CSW70 Side Event

"Preventing and Combating All Forms of Cyber Violence Against Girls"

Wednesday, 11 March 2026 10:00am - 11:15am
UN Headquarters, Conference Room 2

CONCEPT NOTE

Hosts:	Keynote speakers:
Commissioner for Gender Equality of Cyprus, H.E. Ms. Josie Christodoulou	Minister for Women of Mexico, H.E. Ms. Citlalli Hernández
European Commissioner for Equality, Preparedness and Crisis Management, H. E. Ms. Hadja Lahbib	Minister for Social Development of Jordan, H.E. Ms. Bani Mustafa (tbc)
	UN Women Deputy Executive Director Ms. Kirsi Madi

Panelists:	
Mr. Gary Barker, CEO and President, Equimundo	Ms. Olimpia Melo, Activist for the criminalisation of gender-based digital violence
Ms. Mallory Knodel, Executive Director, Social Web Foundation	Mr. Viraj Doshi, Platform Safety Lead, Snap Inc.

1. Introduction

Digital technologies profoundly shape how young people form and manage relationships, influencing virtually every aspect of their lives. In today's digital age, online spaces are therefore integral to social interaction, rendering digital forms of abuse particularly pervasive and harmful. Cyberviolence against girls is increasingly recognised as a widespread, deeply gendered, and fast-evolving form of violence. It spans a continuum of harm across online and offline spaces, reflecting persistent structural inequalities and encompassing a broad spectrum of online harms, including cyber harassment, stalking, sexualised abuse, defamation, hate speech, threats, exploitation, image-based abuse, and emerging AI-enabled threats such as deepfakes.

Evidence consistently shows that cyberviolence disproportionately affects girls and young women, often beginning in early adolescence and intensifying with age. Platform design features, anonymity, cross-border impunity and the rapid evolution of technologies significantly heighten both exposure to abuse and the severity of its impacts. These forms of abuse violate fundamental rights, perpetuate gender inequalities, and hinder girls' full, safe and meaningful participation in digital spaces.

Recent findings from the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), including the study commissioned for the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the EU *"From Lived Reality to Policy Action: Combatting Cyber Violence Against Girls in the EU"*, demonstrate that:

- Cyberviolence is a routine and normalised part of girls' digital and social lives.
- Age shapes exposure: girls aged 13–15 most frequently face relational aggression (exclusion, gossip, body shaming), while girls aged 16–18 are disproportionately targeted by sexualised abuse (sextortion, grooming, non-consensual image sharing, deepfakes).
- Intersectional factors including disability, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, migration background and socioeconomic status further increase vulnerability.
- Impacts are severe and long-lasting, including anxiety, depression, trauma, social isolation, and erosion of trust.
- A significant disconnect persists between girls' lived realities and the current prevention, support and institutional responses available to them.

Victims frequently report profound psychological harm, often resulting in social withdrawal and heightened distrust of both peers and institutions. These harms are further exacerbated by structural barriers to disclosure, such as stigma, fear of reputational damage and victim-blaming narratives, which discourage reporting and perpetuate cycles of silence and impunity.

The EU and Cyprus, as the current Presidency of the Council of the European Union, are strongly committed to advancing gender equality and the prevention and combatting of all forms of gender-based violence against women and girls.

This commitment is reflected in several key developments. Foremost among these is the adoption of the Directive (EU) 2024/1385 on Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, which, for the first time at EU level, requires Member States to criminalise key forms of cyberviolence. This represents a significant step towards recognising digital violence as a serious and distinct manifestation of gender-based violence. Complementing this development, the EU's accession to the Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence reinforces a comprehensive, rights-based framework for prevention, protection, and prosecution across Member States. These commitments are further underscored by the prioritisation of freedom from gender-based violence as the first principle in the 2025 EU Roadmap for Women's Rights.

Within the digital sphere, the Digital Services Act (DSA) plays an important role in strengthening the protection of women's and girls' rights online. By enhancing platform accountability and combining criminal law provisions with systemic due diligence obligations, the DSA aims to alleviate systemic risks that undermine fundamental rights, including those linked to gender-based violence.

On the global level, all UN Member States have committed to combatting sexual and gender-based violence online in the Global Digital Compact as agreed in 2024. More recently, the UN General Assembly adopted the World Summit on the Information Society WSIS+20 resolution (A/Res/80/173) by consensus. It recognises that gender equality and the safe participation of women in the digital space are essential to sustainable development.

2. Objectives

The side event will provide a high-level, multi-stakeholder platform to discuss concrete regulatory and policy responses to preventing and responding to cyberviolence against girls across the globe. Cyberviolence is not an isolated phenomenon; it forms part of a broader continuum of gender-based violence that transcends physical boundaries and manifests in digital spaces. The event aims to address this urgent challenge by fostering dialogue between policymakers, civil society representatives and technology stakeholders from different regions of the world, and draw on recent research, the evolving legislative landscape within and outside the EU, including ongoing work in multilateral fora, and the lived experiences of girls across the globe. The expertise of technology stakeholders will help to explore practical ways of addressing and mitigating specific aspects of cyberviolence.

Main objectives:

➢ Recognise cyberviolence as a form of gender-based violence and highlight its prevalence, drivers, manifestations and disproportionate impact on girls.
➢ Promote effective prevention and response strategies by showcasing best practices and identifying gaps in legal, policy and institutional approaches at national, regional and international levels.
➢ Advance coordinated policy direction and international cooperation by exploring opportunities for alignment between national, regional and global efforts.
➢ Amplify girls' voices and ensure that policy responses reflect the everyday realities faced by girls online and offline, promoting youth-centred solutions.

3. Target audience

The side event is aimed at government representatives and policymakers from Member States and international partners; international organisations, including UN agencies; global experts on gender equality and children's rights; civil society organisations and social partners advocating for women's and girls' rights; academics and researchers specialising in gender studies, digital harms and social policy;

private-sector and technology stakeholders; and youth networks and educators promoting digital literacy and safe online environments. Participation of girls and young women is particularly encouraged.