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BRIEF ON

Digital Violence in the Arab States: Overview and Legal Good Practices

UN WOMEN

FOR ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS

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BRIEF ON

DIGITAL VIOLENCE IN THE ARAB STATES: OVERVIEW AND LEGAL GOOD PRACTICES

Ending Violence Against Women (EVAW)
UN Women Regional Office for the Arab States
Egypt, November 2025

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DIGITAL VIOLENCE OVERVIEW

What is technology-facilitated violence against women and girls?

Violence against women and girls continues to be the most widespread human right violation globally, with serious impacts on women and girls' health and lives. Over the past years, rapid technological developments have amplified the issue, creating additional forms and patterns of violence, and expanding the reach of perpetrators into digital spaces.

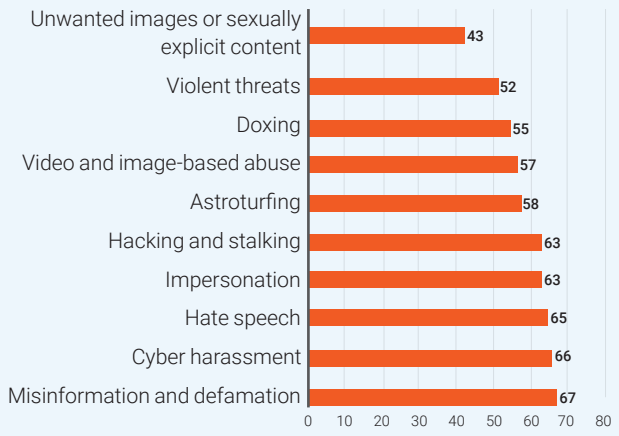
Technology-facilitated VAWG refers to "any act that is committed, assisted, aggravated, or amplified by the use of information communication technologies or other digital tools, that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological, social, political, or economic harm, or other infringements of rights and freedoms". Other terms, such as digital or online violence, are also commonly used.

Understanding emerging forms of violence and trends:

Technological progress has both expanded existing forms of violence against women and girls such as sexual harassment, stalking, hate speech, misinformation, defamation, and impersonation, and created new forms of abuse such as hacking, astroturfing, video and image-based abuse including deepfakes, doxing, cyberbullying, and online grooming among others.

Main forms of digital violence globally according to the Report of the Secretary General on the Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls (2024)

BOX 1



BOX 2

Doxing is the act of sharing someone's personal information online. It can lead to real-life consequences such as stalking, threats, and even physical violence.

Deepfake abuse means manipulated images or videos of someone published online can then result in offline reputational damage with lasting and devastating effects on a person's life. According to Sensity AI, 90 to 95 per cent of all online deepfakes are non-consensual pornographic images with around 90 per cent of these depicting women.

Astroturfing refers to the artificial or false impression of widespread support for an idea. It can be used to spread disinformation, orchestrate harassment campaigns or discredit women in public life.

The **"manosphere"** is a decentralized cross-platform collection of online communities of misogynistic men that amplifies sexist stereotypes in popular, shareable formats that gain traction at scale with limited accountability given the perpetrators' anonymity.

The Report of the Secretary General on the Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls (2024) highlights that technology tools are increasingly used as part of a continuum of recurring, and interrelated forms of violence across online and offline spaces. The unique features of digital spaces, such as speed, accessibility, and lack of accountability, enable violence to spread at scale with a sense of impunity. Three main emerging challenges have been identified:

- Anti-rights actors are increasingly using online spaces to pushback against women's rights. This is creating a hostile digital environment for women and girls, particularly marked by cyberbullying, harassment, and threats of violence targeting women human rights defenders, women's rights activists, and women engaged in public life. This phenomenon is serving to silence

women's voices and undermine their participation in public discourse.

- The growth of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has serious implications for VAWG. AI is intensifying digital violence against women and girls both by facilitating the spread of targeted disinformation, and the proliferation of image-based abuse and deepfake pornographic videos.
- Technology is reinforcing misogynist norms. Like all forms of violence against women and girls, digital violence is rooted in inequality between women and men and discriminatory norms. Increasingly, evidence shows that online spaces are amplifying these inequalities by fueling misogyny and further entrenching violence against women and girls.

