

# Addressing Gendered Manipulative Information:

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Review of Current  
Recommendations and the Case  
for Broadening Responses



Prepared by IREX

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01

# Executive Summary

Disinformation is widely recognized as a threat to individuals, communities, and institutions across the globe.<sup>1</sup> **Gendered disinformation**, however, disproportionately affects women and girls, especially those from marginalized groups for whom gender intersects with other social identities targeted by malevolent actors (e.g. LGBTQI+ and racialized minorities) and those active in public life (e.g. politicians, journalists, and human rights defenders). It is a tactic commonly used by authoritarian regimes to fuel divisive public debate, undermine democratic principles, institutions, and human rights,<sup>2</sup> and silence women's voices in digital spaces,<sup>3</sup> threatening both individual well-being and democracy globally.

This report summarizes and groups the most common recommendations to address gendered disinformation and analyzes gaps between the evidence base and the recommendations made to date. This review is aimed toward those who seek to develop solutions to gendered disinformation in its different forms, although stakeholders across sectors should consider how they can operationalize these recommendations. While reviewers found many actionable recommendations, they also noticed significant gaps and missed opportunities for impact and collaboration.

1. Pérez-Escobar, M., Lilleker, D., & Tapia-Frade, A. (2023). A Systematic Literature Review of the Phenomenon of Disinformation and Misinformation. *Media and Communication*, 11(2), 76–87. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v11i2.6453>
2. U.S. Department of State Global Engagement Center. (2023). *Gendered Disinformation: Tactics, Themes, and Trends by Foreign Malign Actors*. <https://www.state.gov/gendered-disinformation-tactics-themes-and-trends-by-foreign-malign-actors/>
3. She Persisted. (2023). *Monetizing Misogyny: Gendered Disinformation and the Undermining of Women's Rights and Democracy Globally*. [https://she-persisted.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/ShePersisted\\_MonetizingMisogyny.pdf](https://she-persisted.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/ShePersisted_MonetizingMisogyny.pdf)

## Common Recommendations by Stakeholder



### Government and Government Engagement Activities

- » Support the collection of data to better understand the threat of gendered disinformation
- » Establish and promote shared principles to address gendered disinformation
- » Raise awareness of gendered disinformation and its impact
- » Fund programs focused on training to combat gendered disinformation
- » Support improved regulation to address and prevent gendered disinformation
- » Advance national legislation to address gendered disinformation



### NGOs, Civil Society, and other Organizations' Actions

- » Invest in understanding the context behind gendered disinformation
- » Engage women and women-led partners in addressing gendered disinformation
- » Raise awareness of the threat of gendered disinformation
- » Design and deliver capacity building and training programs for different audiences
- » Invest in internal capacity strengthening to improve policies and tools to support employees facing gendered disinformation
- » Engage in cross-sectoral collaboration and stakeholder engagement on the topic of gendered disinformation
- » Dialogue and engage with social media platforms to address gendered disinformation online



### Social Media Platforms and Actions Engaging Social Media and Technology Sector

- » Develop base standards for prevention of and response to gendered disinformation

- » Raise awareness via social media platforms to reach broader audiences
- » Provide support for digital, media, and information literacy trainings
- » Content moderation of gendered disinformation and related harms
- » Improve reporting mechanisms for women experiencing gendered disinformation and other online attacks
- » Integrate safety by design principles into platform design
- » Punish perpetrators who produce and disseminate gendered disinformation
- » Engage in cross-sectoral collaboration



### Academia, Research, and Think Tanks

- » Support the collection of data and evidence to expand the evidence base of gendered disinformation and its impacts
- » Engage in cross-sectoral collaboration to raise awareness of gendered disinformation
- » Improve institutional policies and procedures to support women experiencing abuse



### Media Organizations and the Media Sector

- » Invest in organizational capacity strengthening to protect staff against online attacks
- » Strengthen media stakeholders' capacity to address gendered disinformation
- » Serve as a watchdog for gendered disinformation topics and trends
- » Engage in cross-sectoral collaboration to amplify impact



### Political Parties

- » Increase awareness
- » Improve institutional policies and procedures

## Analysis of Recommendations

Taken together, the above list represents a comprehensive summary of the most common recommendations among existing reports for addressing gendered disinformation. Across the nearly twenty reports reviewed, some clear patterns – and gaps – emerge:

- » **Several stakeholders are consistently cited as leading players in addressing gendered disinformation**— including government, tech platforms, and civil society. Others were cited, but not as consistently. While these stakeholders are critical players, **many stakeholders are missing** from these recommendations.
- » Investing in **understanding the problem of gendered disinformation** is a common recommendation, but notably, the tech sector, social media platforms, and the media sector are not called out as stakeholders in understanding the problem, **which creates blind spots**.
- » **Raising awareness of gendered disinformation** is a common call to action, but more **nuance and tactics on how to do that in a survivor-centered and impactful way** would strengthen this recommendation, as would more comprehensive guidance on what kinds of awareness raising would work for different audiences.
- » **Funding and implementation of training and capacity strengthening initiatives** to build skills for prevention is often recommended. Notable however is **the absence of specific education, culture, religious, and other sector stakeholders** positioned to address several root causes of the problem.
- » A recommendation to **develop base standards and shared principles** when discussing and designing solutions to gendered disinformation would be greatly strengthened if **the voices of women and their experiences online were more prominently centered**, in addition to the many other diverse stakeholders who can contribute to developing principles and standards.
- » Support for **improved regulation and increased legislation** to address and prevent gendered disinformation does emerge frequently as a recommendation for governments, but **more research is needed** on the potential impact of these interventions.
- » Recommendations to **strengthen institutional policies, tools, and resources** for supporting women from abuse within institutions have also been recorded. This recommendation is critical for maintaining the ability

of all these stakeholders to persevere and develop effective responses.

- » The most cited recommendation across sources is to **engage in cross-sectoral collaboration and engagement** to advance effective solutions. This is sorely needed as **none of these interventions— or stakeholders—alone will be able to solve the pernicious problem of gendered disinformation**.

## What's missing from the recommendations?

- » Overall insufficient focus on prevention; lack of recognition and recommended action that get to the roots of the problem
- » Lack of connection to the education sector and other norm-formative institutions
- » Lack of specificity on how to productively engage men and boys
- » Lack of distinction between types of gendered disinformation and how different solutions are best suited to address them
- » Inadequate actions to target bystanders and perpetrators

All proposed mitigation actions should recognize that gendered disinformation, more so than other types of disinformation, creates offline consequences for its subjects. Therefore, responses should require:

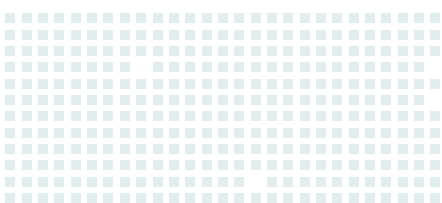
- » Deliberate inclusion of survivor-focused, trauma-informed approaches
- » Explicit mitigation strategies to redress the intersectional nature of abusive content
- » Differentiated solutions for the evolving types of gendered disinformation
- » Strong connection to digital citizenship and digital ethics education
- » Attention to creating incentives for those who create and share gendered disinformation
- » Addition of comprehensive follow-through on the connection between digital and physical harm that gendered disinformation carries
- » Linkage to the broader impact that gendered disinformation has on communities, governance, democracy, economy (and more), to engage relevant power-holders and organizations in solutions

## Conclusion

While there are many recommendations for addressing gendered disinformation, most are siloed and do not leverage the breadth of stakeholders who could and should be involved in gendered disinformation prevention and response. The authors of this report suggest that common recommended actions would be strengthened by adding evidence and best practices from adjacent relevant sectors, such as technology-facilitated gender-based violence, offline gender-based violence, violence against women in politics, countering/preventing violent extremism and radicalization, and behavior change communications, as well as responses to other forms of identity-based disinformation. A more nuanced understanding and

expansion of research and recommendations to different contexts through collaboration with organizations across the globe would also help elevate awareness of the threat and urgency of response, as well as provide a larger set of tested approaches and innovative solutions.

