and threats.



C. LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

a. International & EU instruments relevant to Greece

- Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe) – Greece ratified the Convention; it entered into force in Greece on 1 October 2018. The Convention explicitly treats violence against women (including some online forms) as a human-rights violation and requires comprehensive state measures. (CoE, 2018)
- EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 – identifies online violence against women and girls as an obstacle to equal participation and contains commitments to address it across EU action areas (EC, A roadmap to women’s rights, 2025).
- EU legislative developments: The Commission proposed an EU Directive to combat violence against women and domestic violence (COM(2022)105), and the European Parliament has since advanced EU-level rules addressing certain online harms (Parliament vote April 2024). These EU processes strengthen national obligations on cyber-GBV and non-consensual image sharing (Proposal for a DIRECTIVE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on combating violence against women and domestic violence, 2022)

b. National (Greek) legal framework – key laws & recent reforms

- **Law 4604/2019** – Substantive gender equality and measures to prevent and combat gender-based violence form a central part of the national policy architecture (GREEK NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR GENDER EQUALITY 2021-2025).
- **National Action Plan for Gender Equality 2021–2025 (NAPGE)** – core national strategy with priority axes that relate to prevention, protection and promotion of gender equality (budgeted and operationalized through ministries and the General Secretariat for Gender Equality) (GREEK NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR GENDER EQUALITY 2021-2025).
- **Criminal law updates & image-based sexual abuse (revenge porn):** Article **346** (image-based sexual abuse/revenge porn) was added to the Penal Code in 2022, upgrading the criminalization of non-consensual sharing of intimate images and reflecting growing recognition of image-based harms.
- **Hate speech & aggravating circumstances:** Greek Criminal Code includes aggravating-circumstance provisions for crimes motivated by race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity, but **gender (sex) as such is not currently listed as a protected motive** in the aggravating-circumstance formulation – a legislative gap with implications for prosecuting gendered online hate. (See consolidated Criminal Code amendments and legal summaries.) (Law N. 4285/2014).

Implementation gaps & enforcement challenges

- Police capacity, judicial familiarity with cyber-GBV and digital evidence handling is uneven; underreporting remains high and conviction rates for digital GBV are low. The National Action Plan acknowledges implementation needs (training, victims’ services), but concrete enforcement and monitoring mechanisms require strengthening (GREEK NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR GENDER EQUALITY 2021-2025).

GAPS IDENTIFIED:

1. **Absence of explicit legal recognition** of gender-based online hate as a standalone motivation for hate crime in national hate-speech frameworks.
2. **Outdated or piecemeal criminal provisions** that insufficiently capture coordinated online harassment and disinformation as gendered violence (Machas & partners, 2024).
3. **Enforcement capacity shortfalls** (police, prosecutors, digital forensics, judicial training) (GREEK NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR GENDER EQUALITY 2021-2025).
4. **Platform accountability and cross-border challenges** (data access, takedown speed, detection of coordinated networks). EU legislative moves help, but national transposition



and operational cooperation lag (Proposal for a DIRECTIVE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on combating violence against women and domestic violence, 2022).

D. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Legislative reform:** Amend criminal-law aggravating-circumstance provisions and hate-speech statutes to explicitly include **gender (sex)** as a protected motive and to cover gendered online attacks. l
- 2. Recognize online gender-based hate as gender-based violence:** Concretely integrate online harassment and gendered disinformation into national definitions of gender-based violence (aligned with Istanbul Convention and EU directives).
- 3. Strengthen and resource a specialized cyber-GBV unit:** Create or enhance a dedicated unit with trained investigators, digital forensics capacity, rapid response and liaison officers for platform cooperation.
- 4. Criminalize & enforce image-based abuse effectively:** Build on the 2022 Penal Code reform (Art. 346) with guidelines for evidence, victim protection, and fast takedown procedures.
- 5. Platform regulation & cooperation:** Require social platforms to implement faster notice-and-action, transparency reports on gendered abuse, and to cooperate with Greek authorities in cross-border investigations, in line with forthcoming/ongoing EU rules.
- 6. Training & capacity building:** Fund nationwide training for police, prosecutors, judges and local authorities on digital evidence, gender sensitivity, and trauma-informed victim support.
- 7. Education & prevention:** Implement school curricula on digital literacy, gender equality and critical media skills; fund awareness campaigns and support services for victims.

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Czech Republic – Business & Professional Women CR z.s.