Magnitude and impact of digital violence against women and girls globally and regionally

Studies globally indicate concerningly high rate of digital violence, in particular against young women and women with public visibility:

- Digital violence against women and girls starts at a very young age as most girls report their first experience of social media harassment between 14 and 16 years old.
- The global prevalence of digital violence against women and girls ranges from 16% to 58%. The difference can be explained by the different methodologies used and lack of common definition until recently.
- Young women and women with public visibility, journalists, politicians, and activists are more at risk of attacks in the digital space.

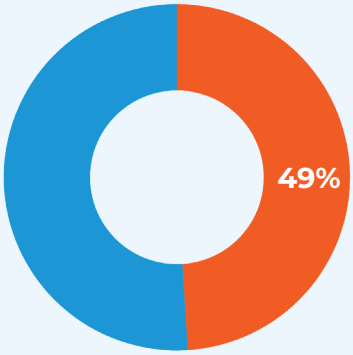
Magnitude and impact of digital violence against women and girls in the Arab States

According to a study published by UN Women on Violence Against Women in the Online Space in the Arab States in 2022, data on the magnitude and impact of digital violence are alarming.

- In the Arab States, 49% of women internet users reported they do not feel safe from online harassment.

BOX 3

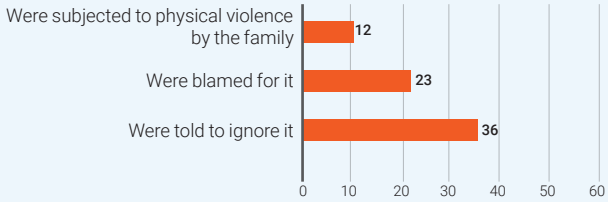
Proportion of women internet users who reported not feeling safe from online harassment



- Exposure to online violence is usually not limited to a single incident. Among women who have experienced online violence, 44 % said they have confronted it more than once.
- 36% of women who experienced online violence were told to ignore it; 23% were blamed for it; 12% were subjected to physical violence by the family.

BOX 4

Women who have experienced online violence



Similarly to global trends, women activists and human rights defenders in the Arab States are more at risk of digital attacks.

- 70% did not feel safe from sexual harassment.
- Regarding forms of violence 70% reported they had received unwanted images or symbols with sexual content; 62% had received insulting and / or hateful messages; 58% reported annoying phone calls or inappropriate or unwelcome communications.

How does digital violence harm women and girls in real life?

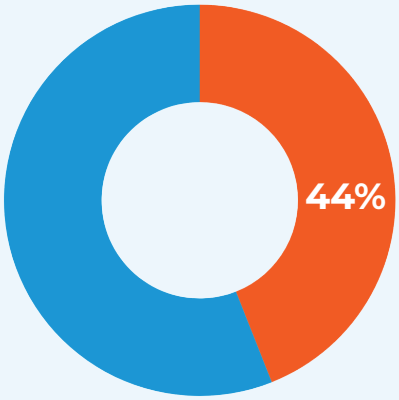
Digital violence does not remain confined online. According to the same UN Women study (2022), its real life consequences deeply impact the lives of women and girls beyond the digital space, with long term impacts on their physical safety, mental health and digital citizen rights. In its most severe form, it has even proven fatal. Digital violence, rooted in patriarchal patterns, also perpetuates attacks against women and girls in the public space, muting their voices, forcing them into digital silence and consequently undermining their freedom of expression and access to public and leadership roles.

Impact on physical safety:

- Online violence represents a serious threat to women's physical safety, with 44% of women who experienced online violence by over a year reporting that the incident moved offline.

BOX 5

Proportion of women experiencing online violence over a year reporting that the incident moved offline.



- In some cases, the sharing of pictures without the woman or girl's consent led to their murder, in other cases the victims committed suicide.