It is important to reiterate that none of these actors or interventions alone will prevent or remedy the harm done by gendered disinformation. To meaningfully address this threat, diverse stakeholders will need to coordinate, partner, and share learnings to build upon and replicate solutions that work.



## 02

# Introduction and Methodology

Disinformation has been recognized as a pernicious global threat present in almost every aspect of today's society.<sup>4</sup> However, there is a particular type of disinformation that disproportionately affects women and girls, especially those from marginalized groups for whom gender intersects with other social identities targeted by malevolent actors (e.g. LGBTQI+ and racialized minorities) and those active in public life (e.g. politicians, journalists and human rights defenders). **Gendered disinformation** is a tactic commonly used by authoritarian regimes to undermine democratic principles and institutions in general, and the human rights of women, girls, and gender minorities in particular.<sup>5</sup> Gendered disinformation and other forms of technology-facilitated gender-based violence<sup>6</sup> that accompany it – doxing, trolling, cyber-attacks, among others – are particularly effective in silencing women's voices in digital spaces, especially women in politics and public life.<sup>7</sup> Common gendered disinformation narratives manipulate gender norms by creating myths about gender equality, objectifying and diminishing women, and/or positioning “traditional family values” as counter to women's leadership.<sup>8</sup> Such identity-driven narratives are often sexualized, and have a strong connection to other types of online and offline abuse and radicalization. These narratives aim to push authoritarian agendas – closing civic spaces, punishing critics - and fuel divisive public debate fed by fictions. Thus, in addition to its impact on individual well-being and reinforcing structural gender-based inequities, gendered disinformation is a key threat to democracy globally.

4. Pérez-Escobar, M., Lilleker, D., & Tapia-Frade, A. (2023). A Systematic Literature Review of the Phenomenon of Disinformation and Misinformation. *Media and Communication*, 11(2), 76–87. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v11i2.6453>
5. U.S. Department of State Global Engagement Center. (2023). *Gendered Disinformation: Tactics, Themes, and Trends by Foreign Malign Actors*. <https://www.state.gov/gendered-disinformation-tactics-themes-and-trends-by-foreign-malign-actors/>
6. **UN Women defines technology-facilitated gender-based violence** (TFGBV) as any act that is committed, assisted, aggravated, or amplified by the use of information communication technologies or other digital tools which results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological, social, political or economic harm or other infringements of rights and freedoms.
7. She Persisted. (2023). *Monetizing Misogyny: Gendered Disinformation and the Undermining of Women's Rights and Democracy Globally*. [https://she-persisted.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/ShePersisted\\_MonetizingMisogyny.pdf](https://she-persisted.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/ShePersisted_MonetizingMisogyny.pdf)
8. Wilson Center. (2021). *Malign Creativity: How Gender, Sex, and Lies are Weaponized Against Women Online*. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/malign-creativity-how-gender-sex-and-lies-are-weaponized-against-women-online>



## What is gendered disinformation?

**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. It is subset of **manipulative information**, which refers to narratives that combine facts and falsehoods, are taken out of context, or are deliberately “pitched” to those who are biased, such as misinformation, disinformation, hate speech, propaganda, and others. This report will use the term “gendered disinformation” throughout to refer to all manipulation that intentionally weaponizes gender.

There is a growing body of evidence on gendered disinformation, most of which includes recommendations to counter it. This review summarizes and groups these recommendations by six key stakeholder types and analyzes gaps between the evidence base and the recommendations made to date. Recommended interventions in the literature range from research, monitoring, and prevention to response and recovery for individuals affected, and all stakeholders should consider how they can operationalize these recommendations. While reviewers found many actionable recommendations, they also noticed significant gaps in specific areas that are discussed in the analysis section. **As a result, this report serves as only a primer for organizations and individuals seeking to address this insidious and dangerous threat.**

## What makes disinformation gendered?

- » Are gender stereotypes, gender roles, social norms on contentious and emotive gender issues being used as part of the disinformation campaign?
- » What is the purpose of this type of gendered disinformation campaign? Is it meant to have a different effect on women compared to men (e.g. to silence female parliamentarians in particular)?
- » What are the different communications techniques being targeted at women compared to men? Which communications techniques are used to polarize the debate on a specific gender issue (e.g. fabricated sexualized images of female politicians or bots used to bolster both sides on contentious gender issues)?
- » How are the intention and the techniques combined to achieve an impact? How does this impact differ for women and men (e.g. to erode support for democratic institutions and to discourage women from participating in political life)?

(Source: UK FCDO [How to Guide on Gender and Strategic Communication in Conflict and Stabilisation Contexts](#)).

**“ Gendered disinformation is a new threat and is taking a significant toll on the mental health and physical safety of women, girls, trans, and LGBTQ+ people all over the world.”**

MARIA RESSA, [NOBEL PRIZE LECTURE 2021](#)

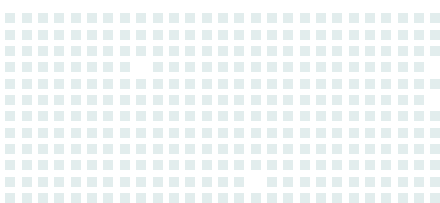
## Methodology

In compiling these recommendations and conducting the subsequent analysis, this review focuses exclusively on publications which analyze the specific threat of gendered disinformation, online harassment against women, or the intersection of gender and social media. As practitioners and decisionmakers search for guidance on addressing the problem, the research team used terms common in titles of publications on information disorders aimed at policymakers and practitioners (rather than terms common in titles of publication aimed at technologists, platform developers, software engineers, or other IT professionals), such as “gendered disinformation” and “gender and disinformation”. Thus, the authors used these terms when searching for evidence to include in this review. The review did not consider reports that did not include recommendations for intervention.

These compiled recommendations represent those from the most oft-cited and well-sourced, publicly available English language sources. However, reviewers acknowledge that this is just a sample of the reports available on responses to gendered disinformation, not a comprehensive list. A full list of the reports reviewed and referenced can be found

at the end of this document. The reviewers only searched for publications available in English because the goal of this analysis was to review the most common and widely shared recommendations, and most disinformation research and funding come from the Global North, where most reviewers and policymakers will search for resources using the English-language term “gendered disinformation”.

This analysis, and the reports upon which the analysis is based, refers to gendered disinformation mainly in reference to women and girls, because they are disproportionately targeted. However, it is critical to note that LGBTQI+ people of all gender identities are often targets of disinformation campaigns that use many of the same tactics to silence them. Indeed, as with most threats, gender intersects with other social identities (including race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion, (dis)ability, and others) in ways that can compound vulnerabilities. While the recommendations referenced in this report are relevant to disinformation campaigns that affect different intersectional and marginalized identities, more dedicated research should be conducted to focus specifically on other identity-based targeted disinformation campaigns, their impact, and recommended solutions.



# 03

## Review of Recommendations by Stakeholder Type

This section represents a summary of the most common recommendations for intervention across six stakeholder types: government, civil society, social media platforms, academia, media organizations, and political parties. These stakeholders and recommendations are presented in no particular order and are summarized and paraphrased from the reports from which they were taken. They represent a comprehensive summary of the most common recommendations from the reviewed reports, *not the recommendations of IREX or the reviewers*. The following section puts forth an analysis of these recommendations and identifies common themes and significant gaps.

It is important to reiterate that neither the source reports nor this review is suggesting that any of these interventions—or stakeholders—alone will be able to solve the pernicious problem of gendered disinformation. To meaningfully address this threat, these stakeholders will need to coordinate, partner, and share learnings to build upon and replicate solutions that work.



