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GENDER 11  
ANTIDISCRIM 10  
JAI 160  
DROIPEN 22  
TELECOM 53  
CYBER 48  
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**NOTE**

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From: General Secretariat of the Council  
To: Delegations  
Subject: Draft Council Conclusions on Preventing and combating cyber violence against girls

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Delegations will find attached a set of draft Council Conclusions on "Preventing and combating cyber violence against girls" prepared by the Cyprus Presidency.

This document will be examined by the Working Party on Social Questions at its meeting on 13 March 2026.

NB. The deadline for written comments will be on Tuesday 17 March (COB).

**Draft Council Conclusions on Preventing and combating cyber violence against girls**

**NOTING THAT**

1. Gender equality and human rights are at the core of European values. Equality between women and men, as well as between girls and boys, is a fundamental right and a founding value of the European Union, enshrined in the Treaties and in the Charter of the Fundamental Rights of the European Union.
2. Article 8 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union provides that “in all its activities, the Union shall aim to eliminate inequalities, and to promote equality, between men and women.”
3. Article 10 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union provides that “in defining and implementing its policies and activities, the Union shall aim to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.”
4. The Charter declares that “equality between women and men must be ensured in all areas” and that “everyone has the right to respect for his or her physical and mental integrity.” Moreover, according to Article 21 of the Charter, “Any discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation shall be prohibited.”
5. Article 24 of the Charter further declares that “children shall have the right to such protection and care as is necessary for their well-being.”
6. The Beijing Platform for Action identifies “Violence against women” (Critical Area of Concern D) as “an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace,” and further states that “violence against women both violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms.”
7. Under Critical Area of Concern L “The girl child”, the Beijing Platform for Action calls on “Governments and, as appropriate, international and non-governmental organizations” to take

appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the girl child, in the household and in society, from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse.

8. Significant progress has been made both at the EU and national level in efforts to combat violence against women and domestic violence, including the adoption of Directive (EU) 2024/1385 on combating violence against women and domestic violence and the EU's accession to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence ("Istanbul Convention"). However, violence remains prevalent and underreported. Full transposition and effective implementation of the Directive is therefore required to address this unacceptable phenomenon, especially measures to prevent and combat cyber violence against girls.
9. The Declaration of Principles for a gender-equal society attached to the European Commission's Roadmap for Women's Rights, which was endorsed by all Member States, lists "Freedom from gender-based violence" as the first principle and declares that "every woman and girl has the right to security and to be treated with dignity, both online and offline, in public and private life." [The Gender Equality Strategy 2026-2030 addresses gender-based violence as one of the key pillars of action.]<sup>1</sup>
10. In its recent Conclusions on "Violence against women and domestic Violence: prevention, early detection and intervention," the Council notes that "violence against women and domestic violence are rooted in historical and structural inequality in power relations between women and men, including sexism. They are forms of gender-based violence inflicted primarily on women and girls by men." Preventing and combating such violence is a societal responsibility.
11. Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 (Digital Services Act, hereinafter "DSA") aims to create a safer online environment for users in the Union, with a set of rules, notably, obliging the very large online platforms (VLOP) or very large online search engines (VLOSE) to mitigate systemic risks, including the dissemination of illegal content, gender-based violence and negative effects for the exercise of fundamental rights. It also obliges the VLOPs and VLOSEs to take

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<sup>1</sup> Paragraph to be completed after the adoption of the Strategy.

mitigation measures to protect the rights of the child, including, for example, the use of age verification and parental control tools.

12. Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 (the “AI Act”) recognizes the risks and challenges associated with the use of Artificial Intelligence, including the need to regulate AI systems that generate or manipulate “deep fakes,” and specifically notes that “depending on the circumstances regarding its specific application, use, and level of technological development, AI may generate risks and cause harm to public interests and fundamental rights that are protected by Union law. Such harm might be material or immaterial, including physical, psychological, societal or economic harm.”
13. Directive 2012/29/EU (“Victims’ Rights Directive”) establishes minimum standards for the rights, support and protection of all victims of crimes, including child victims of cyberviolence.
14. Directive 2018/1808/EU (“Audiovisual Media Services Directive”) defines harmful content for minors as content that may impair the physical, mental, or moral development of minors. Examples of the most harmful content provided in the Directive include pornography and gratuitous violence. Such harmful content must not be made accessible to minors through broadcasting services, on-demand services, and video-sharing platforms.
15. The Commission Recommendation (EU) 2024/1238 on developing and strengthening integrated child protection systems calls on Member States to ensure coordinated, child-centred and multidisciplinary responses to all forms of violence against children, including cyberviolence against girls.
16. Children are particularly vulnerable to online exploitation and especially sexual exploitation, with girls being most affected. In 2024, 26% of victims of sexual exploitation were children, with the vast majority being girls (24%). Directive 2024/1712/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims broadens the scope of trafficking offences, criminalises the knowing use of services provided by victims of trafficking, and strengthens victim support and cross-border cooperation. Moreover, it further enhances the response to action against online recruitment and exploitation.
17. Cyber violence against women and girls (CVAWG) encompasses a broad spectrum of different forms of online harm, including stalking, bullying, sexual harassment, defamation,