A. GENDER-BASED HATE SPEECH

a. Gender-based hate speech online in the Czechia context

- Hate speech on social media represents a serious and growing problem in the Czech Republic, with both legal and societal consequences. Czech law addresses it primarily through Section 356 of the Criminal Code (incitement to hatred against a group of persons or restricting their rights and freedoms).

Initiatives and actors:

- A number of institutions actively address hate speech, including the Public Defender of Rights, the Ministry of the Interior, the Czech Police, and non-governmental organizations such as People in Need (Člověk v tísni) and In IUSTITIA. Some private companies also participate in awareness campaigns promoting a safe and respectful online environment.

Legal measures and sanctions:

- Hate speech is punishable under Czech law. In recent years, courts have handled numerous cases and imposed penalties, particularly for incitement to hatred against specific groups. The government and individual ministries are repeatedly urged to implement more effective preventive measures.

B. DISINFORMATION

Another significant issue is the spread of disinformation, especially online and among younger social media users. Surveys show that almost 75% of people aged 18–35 access information from social media several times a week; overall, this applies to 58% of all respondents. Approximately 35% use social media as an information source daily.

Verification of information:

Around 63% of Czechs report that they verify information from social media at least occasionally, with one-third doing so relatively frequently. A similar pattern applies to traditional and online media. Information spread via email is trusted the least—only 50% verify it at least occasionally, while 15% never check it.

Media literacy and vulnerability to disinformation:

According to the Media Literacy Index, the Czech Republic ranks roughly in the middle among European countries. An Ipsos survey (October; 1001 respondents aged 18+) found that most Czechs have believed a piece of disinformation at some point, with over 31% admitting it happened repeatedly. One-fifth of respondents claimed they had never fallen for disinformation.

Experts emphasize that human error is a natural part of processing information. The key question is to what extent responsibility lies with individuals versus the state or other institutions. The foundation, according to experts, is “**information hygiene**”—consciously and critically evaluating sources. The most effective defense against disinformation is not blocking websites or deleting content, but increasing media literacy.

C. LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

The Czech legal system provides a foundation for addressing hate speech and disinformation, though enforcement challenges remain. Section 356 of the Criminal Code criminalizes incitement to hatred against groups based on race, nationality, religion, gender, or other characteristics. Courts have handled numerous cases, and penalties have been imposed in high-profile instances. Nevertheless, NGOs and experts highlight the need for greater clarity in definitions, more consistent judicial application, and stronger preventive measures. For disinformation, while no specific criminal statute exists, regulations increasingly encourage transparency and accountability on social media platforms and the promotion of media literacy initiatives. Coordination between governmental institutions, civil society, and private sector actors remains crucial to effective implementation.

D. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Hate Speech

- Strengthen digital literacy campaigns targeting both youth and adults, focusing on recognizing and reporting harmful online content.
- Enhance legal clarity on the definition of hate speech to support consistent enforcement.
- Reinforce transparency and accountability mechanisms for social media platforms to remove illegal content in line with EU standards.
- Support community-based initiatives fostering dialogue and tolerance among majority and minority groups.
- Implement training programs for law enforcement and judiciary personnel to improve recognition and handling of online hate speech cases.

Disinformation

- Integrate media literacy into school curricula from primary to secondary education to develop critical thinking skills.
- Promote partnerships between government institutions, NGOs, and social media platforms for fact-checking and verification.
- Launch public awareness campaigns emphasizing “information hygiene” and source verification.
- Increase transparency in social media algorithms to reduce amplification of false information.
- Establish rapid response mechanisms for emerging disinformation threats, especially during elections or national crises.

In conclusion, addressing hate speech and disinformation in Czechia requires a comprehensive approach combining legal measures, education, civil society engagement, and private sector collaboration. While current initiatives provide a solid foundation, sustained efforts in digital literacy, institutional accountability, and public awareness are essential to ensure a safe and informed online environment.

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Cyprus – Stando LTD



STANDOUTEDU

1. HATE SPEECH IN CYPRUS

Hate speech remains a significant social and legal challenge in Cyprus, most importantly in the online sphere, where xenophobia, racism, and discrimination circulate largely without consistent enforcement. Cypriot legislation provides for hate speech, based mainly on the Law on Combating Certain Forms and Expressions of Racism and Xenophobia via Computer Systems, L.26 (III)/2004, and provisions of the Criminal Code relating to incitement of violence or hatred against protected groups. Additional protections against sexist hate speech were added with the passing of the Law on Combating Sexism, L. 209(I)/2020.