## Government Agencies

### Support the collection of data to better understand the threat of gendered disinformation:

Governments can support the collection of data and commission of research and reports on gendered disinformation at the local, national, regional, and global level to understand its prevalence and impact.<sup>9-10</sup> Data should be disaggregated by gender, race, ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity to develop a nuanced understanding of who exactly is targeted, under what circumstances, and how impact may differ.<sup>11-12</sup> This research should also be used to advance understanding of how gender roles, social norms, and gender issues are weaponized through disinformation.<sup>13</sup>

### Establish and promote shared principles to address gendered disinformation:

Governments can work with relevant stakeholders, such as academic and research institutions and civil society organizations working to promote information integrity and resilience and women’s empowerment, to develop a common definition of gendered disinformation and associated threats, such as online gendered harassment and online violence against women.<sup>14</sup> Based on common definitions, Governments

can seek to collaboratively develop strategies to prevent and address these threats and promote them through international venues to advance core principles and garner international attention and buy in.<sup>15-16</sup>

### Raise awareness of gendered disinformation and its impact:

Governments can invest in public awareness campaigns that promote gender equality and refute gendered stereotypes.<sup>17</sup>

### Fund programs focused on training to combat gendered disinformation:

Governments can fund comprehensive media and information literacy programs, including through school curricula, that incorporate awareness-raising and skill-building focused specifically on refuting gender stereotypes.<sup>18-20</sup> This includes training for individuals (youth, adults, teachers, journalists, etc.) or communities (schools, libraries, community centers, etc.) on the impact of gendered disinformation and online harassment of women and girls, including women in politics and public life.<sup>21-22</sup> Governments can also support training for law enforcement, prosecutors, and courts to hold perpetrators accountable for illegal conduct online<sup>23</sup> based on survivor-centered approaches to minimize re-traumatization.

### Support improved regulation to address and prevent gendered disinformation:

Governments have a unique position to enact improved regulations across sectors to eliminate gendered disinformation. Government officials

9. U.S. White House. (2022). *Launching the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse*. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/gpc/briefing-room/2022/03/18/launching-the-global-partnership-for-action-on-gender-based-online-harassment-and-abuse/>
10. U.S. Department of State. (2022). *2022 Roadmap for the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse*. <https://www.state.gov/2022-roadmap-for-the-global-partnership-for-action-on-gender-based-online-harassment-and-abuse/>
11. U.S. White House. (2022). *Launching the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse*. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/gpc/briefing-room/2022/03/18/launching-the-global-partnership-for-action-on-gender-based-online-harassment-and-abuse/>
12. U.K. Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). (2020). *How to Guide on Gender and Strategic Communication in Conflict and Stabilisation Contexts*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-guide-on-gender-and-strategic-communication-in-conflict-and-stabilisation-contexts-january-2020>
13. Ibid.
14. U.S. Department of State. (2022). *2022 Roadmap for the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse*. <https://www.state.gov/2022-roadmap-for-the-global-partnership-for-action-on-gender-based-online-harassment-and-abuse/>
15. Ibid.
16. U.S. White House. (2022). *Launching the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse*. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/gpc/briefing-room/2022/03/18/launching-the-global-partnership-for-action-on-gender-based-online-harassment-and-abuse/>
17. Bradshaw, Samantha and Henle, Amelie. (2021). *The Gender Dimensions of Foreign Influence Operations*. <https://fsi.stanford.edu/publication/gender-dimensions-foreign-influence-operations>
18. Plan International. (2021). *State of the World’s Girls 2021: The Truth Gap*. <https://plan-international.org/publications/the-truth-gap/>
19. U.S. Department of State. (2022). *2022 Roadmap for the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse*. <https://www.state.gov/2022-roadmap-for-the-global-partnership-for-action-on-gender-based-online-harassment-and-abuse/>
20. Bradshaw, Samantha and Henle, Amelie. (2021). *The Gender Dimensions of Foreign Influence Operations*. <https://fsi.stanford.edu/publication/gender-dimensions-foreign-influence-operations>
21. Plan International. (2021). *State of the World’s Girls 2021: The Truth Gap*. <https://plan-international.org/publications/the-truth-gap/>
22. Women in International Security (WIS). (n.d.). *An Overlooked Threat To Democracy? Gendered Disinformation About Female Politicians*. <https://wiisglobal.org/an-overlooked-threat-to-democracy-gendered-disinformation-about-female-politicians/>
23. U.S. Department of State. (2022). *2022 Roadmap for the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse*. <https://www.state.gov/2022-roadmap-for-the-global-partnership-for-action-on-gender-based-online-harassment-and-abuse/>

can lead by example by developing guidance for elected officials and civil servants when attacked by gendered disinformation and online violence, establishing clear standards that prohibit the use of gendered and sexualized insults on Government social media accounts and devices, and by adopting codes of conduct censuring gender-based abuse by Government officials.<sup>24</sup> Governments can co-regulate social media platforms through appropriate legislative and regulatory bodies by mandating the posting of fact-checked information online or mandating the removal of disinformation altogether (while acknowledging the free speech concerns associated with this approach).<sup>25</sup> This may be a preferable alternative for tech platforms to pure top-down regulation by government. In addition, Governments can demand procedural accountability (referring to transparency around the processes through which actors take decisions) from platforms about algorithmic decision-making and content moderation practices around hate online, which are opaque and to date generally ineffective in reducing gendered disinformation and online abuse.<sup>26</sup> This could include working towards common principles for moderating gender-based hate; publishing transparent data about user-generated reports including the kinds of harmful speech being reported; or reviewing decisions made by platforms for consistent application.<sup>27</sup> <sup>28</sup> States can also engage with private sector actors, such as technology companies and mobile network operators, to ensure policies on internet access support gender equality in online spaces by closing the digital divide.<sup>29</sup>

**Advance national legislation to address gendered disinformation:** Governments can enact laws that address

gendered disinformation and online violence against women and girls, holding perpetrators and potentially technology platforms to account.<sup>30</sup> Legislative frameworks addressing gendered disinformation as a threat should be updated to acknowledge that prevalence and impact are affected by race, ethnicity, age, disability, LGBTIQ+ status, and more.<sup>31</sup> Governments should also ensure the effective implementation, by all relevant government departments – such as the police, the judiciary, and the prosecution services – of laws and policies addressing online harassment of and online violence against all women and girls.<sup>32</sup> Laws covering offline harms against women should be updated to include provisions against online gender-based harassment, to ensure durable legislation is in place to deal with both contemporary and future challenges posed by technology.<sup>33</sup> <sup>34</sup> This includes budgetary allocations to build law enforcement awareness about online violence against women and to increase investigation of online gender-based threats, especially against women in politics and public life.<sup>35</sup> <sup>36</sup>



## Civil Society

**Invest in understanding the context behind gendered disinformation:** Civil society organizations can help set guidelines for distinguishing gendered disinformation from other forms of disinformation, so that appropriate measures can be tailored to fit the specific harms of gendered disinformation.<sup>37</sup> Local experts who understand the context

24. Wilson Center. (2021). *Malign Creativity: How Gender, Sex, and Lies are Weaponized Against Women Online*. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/malign-creativity-how-gender-sex-and-lies-are-weaponized-against-women-online>

25. Women in International Security (WIS). (n.d.). *An Overlooked Threat To Democracy? Gendered Disinformation About Female Politicians*. <https://wisglobal.org/an-overlooked-threat-to-democracy-gendered-disinformation-about-female-politicians/>

26. Bradshaw, Samantha and Henle, Amelie. (2021). *The Gender Dimensions of Foreign Influence Operations*. <https://fsi.stanford.edu/publication/gender-dimensions-foreign-influence-operations>

27. Ibid.

28. Wilson Center. (2021). *Malign Creativity: How Gender, Sex, and Lies are Weaponized Against Women Online*. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/malign-creativity-how-gender-sex-and-lies-are-weaponized-against-women-online>

29. Plan International. (2020). *State of the World's Girls 2020: Free to Be Online?* <https://plan-international.org/publications/free-to-be-online/>

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Wilson Center. (2021). *Malign Creativity: How Gender, Sex, and Lies are Weaponized Against Women Online*. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/malign-creativity-how-gender-sex-and-lies-are-weaponized-against-women-online>

34. Bradshaw, Samantha and Henle, Amelie. (2021). *The Gender Dimensions of Foreign Influence Operations*. <https://fsi.stanford.edu/publication/gender-dimensions-foreign-influence-operations>

35. Wilson Center. (2021). *Malign Creativity: How Gender, Sex, and Lies are Weaponized Against Women Online*. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/malign-creativity-how-gender-sex-and-lies-are-weaponized-against-women-online>

36. UNESCO. (2020). *Online violence Against Women Journalists: A Global Snapshot of Incidence and Impacts*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375136>

37. Demos. (2020). *Engendering Hate: The contours of state-aligned gendered disinformation online*. <https://demos.co.uk/research/engendering-hate-the-contours-of-state-aligned-gendered-disinformation-online/>

should be engaged to detect gendered disinformation and explore suitable solutions.<sup>38</sup> Civil society can help identify gendered disinformation narratives by answering key questions:<sup>39</sup> Are gender stereotypes, gender roles, social norms on contentious and emotive gender issues being used as part of the disinformation campaign? Is the disinformation campaign intended to have a different effect on women than on men? Is this intended to polarize debate on a specific gender issue? What are the different communications techniques being targeted at women compared to men (e.g. sexualized images)?

