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2023 Roadmap for the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse

FACT SHEET

OFFICE OF THE SPOKESPERSON

MARCH 28, 2023

The **Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse** (Global Partnership) is a commitment from the first Summit for Democracy, and an action coalition of the Denmark **Tech for Democracy** initiative. It was established in response to the pivotal need to address technology-facilitated gender-based violence as part of a shared global agenda to promote peace, security, and stability – recognizing that the chilling effects of online harassment and abuse on the civic and political participation of women, girls, and LGBTQI+ persons undermine this agenda.

Formally launched at the 66th Commission on the Status of Women in March 2022, the Global Partnership has grown to 12 countries that together have committed to prioritize, understand, prevent, and address the growing scourge of technology-facilitated gender-based violence. It works with a multistakeholder Advisory Group composed of survivors, leaders, and experts from civil society, research and academia, the private sector, and international organizations.

Background

The digital world holds immense potential to amplify the voices of women, girls, and LGBTQI+ persons. At the same time, social media platforms and other digital technologies have given rise to new forms and manifestations of gender-based violence through their misuse. These technologies have exacerbated pre-existing forms of gender-based violence through their scale, speed, and reach, much behind the cover of anonymity alongside insufficient legal, regulatory, and policy mechanisms to stop it.

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence is a subset of gender-based violence that describes any act that is committed, assisted, aggravated, or amplified by the use of information communication technologies or other digital tools, that results in or is likely to result in harm, or other infringements of rights and freedoms. Some forms of technology-facilitated gender-based violence are criminal; others are not, but are nonetheless harmful. The prevalence of technology-facilitated gender-based violence can be higher among women and girls who experience multiple and intersecting discriminations and oppressions due to sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, and sex characteristics; race and ethnicity; age; socioeconomic status; caste; nationality; disability; religion; and citizenship or refugee status. Technology-facilitated gender-based violence can transcend national borders, and can be an added dimension of violence in political and ethnic conflict. Meaningful efforts for protection, prevention, survivor support, and accountability require global, transnational, and multi-sectoral action and coordination.

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence prevents women, girls, and LGBTQI+ persons from fully enjoying their human rights and fundamental freedoms, and impedes their participation in economic, social, cultural, and political affairs, creating an intractable barrier to the achievement of gender equality. While recovery and healing are always possible, survivors and victims can experience psychological distress, trauma, long-term mental health impacts, physical and sexual violence, exploitation, and, in some cases, homicide or suicide. In individuals' private lives, technology-facilitated gender-based violence can take the form of intimate-partner violence, stalking, financial abuse, or workplace harassment. At the societal level, anti-democratic forces – both state and non-state malign actors – increasingly misuse and exploit technology to lead gendered disinformation campaigns against women in public life, including politicians, activists, and journalists. These campaigns have a chilling effect on women's political participation and put at risk hard-fought progress on women's rights, human rights, and democracy around the world.

Progress in the First Year of Action & 2023 Commitments

The Global Partnership focuses its work on three strategic objectives, based on shared commitments to advance national, regional, and multilateral policies; scale programming and resources; and strengthen the evidence base for preventing and responding to technology-facilitated gender-based violence. At the second Summit for Democracy, the Global Partnership is announcing the following accomplishments, actions, and priorities in furtherance of our key objectives:

Develop and advance shared principles.

In the first year of action, the Global Partnership advanced its shared principles through issuing and shaping joint statements in support of women **journalists** and the **women and girls in Iran** demanding respect for their human rights and fundamental freedoms. Global Partnership members, in close coordination with like-minded governments, contributed to and strengthened language on technology-facilitated gender-based violence throughout a range of multilateral policy instruments and fora, including the **G7 Media Ministers Meeting Communiqué**, UN General Assembly Third Committee resolution on **“Intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: gender stereotypes and negative social norms,”** UN Human Rights Council resolutions on **“Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls,”** and **“Freedom of opinion and expression,”** as well as in policy-related statements issued by the **Christchurch Call** and the **Freedom Online Coalition**.

In 2023, member countries intend to pursue opportunities to integrate a rights-based, intersectional, and gender-transformative lens in addressing technology-facilitated gender-based violence and gendered disinformation in relevant national strategies and action plans, such as those related to cybersecurity, Women, Peace, and Security, and gender-based violence, as well as in regional and multilateral fora.

Increase targeted programming and resources.

In the first year of action, member countries maintained, grew, and developed support for domestic, regional, and global programs addressing technology-facilitated gender-based violence, and contributed to knowledge sharing among the Global Partnership on examples of good practice programming.

In 2023, to increase targeted programming and resources, member countries will aim to develop, support, and aim to scale programs that work to prevent and respond to technology-facilitated gender-based violence, building the capacity of civil society and supporting good practice, including by jointly funding member country programs and commissioning the development of evaluation guidance. Drawing on a review of the evidence and data completed in the first year of action, the Global Partnership will prioritize multistakeholder programming that is survivor-centered, rights-based, trauma-informed, intersectional, and gender-transformative.