Initiatives and actors:

A number of institutions are active in the issue of combating hate speech. Examples of these institutions are the Office of the Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights, the Cyprus Police, and the Ministry of Justice. In civil society, organisations such as KISA, the Cyprus Refugee Council, and those under the Cyprus Safer Internet Centre engage in awareness-raising, victim support, and promoting tolerance. Educational institutions and youth organisations also participate in various campaigns of respectful discourse.

Legal measures and sanctions:

Cypriot legislation punishes hate speech in cases of incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence because of race, ethnic origin, religion, sexual orientation, or gender and other characteristics. Depending on the gravity of the offence, courts can hand down penalties ranging from fines to imprisonment. Unfortunately, these legal instruments are inconsistently applied, and the need for more coherent reporting schemes and specialized training for police personnel is often underlined by stakeholders. Indeed, policymakers are regularly called upon to adopt more efficient prevention policies regarding education, awareness, and public engagement.

2. DISINFORMATION IN CYPRUS

The problem of disinformation, and in general, threatening content, has become more visible in Cyprus, especially online through social networks and messaging apps used both by young people and adults. Surveys and media studies show that the majority of Cypriots receive news via social networks several times a week, with a large number of them depending on these platforms as sources of information. The pattern is reflected in findings showing that young people in Cyprus cannot often distinguish whether something is on news or a social-media post. This is an indication of heavy reliance on online sources for information (Knews 2025). Moreover, social media is the dominant place where false information is encountered (74% MDPI, Investigating Online Mis- and/or Disinformation in Cyprus, 2024). The growth of social-media use as a main source of information makes Cyprus an easy target for false narratives, politically motivated misinformation, and viral misleading content.

Verification of information

A study made by MDPI (2024) indicates that, although many respondents try occasionally to verify content, most people do not know about specialized fact-checking tools and only a few apply advanced methods of verification like reverse-image searches. Information passed on through informal channels-private messages or group chats-is generally checked the least, which allows misleading claims to spread more quickly (77% of the respondents reported exposure to misleading content, with many unable to check it) (MDPI, 2024).



Cyprus is situated in the middle tier of European media-literacy rankings, according to the EDMO/MedDMO assessments (2023–2024). These evaluations place the country among those considered moderately vulnerable to disinformation, largely due to gaps in media-education structures and the limited development of national policy frameworks that support digital literacy.

Research also shows that a majority of Cypriots have believed and shared misinformation at least once, with a significant proportion reporting that this has occurred repeatedly. These findings align with regional comparative studies examining misinformation exposure in both Cyprus and Greece, confirming similar vulnerabilities in public information practices (MDPI, Misinformation and Disinformation in the Internet Society, 2025).

Experts consistently emphasize that misinformation exploits natural cognitive biases, not intelligence or education level. Therefore, strengthening public resilience requires systematic educational initiatives, including targeted public-awareness campaigns, structured media-literacy programmes in schools, and community-based workshops. Specialists agree that enhanced media literacy—rather than content removal or blocking—is the most effective long-term defence against disinformation, a position strongly supported by the EDMO/MedDMO recommendations (2024).

3. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Enhance Media Literacy Education for All Age Groups

Introduce structured media-literacy programmes into schools, youth centres, and community spaces. The teaching of citizens to critically analyse online content, to identify misinformation, and to use fact-checking tools is generally considered the most effective long-term defence against disinformation.

2. Enhancing the Reporting and Monitoring Mechanisms for Hate Speech

Create a single, accessible national reporting platform where incidents of hate speech—both online and offline—can be logged, thus enabling the better collection of data, analysis of trends, and targeted interventions.

3. Improved Training for Law Enforcement on Digital Hate Speech

This includes providing specialized training to police and judicial actors in the identification, recording, and prosecution of online hate speech and cyber-harassment, which would foster consistent enforcement, thereby engendering increased public confidence and deterrence.

4. Develop Collaborative Fact-Checking Mechanisms

Encourage cooperation among the universities, independent media, and the Safer Internet Centre for the creation of a Cypriot fact-checking hub, which will provide swift verification during elections, crises, or at periods where the misinformation risk is high.

5. Support victims through accessible assistance services

Expand helplines and psychological/legal support that assure confidentiality. Because confident services mean higher reporting rates and reduce long-term harm, especially for vulnerable groups.

6. Use Public Campaigns to Advocate Responsible Online Conduct

Launch nationwide campaigns to raise awareness on respectful digital communication, the risks of misinformation, and the social consequences of hate speech. It is important to involve influencers, schools, and media to create awareness among wide circles.