**Engage women and women-led partners in addressing gendered disinformation:** Without placing the burden on women to address this threat, civil society can meaningfully engage women (including survivors of online violence) in discussions around solutions, to ensure that the most significant threats are being addressed in a way that does not compound the problem.<sup>40 41</sup> When considering how gendered disinformation affects women in public life, civil society should proactively interface with these women and their teams and name specific points of contact for those responsible for gender issues on a national, regional, or local level.<sup>42</sup> Financial and technical support should be provided to young feminist organizations working to combat gendered disinformation and other online harms.<sup>43</sup>

**Raise awareness of the threat of gendered disinformation:** Civil society can raise more awareness of the threat

of gendered disinformation and the unique dangers faced by girls and women online, especially those from marginalized groups or those in politics and public life.<sup>44</sup> More pressure should be put on platforms to address gendered disinformation, for example through platform-based awareness building campaigns or improved content moderation mechanisms that spot gendered disinformation lexicons.<sup>45 46</sup> When redressing gendered disinformation, civil society should provide alternate narratives on gender issues, highlight disparities and hypocrisies within disinformation narratives, and amplify credible women's voices that counter disinformation and promote social cohesion.<sup>47</sup>

**Design and deliver capacity building and training programs for different audiences:** Civil society can develop and deploy training resources for other civil-society organizations, journalists, and politically active women, as well as training for the civil and criminal justice system and for citizens in general.<sup>48</sup> Communities and families must also be engaged.<sup>49</sup> Training for women who have survived gendered disinformation or who are at risk should focus on protecting one's personal information, mitigating psychological trauma from online disinformation, and platform reporting and moderation tools.<sup>50 51</sup> Civil society should develop and deliver digital citizenship education and awareness raising initiatives on the opportunities as well as risks of being online, with a focus on online abuse against women.<sup>52 53</sup> All members of society should have skills to recognize the harm caused by online harassment

38. EU DisinfoLab. (2021). *Gender-Based Disinformation: Advancing Our Understanding and Response*. <https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/gender-based-disinformation-advancing-our-understanding-and-response/>
39. U.K. Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). (2020). *How to Guide on Gender and Strategic Communication in Conflict and Stabilisation Contexts*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-guide-on-gender-and-strategic-communication-in-conflict-and-stabilisation-contexts-january-2020>
40. Plan International. (2021). *State of the World's Girls 2021: The Truth Gap*. <https://plan-international.org/publications/the-truth-gap/>
41. Demos. (2020). *Engendering Hate: The contours of state-aligned gendered disinformation online*. <https://demos.co.uk/research/engendering-hate-the-contours-of-state-aligned-gendered-disinformation-online/>
42. National Democratic Institute (NDI). (2021). *Addressing Online Misogyny and Gendered Disinformation: A How-To Guide*. <https://www.ndi.org/publications/addressing-online-misogyny-and-gendered-disinformation-how-guide>
43. Plan International. (2021). *State of the World's Girls 2021: The Truth Gap*. <https://plan-international.org/publications/the-truth-gap/>
44. Women in International Security (WIIS). (n.d.). *An Overlooked Threat To Democracy? Gendered Disinformation About Female Politicians*. <https://wiisglobal.org/an-overlooked-threat-to-democracy-gendered-disinformation-about-female-politicians/>
45. Ibid.
46. Demos. (2020). *Engendering Hate: The contours of state-aligned gendered disinformation online*. <https://demos.co.uk/research/engendering-hate-the-contours-of-state-aligned-gendered-disinformation-online/>
47. U.K. Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). (2020). *How to Guide on Gender and Strategic Communication in Conflict and Stabilisation Contexts*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-guide-on-gender-and-strategic-communication-in-conflict-and-stabilisation-contexts-january-2020>
48. U.S. White House. (2022). *Launching the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse*. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/gpc/briefing-room/2022/03/18/launching-the-global-partnership-for-action-on-gender-based-online-harassment-and-abuse/>
49. Plan International. (2020). *State of the World's Girls 2020: Free to Be Online?* <https://plan-international.org/publications/free-to-be-online/>
50. Demos. (2020). *Engendering Hate: The contours of state-aligned gendered disinformation online*. <https://demos.co.uk/research/engendering-hate-the-contours-of-state-aligned-gendered-disinformation-online/>
51. National Democratic Institute (NDI). (2021). *Addressing Online Misogyny and Gendered Disinformation: A How-To Guide*. <https://www.ndi.org/publications/addressing-online-misogyny-and-gendered-disinformation-how-guide>
52. U.K. Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). (2020). *How to Guide on Gender and Strategic Communication in Conflict and Stabilisation Contexts*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-guide-on-gender-and-strategic-communication-in-conflict-and-stabilisation-contexts-january-2020>
53. Plan International. (2020). *State of the World's Girls 2020: Free to Be Online?* <https://plan-international.org/publications/free-to-be-online/>



and violence against women and girls and become active bystanders reporting abuse and amplifying girls' and women's voices.<sup>54</sup>

### **Invest in internal capacity strengthening to improve policies and tools to support employees facing gendered disinformation:**

First and foremost, civil society organizations can build better organizational structures for women affected by gendered disinformation.<sup>55</sup> For example, developing human resource policies and reporting mechanisms related to abuse suffered because of work-related social media presence, or providing psychosocial support services for employees who suffer from online abuse or who witness online abuse as a result of their work.<sup>56</sup> Organizations should consider implementing security measures for those who work to debunk disinformation on contentious gender issues and should protect the personal data of all who are at risk of being targeted by malicious actors.<sup>57</sup> Organizations should consider implementing security measures for those who work to debunk disinformation on contentious gender issues and should protect the personal data of all who are at risk of being targeted by malicious actors.<sup>58</sup> Organizations should consider implementing security measures for those who work to debunk disinformation on contentious gender issues and should protect the personal data of all who are at risk of being targeted by malicious actors.<sup>59</sup>

### **Engage in cross-sectoral collaboration and stakeholder engagement on the topic of gendered disinformation:**

Addressing gendered disinformation cannot be the sole responsibility of gender-based programming. Collaborative responses involving CSOs, academia, the private sector, and other stakeholders are necessary to learn more about the threat of gendered disinformation, to develop collective responses to guard the safety of women online, and to offer adequate support to those who are targeted.<sup>60</sup> In designing programs, different types of stakeholders should be brought in to provide support and expertise—technology companies can provide technical knowledge

and accurate data about how their platforms are being used to cause harm; civil society groups can provide an important depth of understanding on how these types of harm interact with the communities that they represent; government stakeholders can provide legal and institutional governance that can ensure that decisions and policies that are produced are more likely to be taken up and become best practice.<sup>61</sup>

### **Dialogue and engage with social media platforms to address gendered disinformation online:**

Civil society can coordinate directly with social media platforms to address gendered disinformation. For example, CSOs and platforms should work together to support the work of local experts in identifying and combating gendered disinformation through the provision of data access or the trialing of potential responses through changes to platform design.<sup>62</sup> Civil society should help facilitate attempts by government actors, women's rights organizations, other civil society actors and high-profile women to report gendered disinformation to social media platforms so that they can remove it.<sup>63</sup> CSOs can serve as trusted conduits between partners and platforms by maintaining databases of abuse and reports against women employees and affiliates and sharing them regularly with platforms.<sup>64</sup> CSOs can serve as trusted conduits between partners and platforms by maintaining databases of abuse and reports against women employees and affiliates and sharing them regularly with platforms.<sup>65</sup>