Impact on mental health:

- 35% of women who had experienced online violence reported that they felt "sad/depressed"
- 12% of women who had experienced violence indicated having suicidal thought

Impact on access to public and digital space:

- 1 in 5 women who experienced online violence deleted or deactivated their social media accounts.
- 26% were being careful about what they put online.

Who are the perpetrators of digital violence and why do they attack women and girls?

The same UN Women study (2022) provided unsettling insights on perpetrators profile, relationship to the victim-survivor and motives.

In terms of profile:

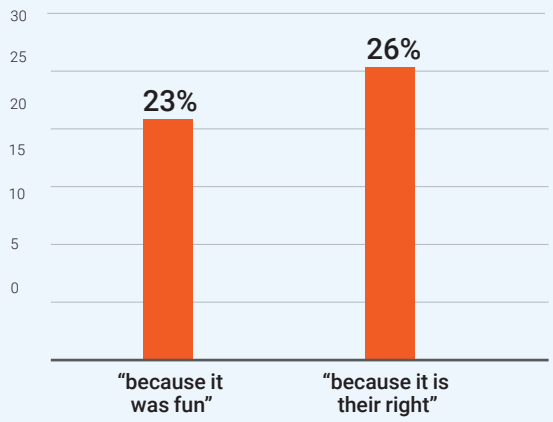
- Younger men and men with lower level of education were more likely to perpetrate online violence.
- 60% of women indicated that the person behind the online violence was anonymous, 24% said that person was a friend, 21% a colleague or school mate, 14% a relative, 13% the online violence was carried out by a former partner.

The motives expressed by perpetrators are particularly chilling when contrasted with their devastating impact on women's and girls' lives and, in some cases, their deaths:

- 26% of perpetrators said that the main reason they perpetrated online violence was "because it is their right".
- 23% of perpetrators said they perpetrated online violence "because it was fun".

BOX 6

Perpetrators said the main reason they perpetuated online violence was



HOW ARE LAWS ADDRESSING DIGITAL VIOLENCE AT GLOBAL AND REGIONAL LEVEL?

International and regional legal frameworks

Despite the prevalence of digital violence against women and girls, most legal frameworks still fail to explicitly define or address it. Legislative reforms often lag behind rapid technological change, leaving significant gaps in prevention, protection, and accountability.

Globally, UN Member States have increasingly adopted regional and international instruments related to digital violence against women and girls. Whether these instruments are binding or not, they represent an important reminder to countries of their commitments and the need to ensure their national implementation. These include:

- **Global Human Rights norms, principles**

The CEDAW Committee's General Recommendation No. 35 and successive Human Rights Council and UN General Assembly resolutions (HRC 20/8, 29/14, 32/13, 34/7, 38/5, 56/19; UNGA 68/181, 71/199, 78/213, 79/152) affirm that human rights enjoyed offline must equally be protected online. These resolutions gradually recognized forms of digital violence, including cyber-harassment, doxing, sextortion, non-consensual image sharing, and AI-generated abuse, as a form of violence and discrimination against women and girls, and call on States to exercise due diligence, prevent harm, and hold perpetrators accountable. The powerful Political Declaration of 69th Commission on the Status of Women, adopted by consensus in 2025, recommits Member States to eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls, including emerging forms such as digital violence, online harassment, and cyberbullying.

- **Global Digital Compact**

The Global Digital Compact (2024) articulates shared principles for inclusive, fair, and safe digital governance, explicitly identifying the elimination of technology-facilitated sexual and violence against women and girls as a core commitment.

- **The Convention against Cybercrime**

The Convention Against Cybercrime (2024) establishes an international legal framework to address cybercrime, including violence against women and girls facilitated by the use of digital technologies.

- **Regional Commitments**

At the regional level, the Arab Declaration on Combating All Forms of Violence Against Women and Girls (2022) explicitly recognizes digital violence as a form of violence against women and girls while the African Union Convention on Ending Violence against Women and Girls (2025), adopted by all African Union Member States in February 2025, establishes obligations for States to adopt legislative and policy measures to address violence in cyberspaces.