Expand reliable, comparable data and access to it.

In the first year of action, the Global Partnership, along with UN Women, co-hosted an **interdisciplinary research dialogue** at Wilton Park to lay the foundation for establishing reliable, comparable global and regional data to measure technology-facilitated gender-based violence and its effects. The Global Partnership also worked to advance global consensus definitions and metrics with UN Women and the World Health Organization (WHO) as part of the expert group meeting on developing a common definition for technology-facilitated gender-based violence, and partnered with UNICEF, UN Women, the WHO, UNFPA, and the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) to facilitate the inclusion of metrics on technology-facilitated gender-based violence across relevant survey instruments and data collection tools. In support of these efforts, representatives from the United Kingdom and the United States delivered a joint statement at the 54th UN Statistical Commission on the **need for global consensus** for a taxonomy and survey tools to measure technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

In 2023, to continue to expand reliable, comparable data and access to it, the Global Partnership intends to release a preliminary assessment on a research agenda for technology-facilitated gender-based violence with new commitments on data and research. Initial findings from the report, *Towards a Research Agenda for Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence – A Preliminary Assessment*, **previewed here**, will also inform a new resourcing strategy that will expand participatory, community-based research on technology-facilitated gender-based violence in the Global South.

Thematic Priorities for 2023

In 2023, the Global Partnership will continue to focus on delivering concrete results across all three of its strategic objectives, and deepen engagement on three priority areas:

- 1. Closing the gender digital divide by promoting online safety, accountability, and meaningful connectivity.** In an increasingly digitized economy, promoting women's, girls', and LGBTQI+ persons' safe and secure access to information and communications technology is essential for achieving gender equity and equality. Preventing and responding to technology-facilitated gender-based violence, is key to facilitating an enabling environment for women, girls, and LGBTQI+ persons to fully participate and succeed in the digital economy and achieve economic security – all essential components of closing the gender digital divide. The Global Partnership will focus part of its work on increasing women and girls' access and meaningful use of digital technologies as part of comprehensive efforts to promote a digital economy that prioritizes safe, inclusive, accountable and secure online spaces. These include an emphasis on safety by design approaches to prevent technology-facilitated gender-based violence from being a key barrier to economic development and growth, enabling women and girls, in all their diversity, to benefit from the digital economy.
- 2. Promoting meaningful participation in public life for women and girls, in all their diversity, by countering technology-facilitated gender-based violence and gendered disinformation.** Women, girl, and LGBTQI+ political and public figures, peacebuilders, human rights defenders, activists, and journalists are uniquely targeted by technology-facilitated gender-based violence, which can impede their meaningful participation in political, public, and economic life. State and non-state actors, including extremist groups and individuals, are increasingly and deliberately engaging in online harassment and abuse, including **gendered disinformation** and hate speech, to silence leaders, and suppress democratic movements. Online violence– which is a critical issue in itself – can precede and carry over into physical settings and can follow women into their homes and communities. At a time of unprecedented global challenges to the progress made on the rights of women, girls, and LGBTQI+ persons, the Global Partnership will work to elevate the promotion and protection of human rights and firmly ground technology-facilitated gender-based violence as a threat to global peace and security, and a contributing factor to democratic backsliding.
- 3. Elevating youth voices, expertise, and experience in preventing and addressing technology-facilitated gender-based violence, and promoting online safety.** Children and young people are using social media and online platforms more than ever before. While there are many benefits of digital technology, online platforms and services that do not have

sufficient safeguards can put young people more at risk of exposure to online harms – including technology-facilitated gender-based violence – which disproportionately impacts girls and LGBTQI+ youth. Young men and boys also face unique vulnerabilities online as they can be radicalized, extorted, and exposed to harmful ideologies through gender-based hate online. Recognizing the significant impacts of technology-facilitated gender-based violence, harassment and abuse on children and youth, the Global Partnership will integrate and prioritize the voices, expertise, and experiences of children and young people across each of our objectives.

Working in Coalition with Stakeholders and Related Initiatives

As a multistakeholder initiative, the Global Partnership works with an Advisory Group comprising over 20 survivors, experts, and leaders from civil society, research and academia, and the private sector. This Advisory Group helps inform, qualify, and guide the activities and outputs of the Global Partnership, and is coordinated by a Steering Committee of international organizations and a civil society representative, led by UN Women, UNICEF, UNFPA, and the Association for Progressive Communications.