54. Ibid.

55. National Democratic Institute (NDI). (2021). *Addressing Online Misogyny and Gendered Disinformation: A How-To Guide*. <https://www.ndi.org/publications/addressing-online-misogyny-and-gendered-disinformation-how-guide>

56. U.K. Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). (2020). *How to Guide on Gender and Strategic Communication in Conflict and Stabilisation Contexts*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-guide-on-gender-and-strategic-communication-in-conflict-and-stabilisation-contexts-january-2020>

57. Wilson Center. (2021). *Malign Creativity: How Gender, Sex, and Lies are Weaponized Against Women Online*. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/malign-creativity-how-gender-sex-and-lies-are-weaponized-against-women-online>

58. National Democratic Institute (NDI). (2021). *Addressing Online Misogyny and Gendered Disinformation: A How-To Guide*. <https://www.ndi.org/publications/addressing-online-misogyny-and-gendered-disinformation-how-guide>

59. U.K. Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). (2020). *How to Guide on Gender and Strategic Communication in Conflict and Stabilisation Contexts*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-guide-on-gender-and-strategic-communication-in-conflict-and-stabilisation-contexts-january-2020>

60. UNESCO. (2020). *Online violence Against Women Journalists: A Global Snapshot of Incidence and Impacts*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375136>

61. Global Network on Extremism and Technology (GNET). (2021). *Bringing Women, Peace and Security Online: Mainstreaming Gender in Responses to Online Extremism*. <https://gnet-research.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/GNET-Report-Women-Peace-And-Security.pdf>

62. National Democratic Institute (NDI). (2021). *Addressing Online Misogyny and Gendered Disinformation: A How-To Guide*. <https://www.ndi.org/publications/addressing-online-misogyny-and-gendered-disinformation-how-guide>

63. EU DisinfoLab. (2021). *Gender-Based Disinformation: Advancing Our Understanding and Response*. <https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/gender-based-disinformation-advancing-our-understanding-and-response/>

64. U.K. Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). (2020). *How to Guide on Gender and Strategic Communication in Conflict and Stabilisation Contexts*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-guide-on-gender-and-strategic-communication-in-conflict-and-stabilisation-contexts-january-2020>

65. National Democratic Institute (NDI). (2021). *Addressing Online Misogyny and Gendered Disinformation: A How-To Guide*. <https://www.ndi.org/publications/addressing-online-misogyny-and-gendered-disinformation-how-guide>



## Technology Companies and Social Media Platforms

**Develop base standards for prevention of and response to gendered disinformation:** Efforts can be made by social media platforms to identify risks systematically rather than on a case-by-case basis.<sup>66</sup> This could be achieved by partnering with other stakeholders, such as government and civil society, to establish an official method of quickly flagging dangerous gendered campaigns, starting by updating terms of service when it comes to threats, harassment, doxing, and manipulated imagery.<sup>67</sup> Addressing gender-based harms should be incentivized and a cultural change that prioritizes user safety over sheer innovation and profit should be encouraged.<sup>68</sup>

**Raise awareness via social media platforms to reach broader audiences:** Social media platforms are a good conduit for mass awareness raising campaigns about the threat of gendered disinformation and its impacts. Raising more awareness about the unique dangers faced by women (and especially women in public life) online needs to occur.<sup>69</sup>

**Provide support for digital and media and information literacy trainings:** Online platforms can work with women and civil society to build on and create solutions to increase girls' and all young people's digital literacy on

their platforms.<sup>70</sup> They could also divert a small portion of their profits to digital literacy programs as well as to public services or non-profit organizations that provide support to victims of gender-based violence online.<sup>71</sup> Social media platforms already make investments into digital literacy and media programs to combat the spread of disinformation online—gender equality should be an important part of these educational programs.<sup>72</sup> Training for content moderators should also be prioritized, to ensure the programs and individuals responsible for spotting false information consider gendered language and narratives as well.<sup>73</sup>

**Content moderation of gendered disinformation and related harms:** Content moderation on social media platforms requires expertise and language skills in the relevant context, as automated systems will often miss the nuances of gendered disinformation campaigns.<sup>74</sup> Automated detection must be improved, starting with better data collection about the many forms of misogyny, hate speech, and gendered disinformation women face online.<sup>75</sup> Platform classifiers and keywords need to be updated to include the unique narratives, nicknames, and memes employed against women in public life who face online abuse.<sup>76</sup> Platforms must also improve their reporting mechanisms for individuals experiencing gender-based hate, as users currently have little insight into how their reports are reviewed by content moderators.<sup>77</sup> It is important to note that content moderation often causes secondary harms to those responsible for reviewing and reporting harmful content,<sup>78</sup> and that improving content moderation practices should also include psychosocial

66. EU DisinfoLab. (2021). *Gender-Based Disinformation: Advancing Our Understanding and Response*. <https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/gender-based-disinformation-advancing-our-understanding-and-response/>

67. Ibid.

68. Global Network on Extremism and Technology (GNET). (2021). *Bringing Women, Peace and Security Online: Mainstreaming Gender in Responses to Online Extremism*. <https://gnet-research.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/GNET-Report-Women-Peace-And-Security.pdf>

69. Women in International Security (WIS). (n.d.). *An Overlooked Threat To Democracy? Gendered Disinformation About Female Politicians*. <https://wiisglobal.org/an-overlooked-threat-to-democracy-gendered-disinformation-about-female-politicians/>

70. Plan International. (2021). *State of the World's Girls 2021: The Truth Gap*. <https://plan-international.org/publications/the-truth-gap/>

71. Bradshaw, Samantha and Henle, Amelie. (2021). *The Gender Dimensions of Foreign Influence Operations*. <https://fsi.stanford.edu/publication/gender-dimensions-foreign-influence-operations>

72. Ibid.

73. Women in International Security (WIS). (n.d.). *An Overlooked Threat To Democracy? Gendered Disinformation About Female Politicians*. <https://wiisglobal.org/an-overlooked-threat-to-democracy-gendered-disinformation-about-female-politicians/>

74. EU DisinfoLab. (2021). *Gender-Based Disinformation: Advancing Our Understanding and Response*. <https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/gender-based-disinformation-advancing-our-understanding-and-response/>

75. Wilson Center. (2021). *Malign Creativity: How Gender, Sex, and Lies are Weaponized Against Women Online*. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/malign-creativity-how-gender-sex-and-lies-are-weaponized-against-women-online>

76. Ibid.

77. Bradshaw, Samantha and Henle, Amelie. (2021). *The Gender Dimensions of Foreign Influence Operations*. <https://fsi.stanford.edu/publication/gender-dimensions-foreign-influence-operations>

78. Arshat, A., & Etcovitch, D. (2018). The Human Cost of Online Content Moderation. *Harvard Journal of Law & Technology Digest*. <https://jolt.law.harvard.edu/digest/the-human-cost-of-online-content-moderation>



support care for content moderators – especially those who may identify with the identities being targeted through these disinformation campaigns. Improving automatic detection to reduce the human toll of reviewing and flagging violent content should be prioritized.

### **Improve reporting mechanisms for women experiencing gendered disinformation and other online attacks:**

Reporting mechanisms on social media platforms can be made more user-friendly and trauma-informed.<sup>79</sup> At a minimum, internet communications companies should ensure that their online abuse and harassment reporting systems enable complaints to be acted upon in a timely and effective manner in accordance with international human rights frameworks.<sup>80</sup> Reporting mechanisms should be improved so that they hold perpetrators to account, are responsive to all girls' and women's needs and experiences, and consider intersecting identities.<sup>81</sup> Platforms should be transparent in reporting patterns around the types of abuse complaints they receive, and how they have responded.<sup>82</sup> They should create a streamlined, flexible, and responsive report management system, including allowing users to create and edit drafts, add context, and combine multiple reports to document a more holistic view of the abuse they are receiving.<sup>83</sup> <sup>84</sup> Another idea is to create formal, publicly known appeals or escalation channels for content that is reported as abusive but not taken down.<sup>85</sup>

### **Integrate safety by design principles into platform design:**

Safety by design features can be integrated into

social media platform design to help mitigate against gendered disinformation. Examples include: building shields that enable users to proactively filter abusive content and quarantine it in a dashboard, where they can review and address it with the help of trusted allies;<sup>86</sup> enabling users to assemble rapid response teams of trusted allies and to delegate account access, so that those allies can jump in to provide targeted assistance;<sup>87</sup> providing an SOS button that users can instantly activate to trigger additional in-platform protections and an emergency hotline;<sup>88</sup> and others. Systems should be designed to empower users rather than simply prohibit bad behavior.

