



European
Commission

erechos fundamentales
Основни права
Cearta bunúsacha
Grundläggande rättigheter

Grondrechten
Direitos fundamentais
Temeljne pravice
Alapvető jogok

Pamattiesības
Základné práva
Prawa podstawowe
Droits fondamentaux
Grundlæggende rettigheder

Pagrindinēs teisēs
Prava podstawowe
Colloquium
Základní práva

Drepturile funda
Drittijiet fu
Θεμελιώδη
Perusoikeudet

Temeljna prava
Põhiõigused

Fundamental rights

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"Women's Rights in Turbulent Times"
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Concept paper by the European Commission

Session I.a: Empowering women's public voices, including online

Aim of the session

This session will examine the underlying mechanisms that fuel misogynistic hate speech especially in the online world. It will look at the impact of misogynistic hate speech on women's voices and choices, be it in the public or business sphere. The session will also look at legal frameworks and best practices to support and protect women who are victims of hate speech and discuss the role of IT companies in these situations. The session will then finally explore avenues to prevent and combat misogynistic hate speech through awareness raising, education and the empowerment of women themselves.

The session takes the form of a roundtable discussion. To enable as many discussants to take the floor as possible, please keep your interventions to 2 minutes.

Issues for discussion

- What is, from your perspective, the most urgent issue to address, and if there was one action you could take to improve the situation, what would it be?
- Is the current response to misogynistic hate speech by different actors sufficient to address the problem (e.g. EU and international institutions, national authorities, IT platforms, civil society organisations and individuals, etc.)?
- What best practices exist for civil society and grassroots movements to counter the occurrence and effects of misogyny against women and how can state actors and businesses support them?
- What more could be done to, on the one hand, support and protect women that are victims of hate speech and, on the other, to prevent and combat misogynistic narratives? What proposals would you recommend for the European Union level, Member States and IT platforms?

Background

Women should be able to fully engage in public and political life and explore the business opportunities in the converged media and information landscape, without resorting to self-censorship because of threats, sexual harassment and misogynistic hate speech. This paper considers the impact of misogyny and hate speech on women's choices and voices, and how the legal and policy framework, best practices and actions of civil society organisations, IT platforms and women themselves can impact women's rights.

The prevalence of misogynistic hate speech

Research shows that hate speech online and offline continues to be a great concern and that girls and women are disproportionately affected (Council of Europe, 2014). The UN Human Rights Council (2013, p.15) has referred to the internet as having become “a site of diverse forms of violence against women, in the form of pornography, sexist games and breaches of privacy”. By way of example, a study of the frequency of threatening messages sent to online accounts, carried out by researchers in the University of Maryland, revealed that accounts with female user names received an average of 100 sexually explicit or threatening messages per day while user accounts with male names only received, on average, 3.7 such messages per day (Demos, 2014, p.3).

In the online world, young female influencers and bloggers but also women who use the internet simply to engage with friends and share content, are frequently subject to threats, hatred and sexual harassment including “slut-shaming” and unsolicited graphic sexual invites (Council of Europe, 2014, p.3). Studies have revealed that as many as 26% of women aged 18-25 years old have been stalked online, with 25% of them having faced online sexual harassment (Council of Europe, 2016, p.7).

Female public figures, including politicians, journalists, athletes, broadcasters and academics, are subject to widespread abuse on a daily basis (FRA, 2017, p.6-9). Female politicians find that their public status multiplies the hate speech they receive (Council of Europe, 2014, p.4 and 2016, p.8). They face threats of violence and rape (FRA, 2017, p.7), and some female journalists and bloggers receive so much harassment that they consider stopping writing altogether (FRA, 2017, p.7, 9 and 10). Recently, numerous women have stepped forward by using social media to denounce experiences of abuse and harassment through campaigns such as “the everyday sexism project”, “Reclaim the internet”, #MeToo or #denoncetonporc.

Ethnicity, faith or sexual orientation are other factors that can heighten the risks women face and can exacerbate their vulnerability due to the likelihood of facing online hate speech on multiple grounds (Council of Europe, 2014, p.4).

Individual and societal effects of misogynistic hate speech online

Misogynistic hate speech may result in psychological and physical violence against women. Misogynistic hate speech aims to belittle, humiliate and scare women, often targeting their reputation, and it can have severe effects on the victim's psychological and emotional well-being (Council of Europe, 2014).

Beyond the immediate traumatic effects of misogynistic hate speech on the victim's sense of security and self-esteem, it also impacts the choices women make. It can dissuade them from engaging in discussions on certain subjects or silence their voices altogether (Council of Europe, 2016, p.8). It can

prevent women from fully participating in public life and in the democratic discourse, on and offline (FRA, 2017, p.7, 9 and 10). Indeed, a Eurobarometer survey (European Commission, 2016) revealed

that 75% of those who follow or participate in debates online have heard, read, seen or experienced cases where abuse, hate speech or threats were directed at journalists/bloggers/people and, out of those, nearly half considered that this made them hesitate to engage in such debates.

Misogynistic hate speech can also make women miss out on business opportunities in the converged media landscape where new forms of entrepreneurship are thriving for those who feel safe to participate.

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