

Gender-based hate speech and young people: Risks in the digital generation

Young people are among the most active users of digital platforms, but young women and girls are also among the most exposed to gender-based hate speech online. According to Eurostat, over half of young women aged 16–24 in the EU report experiencing online harassment.

On platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and gaming forums, gender-based abuse often takes the form of sexualised comments, body-shaming, and coercive messaging. The anonymity and virality of online environments amplify harm and normalise misogynistic behaviour.

Research indicates that early exposure to online hate can shape young people's perceptions of gender roles and self-worth. Girls subjected to online abuse are more likely to disengage from digital learning spaces and public expression.

The EU addresses this challenge through education and prevention. Erasmus+ projects increasingly integrate digital citizenship, gender equality, and media literacy. These initiatives help young people recognise harmful behaviour, understand their rights, and develop resilience.

Empowering young users is essential. Without early intervention, gender-based hate speech risks becoming a normalized feature of the digital ecosystem.