### **Punish perpetrators who produce and disseminate gendered disinformation:**

Social media platforms can create and enforce transparent and meaningful consequences for persistent abusers, while still protecting free speech online.<sup>89</sup> <sup>90</sup> For repeat offenders in particular, platforms should consider heftier consequences than removal of an isolated piece of content or locking of account features until the offending content is deleted.<sup>91</sup> Platforms can consider a transparent system of escalating penalties for abusive behavior—which should include warnings, strikes, temporary functionality limitations, and suspensions, as well as content takedowns and account bans—and spell out these penalties for users every step of the way.<sup>92</sup> Nudges and reminders can be used to discourage users from posting abusive content as well.<sup>93</sup> Equally important, platforms should study the efficacy of nudges in curbing abuse, publish their findings, and give outside researchers

79. PEN America. (2021). *No Excuse for Abuse: What Social Media Companies Can Do Now to Combat Online Harassment and Empower Users*. <https://pen.org/report/no-excuse-for-abuse/>

80. UNESCO. (2020). *Online violence Against Women Journalists: A Global Snapshot of Incidence and Impacts*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375136>

81. Plan International. (2020). *State of the World's Girls 2020: Free to Be Online?* <https://plan-international.org/publications/free-to-be-online/>

82. UNESCO. (2020). *Online violence Against Women Journalists: A Global Snapshot of Incidence and Impacts*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375136>

83. Wilson Center. (2021). *Malign Creativity: How Gender, Sex, and Lies are Weaponized Against Women Online*. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/malign-creativity-how-gender-sex-and-lies-are-weaponized-against-women-online>

84. PEN America. (2021). *No Excuse for Abuse: What Social Media Companies Can Do Now to Combat Online Harassment and Empower Users*. <https://pen.org/report/no-excuse-for-abuse/>

85. Ibid.

86. Ibid.

87. Ibid.

88. Ibid.

89. Ibid.

90. Wilson Center. (2021). *Malign Creativity: How Gender, Sex, and Lies are Weaponized Against Women Online*. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/malign-creativity-how-gender-sex-and-lies-are-weaponized-against-women-online>

91. Ibid.

92. PEN America. (2021). *No Excuse for Abuse: What Social Media Companies Can Do Now to Combat Online Harassment and Empower Users*. <https://pen.org/report/no-excuse-for-abuse/>

93. Wilson Center. (2021). *Malign Creativity: How Gender, Sex, and Lies are Weaponized Against Women Online*. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/malign-creativity-how-gender-sex-and-lies-are-weaponized-against-women-online>

access to the data they need to assess these features independently.<sup>94</sup>

**Engage in cross-sectoral collaboration:** Platforms can collaborate to create a cross-platform consortium to track and respond to online misogyny. Rather than duplicate threat investigation and enforcement work within individual platforms, social media platforms should consider creating a consortium to address gendered online abuse.<sup>95</sup>



## Academia, Research, and Think Tanks

**Support the collection of data and evidence to expand the evidence base of gendered disinformation and its impacts:** Think tanks and academia can support the collection of data on gender-based online harassment and abuse at the national, regional, and global levels and commission research to measure its prevalence and impact.<sup>96</sup> This must be done at an intersectional level that includes more research into gendered disinformation in non-English languages and in the global South.<sup>97</sup> Researchers must help document the threat by helping to understand the patterns of abuse and efficacy of prevention measures and solutions, rather than investigating isolated episodes. A body of research, both qualitative and quantitative, on gendered disinformation would allow stakeholders to share trends and compare across contexts and to find resonance with other movements, for instance in relation to GBV or journalistic safety.<sup>98</sup> Other research priorities include understanding the tactics used by foreign state and non-

state actors to spread gendered disinformation,<sup>99</sup> better understanding intersectional impacts to move away from a binary definition of gendered disinformation,<sup>100</sup> and better understanding of the effectiveness of different responses. For example, researchers can support a forward-looking analysis of regulation to understand the possibilities and implications of different approaches to regulating social media.<sup>101</sup>

### **Engage in cross-sectoral collaboration to raise awareness of gendered disinformation and its impacts:**

Any research on gender norms and social media should take an interdisciplinary approach that recognizes the relationships between business processes, technological development, user behavior, and different forms of regulation. Studying gender norms online through a siloed disciplinary lens risks narrow and inaccurate conclusions that overemphasize certain features of platforms and how they operate.<sup>102</sup> Collaborative responses involving stakeholders across research, government, civil society, and the private sector are necessary to gain more granular knowledge about attacks, to develop collective responses to guard the safety of women online.<sup>103</sup>

### **Improve institutional policies and procedures to support women experiencing abuse:**

Think tanks and academic institutions can develop support policies for employees facing online harassment and abuse. Many employers have policies relating to employees' or affiliates' use of social media, but far fewer have support mechanisms for those undergoing online abuse as a result of their work-related social media engagement. Employers should consider providing mental health services, support for employees or affiliates' legal fees and other expenses (such as anti-doxxing service subscriptions) and should outline clear

94. PEN America. (2021). *No Excuse for Abuse: What Social Media Companies Can Do Now to Combat Online Harassment and Empower Users*. <https://pen.org/report/no-excuse-for-abuse/>

95. Wilson Center. (2021). *Malign Creativity: How Gender, Sex, and Lies are Weaponized Against Women Online*. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/malign-creativity-how-gender-sex-and-lies-are-weaponized-against-women-online>

96. U.S. White House. (2022). *Launching the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse*. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/gpc/briefing-room/2022/03/18/launching-the-global-partnership-for-action-on-gender-based-online-harassment-and-abuse/>

97. Align. (2022). *Hidden in plain sight: how the infrastructure of social media shapes gender norms*. <https://www.alignplatform.org/resources/report-hidden-in-plain-sight>

98. EU DisinfoLab. (2021). *Gender-Based Disinformation: Advancing Our Understanding and Response*. <https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/gender-based-disinformation-advancing-our-understanding-and-response/>

99. U.S. Department of State Global Engagement Center. (2023). *Gendered Disinformation: Tactics, Themes, and Trends by Foreign Malign Actors*. <https://www.state.gov/gendered-disinformation-tactics-themes-and-trends-by-foreign-malign-actors/>

100. EU DisinfoLab. (2021). *Gender-Based Disinformation: Advancing Our Understanding and Response*. <https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/gender-based-disinformation-advancing-our-understanding-and-response/>

101. Align. (2022). *Hidden in plain sight: how the infrastructure of social media shapes gender norms*. <https://www.alignplatform.org/resources/report-hidden-in-plain-sight>

102. Ibid.

103. UNESCO. (2020). *Online violence Against Women Journalists: A Global Snapshot of Incidence and Impacts*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375136>

mechanisms for targets to report such campaigns against them to official communications and human resources staff.<sup>104</sup>



## The Media Sector

**Invest in organizational capacity strengthening to protect staff against online attacks:** News organizations can establish formal gender-sensitive procedures and systems for identifying, reporting, and monitoring online violence against their staff—women journalists should not bear the responsibility for managing or combatting the problem on their own.<sup>105 106</sup> This includes policies and protections for freelance journalists.<sup>107</sup> Media organizations should provide online safety support (integrating psychological, digital security, physical security, and legal responses) to staff before, during, and after attacks, along with targeted education and training.<sup>108 109</sup>

**Strengthen media stakeholders' capacity to address gendered disinformation:** Civil society and other media organizations can support the production of gender-sensitive content through capacity strengthening of media organizations, training of journalists and editors, and the development of communication or editorial guidelines on terminology to tackle newsroom biases and counter gendered disinformation and sexist hate speech.<sup>110</sup> Training should also focus on the causes and consequences of

gendered disinformation and how to prevent and respond to these incidents.<sup>111</sup>