illegal hate speech and various forms of exploitation. Recital 6 of Directive 2024/1385/EU recognises that such violence can be exacerbated when a person is subject to intersectional discrimination based on a combination of sex and any other ground or grounds of discrimination as referred to in Article 21 of the Charter. Cyberviolence predominantly affects women and girls, with certain demographic groups experiencing disproportionate exposure and targeting, including those mentioned in Recital 71 of Directive 2024/1385/EU. However, men and boys can also be victims of cyberviolence. Perpetrators of cyberviolence may act individually, in coordinated groups, or through organized networks, leveraging digital platforms such as social media, instant messaging applications, email, telecommunication channels and other online infrastructures to perpetrate these acts.

18. Increasingly, CVAWG is recognized as part of a broader continuum of violence that spans both online and offline behaviours, reflecting the interconnected nature of digital and real-world abuse. Empirical studies reveal a significant overlap between cyber violence and offline abuse; for instance, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) reports that 70% of victims of cyber harassment and stalking in the EU have also experienced intimate partner violence (FRA, 2014).
19. Within the European Union, CVAWG has emerged as a rapidly proliferating form of gender-based violence that has a particularly pronounced impact on adolescents. As digital communication becomes increasingly integrated into the social fabric of young people's lives, online environments play a pivotal role in shaping interpersonal relationships.
20. According to EIGE's study entitled "From Lived Reality to Policy Action: Combatting Cyber Violence Against Girls in the EU", cyber violence has become a routine aspect of girls' and young women's digital and social lives, with clear age-related patterns. Younger adolescents (13–15) are more likely to encounter exclusion, gossiping and body shaming, whereas older girls (16–18) are disproportionately subjected to sexualized forms of abuse, including sextortion, grooming and non-consensual image sharing. Notably, younger adolescents are increasingly exposed to sexualized and coercive forms of online abuse, which suggests the widening reach and normalization of digital violence across age groups.
21. EIGE's study also shows a clear disconnect between prevention efforts and adolescents' lived experiences. Girls report frustration with school campaigns and institutional responses, describing them as outdated and irrelevant to their digital realities. Adults often minimize the

impact of online harm, leaving young people feeling isolated and invalidated. Inconsistent institutional responses, breaches of confidentiality and the absence of clear support pathways further erode trust. Structural barriers such as fear of gossip in small communities exacerbate the problem, discouraging reporting and leaving many adolescents without adequate protection.

22. The EU has progressively strengthened its regulatory framework to address cyber violence, drawing on a wide range of legal and policy instruments. This evolution reflects a growing awareness of the vulnerabilities experienced by women and girls, shaped by intersecting factors such as age, disability, ethnicity and socioeconomic status. However, definitions of cyber violence vary across jurisdictions, enforcement mechanisms are uneven and victim support services are inconsistently available across Member States. Moreover, the rapid emergence of new forms of online harm—including AI-enabled abuse—continues to challenge the capacity of existing regulatory frameworks to keep pace.
23. Cyber violence against girls is deeply embedded within broader social structures, prevailing gender norms and peer dynamics, and is amplified by the expansion and rapid evolution of the digital sphere. It is not merely the result of individual behaviours but is shaped by systemic inequalities that render certain groups more vulnerable. It cannot be adequately addressed in isolation from broader social, cultural and institutional contexts. Moving forward, coordinated, intersectional and youth-centred approaches are essential for ensuring meaningful prevention, protection and accountability across the EU.

**THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION CALLS ON THE MEMBER STATES, in accordance with their respective competences, TO:**

24. Take steps to prevent and address cyber violence against girls, by:
  - a) promoting, within the larger context of digital well-being, gender-responsive digital literacy and a culture of digital self-care in schools encompassing topics such as identity, digital footprints, online safety and disinformation detection;
  - b) promoting regular “digital safety screenings” for students and educators;
  - c) addressing gender stereotypes and sexist gender norms, accountability, harmful notions of masculinity and risks of harmful peer pressure;