Arab States good practices on criminalizing digital violence

Life threatening gaps persist regarding laws criminalizing all forms of violence against women and girls and explicitly acknowledging digital violence against women and girls in all its manifestation. Advancing legislation is crucial to end impunity and hold perpetrators accountable, ensure access to justice for victims-survivors, and support prevention efforts so that no woman or girl has to suffer or lose her life to digital violence ever again.

Some Arab States have increasingly sought to regulate the digital space and address technology facilitated violence against women and girls, adopting different approaches. National legislation may extend existing domestic sexual harassment laws to cover acts committed through digital means, as in Egypt and Lebanon, where penal code provisions on sexual harassment explicitly apply to online space. A good practice comes from Tunisia, which has established a comprehensive law addressing all forms of violence against women in the public and private sphere, which also covers digital violence, though not explicitly mentioning it. The third and most common approach among the Arab States relies on general cybercrime laws, which may support access to justice to survivors though miss to address how digital violence specifically targets women and girls across the online-offline continuum.

Penalties range from fines to imprisonment, with in some legislations aggravated sentences applied when the offense

is perpetrated by a figure of authority, as reflected in the laws of Egypt, Morocco, and Lebanon.

The Global Justice and the Law Initiative indicates that 11 countries have partial legal provisions on cyberviolence against women and girls, and 3 countries have legislations addressing cyberviolence against women and girls, namely Morocco, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates.

BOX 7

The Gender Justice and the Law initiative is a multi-stakeholder partnership involving four UN agencies, namely UN ESCWA, UNDP, UN Women, UNFPA alongside national stakeholders in the Arab States. The initiative uses a rigorous methodology to enhance States' commitment to international standards. Through the launch of country reports, this initiative aims to encourage the review of national and institutional policies to promote justice in women's rights and eliminate structural barriers. A user-friendly five-color coding system is used to assess and compare laws and public policies across key categories, offering policymakers a clear visual map of areas requiring greater attention, harmonization, or alignment with global norms relating to equality for women and men.

Member States are fully consulted each year during the tool update process, which includes the administration of a detailed questionnaire to all participating countries. The platform also enables users to learn from the legislative experiences of other Arab States, particularly in the adoption and amendment of laws that promote justice for women and men.

- **Morocco's Violence against Women Law**

Since 2018, Morocco's legislation explicitly extends protections against violence against women and girls to the digital sphere. Morocco's law on Violence Against Women (Law No. 103-13 of 2018) amended the Penal Code to criminalize digital forms of harassment, specifically adding Articles 447-1 to 447-3 that penalize the non-consensual sharing of sexual nature messages, images, or videos, as well as recording or disseminating content of a private nature without prior consent, with imprisonment punishment up to 3 years. Prison sentence can go up to five years if the perpetrator is a relative, guardian, or person in authority, or when the victim is a woman or a minor. Sexual harassment is criminalized in both physical and digital environments, explicitly targeting the use of telephones, electronic communications, or visual materials of a sexual nature for sexual purposes. Morocco's General Directorate for National Security operates an online reporting portal that allows victims to report cybercrimes, including misuse of their personal data.

- **Egypt's Penal Code**

Since 2018, digital violence has been broadly regulated under the Anti-Cyber and Information Technology Crimes Law (Law No. 175 of 2018), which addresses various forms of cybercrimes, including threats, blackmail, defamation, and extorsion. In 2020, Law No. 141 amended Articles 306(a) and 306(b) of the Penal Code, expanding the definition of sexual harassment to include acts committed through social media and other online platforms. These provisions criminalize sexual harassment carried out by any means, including "wired and wireless communication methods", and as any act "committed with the intention to receive benefits of a sexual nature". Stronger penalties apply when the perpetrator holds a position of authority, whether occupational, familial, educational, or mentoring roles, or exerts any form of pressure that enables the offense.