**Serve as a watchdog for gendered disinformation topics and trends:** Media organizations can play a watchdog role around gendered disinformation by highlighting evidence of online abuse to raise the alarm among various actors best positioned to take action—international media reporting can serve as a powerful motivator for systemic change among governments or platforms.<sup>112</sup> Media organizations can also create monitoring mechanisms at the organizational, local, and national level for gendered disinformation campaigns, and can track and map trends and topics that cause spikes in gendered disinformation.<sup>113</sup>

Engage in cross-sectoral collaboration to amplify impact: Media organizations can collaborate with other stakeholders to hold the tech industry, governments, and others to account by critically reporting on the lack of improvements on gender-based violence, safety of journalists (and other public-facing women), and women's and LGBTQ+ rights generally.<sup>114</sup> They should work to exchange best practices around combatting gendered disinformation with other media and media regulatory institutions, as well as other relevant sectors.<sup>115</sup> They should share sector insights and expertise to inform digital and media literacy programs that focus on developing critical thinking and on practical digital navigation and safety skills.<sup>116</sup>

104. Wilson Center. (2021). *Malign Creativity: How Gender, Sex, and Lies are Weaponized Against Women Online*. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/malign-creativity-how-gender-sex-and-lies-are-weaponized-against-women-online>

105. Ibid.

106. UNESCO. (2020). *Online violence Against Women Journalists: A Global Snapshot of Incidence and Impacts*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375136>

107. International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF). (n.d.). *Attacks and Harassment: The Impact on Female Journalists and Their Reporting*. <https://www.iwmf.org/attacks-and-harassment/>

108. International Media Support. (2023). *Online gendered disinformation and sexist hate speech*. [https://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/IMS-Online-gendered-disinformation\\_final.pdf](https://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/IMS-Online-gendered-disinformation_final.pdf)

109. UNESCO. (2020). *Online violence Against Women Journalists: A Global Snapshot of Incidence and Impacts*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375136>

110. International Media Support. (2023). *Online gendered disinformation and sexist hate speech*. [https://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/IMS-Online-gendered-disinformation\\_final.pdf](https://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/IMS-Online-gendered-disinformation_final.pdf)

111. Ibid.

112. EU DisinfoLab. (2021). *Gender-Based Disinformation: Advancing Our Understanding and Response*. <https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/gender-based-disinformation-advancing-our-understanding-and-response/>

113. International Media Support. (2023). *Online gendered disinformation and sexist hate speech*. [https://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/IMS-Online-gendered-disinformation\\_final.pdf](https://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/IMS-Online-gendered-disinformation_final.pdf)

114. Ibid.

115. Ibid.

116. Plan International. (2021). *State of the World's Girls 2021: The Truth Gap*. <https://plan-international.org/publications/the-truth-gap/>



## Political Parties

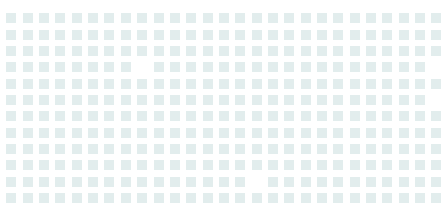
**Increase awareness:** Political parties can support awareness raising efforts around the existence of gendered disinformation and the negative impact of gendered disinformation on reaching political equity.<sup>117</sup>

**Improve institutional policies and procedures:** Political parties can support and adopt improved policies to address women within and outside the party who are the victims of targeted attacks, for example by outlining clear mechanisms for targets to report such campaigns against them to official communications staff.<sup>118</sup> Political actors must, of course, desist from mounting attacks (on and offline) against women.<sup>119</sup>

117. Internet Governance Forum (IGF). (2022). IGF 2022 *Best Practice Forum Gender and Digital Rights*. <https://intgovforum.org/en/content/igf-2022-best-practice-forum-gender-and-digital-rights>

118. UNESCO. (2020). *Online violence Against Women Journalists: A Global Snapshot of Incidence and Impacts*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375136>

119. Ibid.



# 04

## Analysis of Recommendations

Taken together, the above recommendations represent a comprehensive summary of the most common recommendations among existing reports (2020-2023) for addressing gendered disinformation. Across the nearly twenty reports reviewed, some clear patterns – and gaps – emerge. Government, tech platforms, and civil society (and to a slightly lesser extent media organizations, think tanks, and political parties) emerge as the main players in the fight against gendered disinformation. Actions such as evidence gathering, awareness raising, coalition building, training, institutional strengthening, and the development of base standards and principles around gendered disinformation emerge as recommendations for nearly each of the six stakeholders mentioned.

**A deeper analysis of the main recommendations to address gendered disinformation, including the stakeholders and interventions missing, follows in the sections below.**



## Who is called to action?

In the reports reviewed and referenced in this analysis, **several stakeholders were consistently cited as leading players in combatting gendered disinformation—these include government, tech platforms, and civil society.** Others, like the media organizations, think tanks and academia, and political parties, were cited, but not as consistently. While these six stakeholders are critical players in addressing the threat of gendered disinformation, many stakeholders are missing from these recommendations, including the private sector and businesses; donors, funders, and philanthropies (other than the government); the entertainment industry, including influencers, sports, and cultural institutions; faith and religious institutions; men’s communities and peer groups; and bystanders. Recommendations focused on how to engage these different groups are sorely needed for a holistic response to gendered disinformation. Additionally, political parties and actors have not been called to action by many sources, with the sole exception of UNESCO<sup>120</sup> recognizing them as important stakeholders in gendered disinformation discourse. While recommendations for actions by political parties abound when it comes to violence against women in politics, they are not recognized as significant stakeholders but those who work to address disinformation.

It is important to note the role of women and women-led organizations in responding to and preventing gendered disinformation. Many of the reports analyzed correctly assert that women be centered in designing and implementing solutions to this exigent threat. It is important that women’s empowerment and leadership organizations help define the terms, stakes, and resources needed to address this threat, in addition to the work of cross-sectoral partnerships with organizations that provide services to survivors of gender-based violence, policymakers, platforms, and law enforcement.<sup>121</sup> However, to say that this is solely the responsibility of women’s rights organizations could potentially perpetuate the dismissive notion that this is

“only” a women’s problem. Awareness-raising and capacity building in the areas of gender awareness and sensitivity, survivor-centeredness, and holistic security – psychosocial, digital, and physical – are key to being effective and safe while addressing gendered disinformation and should be conducted with the support and coordination of a diverse set of stakeholders and organization types.<sup>122</sup>



## Analysis of commonly recommended actions:

**Investing in understanding of the problem of gendered disinformation is a common recommendation** – civil society and non-governmental organizations, academia and research institutions, and governments and government agencies are called upon to support, conduct, and use research and evidence that helps to better understand the problem and what works to address it. A critical topic for research that is not mentioned in these reports relates to strategies for the *prevention* of gendered disinformation—what types of education and training, for example, help to reduce the prevalence of this threat in a given society? Notably, the tech sector, platform stakeholders, and media sector are not called out as stakeholders in understanding the problem, which creates a blind spot and can lead to a lack of urgency or even reluctance on the part of technology partners to share platform data with researchers.

**Raising awareness of gendered disinformation and its impact is also a common call to action.** Governments, civil society, social media platforms, media, and even political parties are all encouraged to engage their constituents and raise awareness about the problem and its impact. This recommendation is an important step in recognizing the societal scale of the problem and the need to reach multiple and diverse audiences. More nuance and tactics on how to do that in a survivor-centered and impactful way would strengthen this recommendation, as would more comprehensive guidance on what kinds of awareness raising would work for different audiences and by different messengers, and where campaigns are most effective—on

120. Ibid.

121. National Democratic Institute (NDI). (2021). *Addressing Online Misogyny and Gendered Disinformation: A How-To Guide*. <https://www.ndi.org/publications/addressing-online-misogyny-and-gendered-disinformation-how-guide>

122. Wilson Center. (2021). *Malign Creativity: How Gender, Sex, and Lies are Weaponized Against Women Online*. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/malign-creativity-how-gender-sex-and-lies-are-weaponized-against-women-online>



what platform, and via what method (digital, traditional media, community-based messaging, etc.). This is necessary to avoid doing (more) harm through awareness raising campaigns and to avoid further politicizing the issue of gender and/or further fueling divisions. It is also important to note, however, that awareness campaigns should focus not just on gendered disinformation as a threat to individual women, but also on how it affects democracy, integrating these messages into campaigns. Additionally, going beyond awareness and towards shifting attitudes and behaviors online would strengthen the impact of this recommendation. Interestingly, awareness-raising is mentioned as a key recommendation for every stakeholder except for media organizations. This is a major gap, as the media has an important role to play in reporting the various impacts of gendered disinformation and educating the public on both societal (democracy, economic, etc.) and individual-level consequences. In addition, more detail is needed around the role tech companies should play to support and amplify campaigns designed and led by government or civil society.