- d) offering bystander intervention training in education and youth programmes;
  - e) collaborating with child rights organisations, youth-led organisations and community organisations, using participatory approaches and co-designing materials addressing cyber violence, sexual abuse and exploitation, as well as the problem of victim-blaming, in age-appropriate style and format;
  - f) promoting peer-led support spaces for discussing harassment and healthy digital relationships;
  - g) developing programmes for boys that challenge sexist norms and promote healthy notions of masculinity, respect and the principle of consent in sexual relationships;
  - h) empowering girls, including through age-appropriate education, peer-led initiatives and participatory approaches, to strengthen their digital agency, self-confidence and capacity to recognise, resist and report cyber violence;
  - i) ensuring that women and girls with intersectional needs benefit from specific measures of prevention, support and protection;
  - j) improving the protection of girls against online exploitation in the context of trafficking in human beings, by promoting closer coordination between the private sector and law enforcement, and working to detect and identify human trafficking activities earlier, with an emphasis on online recruitment and exploitation, while also promoting awareness raising among potential perpetrators and victims in order to prevent online trafficking; and
  - k) strengthening and further developing integrated child protection systems, in line with Commission Recommendation (EU) 2024/1238, to ensure coordinated, child-centred and multidisciplinary prevention of and response to cyberviolence against women and girls, through effective cooperation, clear referral pathways and information-sharing between education, child protection, social and health services, law enforcement and the judiciary, in full respect of the best interest of the child and data protection rules.
25. Improve regulation and enforcement, by:
- a) strengthening victim-centred support services by prioritizing family engagement, accessible support services and professional capacity building based on a targeted and integrated multi-agency approach;

- b) providing trauma-informed care, mental health support and legal assistance, in line with standards on child-friendly justice;
- c) building the professional capacity of frontline workers, including educators, social workers, law enforcement officers, judicial actors and healthcare providers, by providing them with expertise regarding cyber violence and platform-specific abuse patterns, and by making them aware of their roles within integrated child protection systems;
- d) establishing national technical assistance points and ensuring sustainable funding for civil society organisations in order to strengthen prevention and response efforts, including addressing emerging risks such as generative AI deepfakes;
- e) supporting families and educators in early identification and timely intervention in order to create a proactive and protective environment for children and young people, including clear procedures for reporting, referral, risk assessment and follow-up across relevant services, through an integrated child protection approach;
- f) ensuring that measures to improve regulation and enforcement cater for the specific needs of women and girls experiencing intersectional discrimination;
- g) providing parents and caregivers with practical digital parenting guidance allowing them to detect and address online abuse at an early stage. Schools could be required to implement clear protocols for responding to technology-facilitated abuse, to define and enforce consequences for perpetrators and to raise awareness of civil legal remedies available to victims, thereby ensuring timely intervention and accountability; and
- h) encouraging civil society, researchers, educational institutions and technology companies to cooperate and to share best practices for prevention and response.

**CALLS ON THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND THE MEMBER STATES, in accordance with their respective competences, and involving the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) where appropriate, TO:**

26. Require relevant economic actors such as online platforms to follow a data protection by default and by design and safety-by-design approach in order to prevent misuse and to invest in detection and deterrence tools such as pop-up warnings and image-based detection.

27. Require relevant economic actors such as online platforms to moderate harmful trends, especially those targeting girls and LGBTI youth, including those from racial, ethnic or religious minorities, while fully respecting freedom of expression.
28. Require relevant economic actors such as online platforms to link victim reporting mechanisms to technical infrastructures that enable cross-platform blocking and victim support mechanisms.
29. Ensure that data collection reflects the diversity of victims' experiences, which is critical for evidence-based policymaking. As outlined in Article 44 of Directive 2024/1385, continue, in collaboration with EIGE, to collect data on all forms of gender-based violence, including cyber violence, disaggregated by sex, age, ethnicity, disability and socioeconomic status. Take steps to ensure that research and data collection capture the specific experiences of groups facing intersecting forms of discrimination, so as to facilitate inclusive and effective policy responses.
30. Invest in long-term, evidence-based research in order to understand the evolving nature and consequences of cyber violence. Support long-term studies examining the psychological, social and economic impacts of cyber violence against girls, so as to facilitate the improvement of prevention measures, victim support services and policy development at both national and EU levels.
31. Take utmost account of the findings and recommendations of the newly established EU expert panel on social media.
32. Continue discussions and the exchange of best practice on the prevention of cyberviolence, including through the EU network on the prevention of gender-based and domestic violence established by the European Commission in 2023.

**CALLS ON THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION TO:**

33. Fully implement its Action Plan Against Cyberbullying, with particular attention to the measures aimed at tackling cyberbullying against women and girls, including those at risk of intersectional discrimination.