- **UAE's Cybercrimes Act**

In the Emirates, Federal Decree-Law No. (34) of 2021 On Countering Rumors and Cybercrimes criminalizes acts of defamation and slander and infliction of damage upon others through the use of information network, information technology equipment, or an information system. In this context, harassment, cyberbullying and online threats, and the unauthorized circulation of personal pictures of individuals without their consent may be punished by up to 2 years of imprisonment and / or fines.

In a Mapping of laws and services for online and ICT-facilitated violence against women and girls in Arab States conducted by UN Women in 2022, good practices from Lebanon and Saudi Arabia were also identified:

- **Saudi Arabia's Anti-Harassment Law**

Since 2018, Saudi Arabia has specifically criminalized online violence and penalizes harassment defined as any utterance, act or gesture with sexual connotations from one person to any other person that would harm his/her body, honor or modesty, by any means, including through the use of modern technology.

- **Lebanon's Sexual Harassment Law**

Lebanon's Law No. 205 of 2020 was adopted to offer support to the victims of sexual harassment on the workplace. However, it does not limit the protections against sexual harassment to just the workplace but also covers harassment in "any place" with explicit reference to perpetration through electronic means. Sexual harassment is defined as any single act or attempt that uses psychological, moral, material, or discriminatory pressure to obtain a sexual benefit and any repeated, abnormal, and unwanted behavior by the victim that has a sexual connotation and constitutes a violation of the body, privacy, or feelings of the victim through words, acts, gestures, or sexual or obscene insinuations.

CALL FOR ACTION: ZERO TOLERANCE FOR DIGITAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Ending digital violence against women and girls is a collective responsibility. It calls upon governments, technology companies, UN agencies, and funders to put in place and resource comprehensive prevention and response measures, anchored in the Beijing +30 Action Agenda on the Digital Revolution and Zero Violence, to:

1. Criminalize and prohibit all forms of digital violence against women and girls and strengthen capacities of law enforcement to investigate and prosecute crimes and ensure accountability of perpetrators. Existing good practices in the Arab States can be inspirational to further uphold women and girls' rights to live free from digital violence.

2. Strengthen accountability & transparency of technology companies to end digital violence against women and girls through immediate removal of harmful content and content moderation policies, codes of conduct & responses to victim survivors in line with human rights standards.

3. Strengthen responses to victim-survivors through access to specialized support and justice and ensure the inclusion of digital violence survivor-centered approach in service providers curricula.

4. Strengthen protection for women in the public life, including women politicians and women human rights defenders, to ensure their rights to safely and freely express themselves.

5. Support women, girls and survivors in amplifying their voices and support their participation in legislative and policies processes on digital violence.

In addition, a comprehensive approach to digital violence also calls for integrated action, which includes

6. Enhancing digital resilience and literacy for women and girls, to raise awareness of rights, risks, and reporting mechanisms related to digital violence—particularly online and offline measures for the protection of girls and youth, and groups facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, for example women and girls refugees, affected by conflict and / or living with disabilities.

7. Investing in innovative solutions and digital tools, with the aim to foster social norm change and transforming harmful masculinities to counter misogynist content.

Resources

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- UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/71/199: UN Docs
- UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/78/213: UN Docs
- Human Rights Council Resolution A/HRC/RES/20/8. UN Docs.
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UN WOMEN ADVANCES WOMEN'S RIGHTS, THE EMPOWERMENT OF ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS AND EQUALITY BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN.

As the lead UN entity on women's empowerment, and secretariat of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, we support advancement of laws, institutions, social behaviours and services to close the gap between women and men and build an equal world for all women and girls. Our partnerships with governments, women's movements and the private sector coupled with our coordination of the broader United Nations translate progress into lasting changes. We make strides forward for women and girls in four areas: leadership, economic empowerment, freedom from violence, and women, peace and security as well as humanitarian action.

UN Women keeps the rights of women and girls at the centre of global progress – always, everywhere. Because equality between men and women is not just what we do. It is who we are.

UN WOMEN FOR ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS

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