7. Improve Platform Accountability and Transparency

Work with social media companies to implement local legal standards for hate speech and harmful content. Promote transparency around algorithmic amplification and require clearer labelling of political content or sponsored information.

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11. Policy Implications

The findings carry significant implications for European, national, and regional policy. First, **digital and media literacy can no longer be regarded as an “add-on” or optional skill**, but must be recognised as a core competence essential for navigating the 21st-century digital environment safely and critically. Youth workers, who often serve as the first line of response to online harm, **frequently lack the guidance, training, and institutional support necessary** to address these challenges effectively, leaving both young people and practitioners vulnerable. Furthermore, current cyber-violence prevention strategies **tend to overlook critical gender and intersectional dimensions**, failing to account for how online harms disproportionately affect marginalised groups or intersect with broader social inequalities. Finally, the absence of **robust monitoring and data-driven evaluation mechanisms** limits the ability of policymakers and practitioners to assess the effectiveness of existing interventions, adapt strategies to emerging risks, and implement evidence-based improvements. Taken together, these gaps highlight an urgent need for coordinated policy approaches that prioritise digital literacy, provide structured support for youth workers, and integrate gender-sensitive, data-informed frameworks into all levels of cyber-violence prevention and response.

The WP4 National Workshops clearly show how well-designed and well-implemented training approaches can have a beneficial effect on youth workers' competencies in dealing with complex topics like gender-based hate speech and mental health in online spaces.

The Swedish workshops have empirical evidence of their impact: high engagement, increased professional confidence, and clear intentions to use the learning outcomes in their practice. Where similar results observed in the other partner countries, WP4 is a successful model for capacity building in youth work.

Crucially, WP4 verifies that online hate speech can in no way be considered in isolation to mental health issues or issues of gender equality. In this way, through its provision of useful skills, reflection spaces, as well as online tools, the ScrollOff project does have a significant part to play in a safer online/offline environment.

12. Recommendations

A. For Policymakers (10 Recommendations)

1. Introduce legislative frameworks distinguishing gender-motivated hate speech.
2. Implement and further develop EU protection standards within the Digital Services Act.
3. Fund long-term digital and media literacy programmes.
4. Strengthen legal support and counselling availability for victims.
5. Develop national strategies for preventing online violence based on data.
6. Introduce mandatory training for school psychologists and social pedagogues.
7. Establish rapid-response teams for online attacks on minors.
8. Support inter-ministerial coordination (education, justice, interior).
9. Create standards for preventive programmes in schools and youth services.
10. Promote cross-border collaboration and data-sharing – encourage cooperation between national and EU-level authorities to track, prevent, and respond to online gender-based disinformation and hate speech effectively

B. For Educational Institutions (9 Recommendations)

1. Strengthen systematic teaching of critical thinking.
2. Introduce school reporting systems for online incidents.
3. Train teachers to address gender stereotypes.
4. Create safe spaces for discussing online harms.
5. Strengthen the role of school psychologists in prevention.
6. Organise workshops with experts from practice.
7. Implement thematic educational modules such as ScrollOff.
8. Integrate digital and media literacy across all subjects
9. Engage parents and caregivers in digital safety education

C. For Youth Workers (10 Recommendations)

1. Use the ScrollOff KeyBook as a methodological guide.
2. Support young people in setting digital boundaries.
3. Provide a safe, non-stigmatizing space for sharing experiences.
4. Teach young people how to safely report online incidents.
5. Work with scenarios and model situations.



6. Develop emotional resilience and critical content evaluation.
7. Identify risky algorithmic behaviour patterns.
8. Monitor online trends using data tools.
9. Cooperate with minority communities.
10. Actively support the self-confidence of young women and LGBTQ+ youth.

D. For Digital Platforms and Tech Companies (8 Recommendations)

1. Improve detection of gender-motivated hate.
2. Ensure transparent reporting on content moderation.
3. Introduce fast-support functions for young users.
4. Clearly label risky or false information.
5. Develop verified databases on gender-related information.
6. Employ human moderators for high-risk languages and regions.
7. Limit recommendation of toxic content.
8. Collaborate with youth-focused organisations.

13. Conclusion

The ScrollOff project demonstrates that gender-based hate and disinformation represent a complex challenge requiring coordinated measures in education, policy, technological design, and youth work. Building a safe digital environment requires long-term investment, political commitment, and cooperation between states, schools, NGOs, and technology platforms.

This policy brief presents concrete steps that governmental institutions and local organisations can implement immediately – to strengthen the resilience of young people, ensure equality, and support democratic debate in online spaces.



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