34. Issue periodic monitoring reports on cyber violence, based on Member State data collection obligations under the VAW Directive.
35. Continue supervising and enforcing the DSA including the provisions that apply to Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs) and Very Large Online Search Engines (VLOSEs) in the area of illegal content and gender-based violence such as provisions concerning risk mitigation measures including age verification and parental control tools and tools aimed at helping minors signal abuse or obtain support.
36. Promote the use of the information that is to be made available under the transparency reporting and data access rules set out in the DSA by researchers, civil society and other stakeholders in order to develop a better understanding of how gender-based violence manifests in the online world.
37. Support the work of “trusted flaggers,” which are expert entities whose notices of illegal content must be prioritised in accordance with the rules set out in the DSA, including in the area of gender-based violence.
38. Provide age-appropriate information and support on countering and reporting cyber violence against girls via the better internet for kids (BIK) portal and the Safer Internet Centres.
39. Support the implementation of integrated child protection systems across Member States, including in relation to the prevention of and response to cyber violence against girls, and facilitate the exchange of good practice concerning such systems at the EU level.

## References

### 1. EU Legislation

Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation). OJ L 119, 4.5.2016, pp. 1–88.

Directive (EU) 2018/1808 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 November 2018 amending Directive 2010/13/EU on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the provision of audiovisual media services (“Audiovisual Media Services Directive”) in view of changing market realities. OJ L 303, 28.11.2018, pp. 69–92.

Directive (EU) 2019/882 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on the accessibility requirements for products and services (“European Accessibility Act”) OJ L 151, 7.6.2019, pp. 70–115.

Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act). OJ L 277, 27.10.2022, pp. 1–102.

Directive (EU) 2024/1385 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on combating violence against women and domestic violence. OJ L, 2024/1385, 24.5.2024, pp. 1-36.

Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence and amending Regulations (EC) No 300/2008, (EU) No 167/2013, (EU) No 168/2013, (EU) 2018/858, (EU) 2018/1139 and (EU) 2019/2144 and Directives 2014/90/EU, (EU) 2016/797 and (EU) 2020/1828 (Artificial Intelligence Act). OJ L, 2024/1689, 12.7.2024, pp. 1-144.

Directive (EU) 2024/1712 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 amending Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims.

## 2. Council

Council Conclusions on the Eradication of Violence Against Women in the European Union (Doc. 6585/10)

Council Conclusions on LGBTI equality (Doc. 10417/16)

Council Conclusions on the Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Gender Equality in the Labour Market (Doc. 14750/21)

Council Conclusions on the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child. (Doc. 10024/22)

Council Conclusions on Mainstreaming a Gender Equality Perspective in Policies, Programmes, and Budgets (Doc. 9684/23)

Council Conclusions on the Economic Empowerment and Financial Independence of Women as a Pathway to Substantive Gender Equality (Doc. 9752/24)

Council Conclusions on the Future of Cybersecurity: implement and protect together (Doc. 10133/24)

Council Conclusions on Strengthening Women's and Girls' Mental Health by Promoting Gender Equality (Doc.16366/24)

Council Conclusions on Advancing Gender Equality in the AI-Driven Digital Age: 6th horizontal review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action by the Member States and the EU institutions (Doc. 9984/25)

Council Conclusions on Violence against Women and Domestic Violence: Prevention, Early Detection and Intervention (Doc. 14029/25)

## 3. Eurostat, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) and European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)

EU gender-based violence survey (2024)

#### 4. **European Commission**

EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child, COM (2021) 142 final

Commission Recommendation (EU) 2024/1238 of 23 April 2024 on developing and strengthening integrated child protection systems in the best interests of the child

Roadmap for Women's Rights. (Doc. 6756/25. Commission reference: COM(2025) 97 final)

[Gender Equality Strategy 2026-2030 COM(2026) XXX]<sup>2</sup>

Anti-Racism Strategy 2026-2030, COM(2026) 12 final

LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy 2026-2030, COM(2025) 725 final

EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation, COM(2020) 620 final

EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 COM(2021) 101 final

Action Plan Against Cyberbullying, COM(2026) 71 final

#### 5. **European Parliament**

European Parliament resolution of 14 December 2021 with recommendations to the Commission on combating gender-based violence: cyberviolence (2020/2035(INL))

European Parliament resolution of 28 April 2016 on gender equality and empowering women in the digital age (2015/2007(INI))

#### 6. **European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)**

“From lived reality to policy action: Combatting cyber violence against girls in the EU”. (2025)

“Tackling cyber violence against women and girls: The role of digital platforms”. (2024)

“Combating cyber violence against women and girls”. (2022)

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<sup>2</sup> Reference to be completed after the adoption of the Strategy.

7. **European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)**

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8. **United Nations**

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Cybersafe Project. (2020). Cyber Violence Against Women and Girls: Report on Research Findings and Framework. University of Ljubljana. Funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014–2020).

9. **Council of Europe**

Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence CETS-No. 210

Guidelines of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on child-friendly justice