The Global Partnership will continue to engage with civil society, recognizing its expertise and leadership – often through lived experience – to carry out the Global Partnership’s work in a manner that is transparent and consistent with a free, open and secure internet and respect for international human rights law. The Global Partnership will also continue to support opportunities for constructive and action-oriented dialogue with the private sector, including technology companies, to promote safety by design, encourage interoperable solutions to addressing online harassment, abuse, and disinformation and strengthen transparency and accountability. It will also facilitate multistakeholder engagement through the Advisory Group, with a particular focus on inclusive discourse across online platforms and services of all sizes.

The Global Partnership works in tandem with parallel multistakeholder efforts to promote internet freedom, digital inclusion, human rights, prevent and address child sexual exploitation and abuse online, and counter terrorism, and violent extremism, elevating and deepening these efforts to address shared roots with gender inequality and online misogyny, harassment, and abuse, including the **Christchurch Call** , the **Freedom Online Coalition** , and the **Generation Equality Action Coalitions** .

Membership

The Global Partnership is growing its membership and open to additional countries who have demonstrated a strong commitment to preventing and addressing technology-facilitated gender-based violence in their national and foreign policies. It is a coalition of like-minded governments that refrain from and oppose the spread of gendered disinformation or any other form of technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

Current members of the Global Partnership include Australia, Canada, Chile, Denmark, Iceland, Kenya, Mexico, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

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Gendered Disinformation: Tactics, Themes, and Trends by Foreign Malign Actors

GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT CENTER

MARCH 27, 2023

This bulletin is also available in **Arabic, Chinese, French, Persian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Ukrainian,** and **Urdu**

Gendered disinformation is a subset of misogynistic abuse and violence against women that uses false or misleading gender and sex-based narratives, often with some degree of coordination, to deter women from participating in the public sphere. Both foreign state and non-state actors strategically use gendered disinformation to silence women, discourage online political discourse, and shape perceptions toward gender and the role of women in democracies. In a groundbreaking study, Canada, the European External Action Service (EEAS), Germany, Slovakia, the United Kingdom, and the United States jointly assessed the tactics used by these actors to sow gendered and other identity-based disinformation across the world. Key findings from this report are detailed below.

Perpetrators of gendered disinformation targeting women comprise both foreign state and non-state actors, including Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC).

Foreign state actors utilize their media assets, control of the information environment, and sometimes state-backed troll farms to spread disinformation about women politicians, policy makers, journalists, and activists, and even policies targeted at women.

Disinformation is often targeted toward women with intersecting identities. Our research captured 13 unique themes of gendered disinformation that include the wide use of gendered stereotypes, hyper-sexualization, and political targeting of women to shame and discredit them. Perpetrators use a combination of identity-based and political themes, revealing that disinformation can target any vector of a person's identity to discredit and shame either them and/or their communities.

Perpetrators most often disseminate gendered disinformation through coordinated social media activity that is either spontaneous or pre-mediated across multiple platforms. In many cases, abuse initiated by foreign state actors spurred further online gendered disinformation by social media users. Foreign state actors use false materials to spread disinformation (such as doctored or misleading images or videos) in addition to media articles, memes, bespoke hashtags, public statements by politicians or other influential people, and even manga cartoons.

Foreign state actors mobilize gendered disinformation to target a variety of individuals, groups, and legislation. When individual politicians, journalists, and activists are targeted, they may decide to leave their jobs or stop speaking out online as a result. When legislation is targeted, the underpinning public and political consensus can be reduced, sometimes leading to policy reversals. Beyond the harm caused by the abuse itself to the victims and survivors, which also include psychological distress, trauma, long-term mental health impacts, and physical and sexual violence, narratives also include threats of violence and rape, and physical calls to action outside the online sphere, whilst simultaneously posing a threat to democracy.

The ultimate goal of gendered and identity-based disinformation is to discourage the exercise of freedom of expression and undermine democracy. Both foreign state and non-state actors strategically target women and people with intersecting identities. One goal of this strategy is to dissuade individuals from practicing their freedom to express and uphold beliefs and ideals that contradict their adversaries' beliefs. A second goal is to dissuade members of broader identity-based groups from exercising their rights. This strategy threatens democracy by undermining the ability to access impartial, fact-based information, and it negatively impacts the make-up of democratic representation.

Our research underscores the importance of using a gender and identity-based lens to analyze the tactics used by foreign state and non-state actors to spread gendered disinformation that deliberately polarizes attitudes, sows division, and undermines social cohesion. The spread of

gendered disinformation harms not only the targeted individuals, but also democracy. The critical nature of the subject matter requires further investigation, particularly in understanding the use of gendered disinformation in Africa and Latin America; the evolving tactics of state actors; and Russia's use of misogynistic narratives in Europe; in addition to furthering understanding of communications responses and interventions that can be used to counter gendered disinformation. To inform our collective responses most effectively, we must continue to not only study gendered disinformation tactics and their impacts on targeted communities, but also partner across countries invested in preserving democracy to share findings, deepen the evidence base, and inform policy to tackle this scourge.

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