**Funding and implementation of training and capacity strengthening initiatives to build skills for prevention and mitigation**, including supporting survivors of gendered disinformation and punishing perpetrators, is recommended as an action for stakeholders within their domains. Governments are called upon to fund education initiatives and train public servants and law enforcement and litigators. Civil society is called out as one of the leading stakeholders able to reach multiple audiences: from citizens to communities, to survivors, to journalists through training and capacity building initiatives. Media are also encouraged to carry out capacity strengthening programs to improve their ability to address gendered disinformation. However, many recommendations for media organizations omit the role that they must play in reversing their own contributions to the normalization of harmful gender narratives and the amplification of gendered disinformation, particularly in and around election cycles. Media organizations should consider trainings for the producers of news and students of journalism around these topics. Additionally, the reports reviewed did not touch upon the implementation of trainings by political parties, who should also be encouraged to undergo trainings on the threat and harm of gendered disinformation, particularly in political campaigns. Notable is the absence of specific education sector stakeholders positioned to address several of the root causes of the problem, such as toxic gendered stereotypes, lack of girls and women in technology, and ethical considerations and

safety by design in new technologies. Skill and capacity-focused recommendations would be stronger if they leveraged the education sector's capacity for scale. Training is also critical for preventative strategies—for example, stronger civic education around the political process could help reduce gendered disinformation that stems from intense polarization.

A recommendation to **develop base standards and shared principles when discussing and designing solutions to gendered disinformation** is provided to government and tech platform stakeholders. Perhaps this is done in recognition of the fact that these stakeholders hold the biggest levers to address the problem through policies, regulations, and changes to the infrastructure that allow and enable this problem to spread. This recommendation would be greatly strengthened if the voices of women and their experiences online were more prominently centered, in addition to the many other diverse stakeholders who can contribute to developing principles and standards. In addition, while the integration and adoption of safety by design principles are mentioned by several reports as critical for the development and improvement of social media platforms, these principles should be included in digital design education as well, to ensure these principles are socialized to future generations of tech designers.

**Support for improved regulation and increased legislation to address and prevent gendered disinformation** does emerge frequently in reports as a recommendation for governments. While there are good recommendations for types of legislation or regulation that may be beneficial, more should be considered, for example requirements for platforms to annually review databases of abuse or mandating the release of certain types of data to research organizations. A better understanding, through research, of the implementation of proposed legislative or regulatory interventions via the enforcement agencies and mechanisms responsible for upholding them would bolster these recommendations.

The most commonly cited recommendation across sources is to **engage in cross-sectoral collaboration and engagement to advance effective solutions**. Civil society, social media platforms, academia, and media are encouraged to collaborate with other stakeholders for advocacy, monitoring, and uncovering new evidence and utilization of this evidence and tools and to share their insights. Practical steps and examples of cross-sectoral and

whole of society approaches would strengthen the capacity of these actors to build them. Particular focus on gendered disinformation could be made part of existing larger cross-sectoral coordination efforts around the issue of disinformation and manipulative information in general. Of course, such collaboration is contingent on the willingness and interest of sectors to collaborate. Collaboration with social media platforms, for example, would help scale interventions like mass awareness campaigns, but may be difficult to implement given financial disincentives for social media platforms to reduce high levels of engagement that unfortunately frequently accompanies online attacks against women.

Finally, recommendations to **strengthen institutional policies, tools, and resources for supporting women experiencing abuse** within institutions has also been recorded. Different sources called for digital, psychosocial/mental health, and safety and security training, and for clear reporting and protection mechanisms for those facing gendered disinformation and abuse due to the nature of their work. This recommendation is critical for maintaining the ability of all these stakeholders to persevere and develop effective responses, and additional attention and investments are needed to develop psychosocial support resources, tools, and trainings for survivors of gendered disinformation and those who work on mitigating, monitoring, researching, and preventing it. In addition, protection and psychosocial care of content moderators is not addressed in these reports but is a critical need, given that secondary trauma from repeated viewing of gendered disinformation is at crisis levels among content moderators.<sup>123</sup> It would be beneficial for all these stakeholders to be deliberate about recognizing gendered disinformation and its impact and develop standards, principles, protocols, and tools to prevent and mitigate it.

Additional recommendations specific to each stakeholder – media, civil society, government, social media platforms, academia – are also recorded. There are many sector-specific recommendations for digital platforms, policy makers, media, and NGOs. Surprisingly, only civil society stakeholders have been specifically called to engage women and women-led partners in addressing gendered disinformation, despite the clear applicability of this recommendation to all sectors.



## Siloed responses: Disconnect between identity-based disinformation, online violence, and violence against women in politics.

A review of existing recommendations pertains to gendered disinformation as a subset of a broader threat of disinformation. While this is not incorrect, it does silo and limit the solutions, as this containment of the conversation fails to recognize the unique attributes of gendered disinformation.

Unfortunately, gendered disinformation has attributes which render some traditional responses ineffective, and which require additional consideration. For example, like many other forms of identity-driven disinformation, such as race- or religion-based narratives, gendered disinformation narratives are identity-driven, culturally resonant, draw on embedded social norms and fall into the category of “hard to debunk and counter” disinformation. In addition, harm is done on impact, and corrective measures are often ineffective. Like radicalization, gendered disinformation leverages misogynistic attitudes, narratives, and beliefs to normalize them. Unlike other forms of identity-based disinformation, gendered disinformation is often sexualized and thus is hard to discuss in a neutral way. Attempts to address gendered disinformation often penalize survivors, and it goes grossly underreported as abuse due to the persistent stigmatization of survivors. Given linkages to other forms of identity-based disinformation, the authors of this report recommend not only cross-sectoral stakeholder collaboration, but also cross-identity group collaboration on effective methods to prevent and respond to these narratives.

In addition, the authors of this review recommend strengthening and supplementing recommendations and interventions with evidence and good practices from adjacent relevant sectors, such as technology-facilitated gender-based violence, offline gender-based violence, violence against women in politics, countering/preventing violent extremism and radicalization, and behavior change communications. One subset of recommendations above – advancing national legislation – already includes these areas of response. They could be integrated into other actions by:

123. Arshat, A., & Etcovitch, D. (2018). The Human Cost of Online Content Moderation. *Harvard Journal of Law & Technology Digest*. <https://jolt.law.harvard.edu/digest/the-human-cost-of-online-content-moderation>



- » Implementing solutions to gendered disinformation together with other responses to technology facilitated gender-based violence and addressing heightened threat to targeted individuals, including frequent and severe threat of physical violence, severe trauma, sexualized content, and other digital threats such as doxing, trolling, cyber-bullying, and cyber-stalking.
- » Linking and learning from solutions designed to address violence against women in politics, which recognizes these tactics as part of the agenda to silence women and decrease the representation of diverse voices in decision making.
- » Connect to efforts to address malign influence and radicalization that seek to weaponize misogynistic narratives to drive authoritarian objectives.

Additionally, more nuanced understanding and expansion of research and recommendations to different contexts through collaboration with organizations across the globe would help elevate awareness of the threat and urgency of response, as well as provide a larger set of tested approaches and innovative solutions.



## What is missing from this list

Analysis of the recommendations revealed some notable opportunities for further action. Current weakness in recommendations, addressing which could strengthen prevention, response, and mitigation include:

- » Overall insufficient focus on prevention – most of the recommendations focus on addressing the harm that's already happening
- » Lack of recognition and recommended action that get to the roots of the problem which include for example, underrepresentation of women in engineering of new online spaces, decision-making on policies, and algorithm design
- » Lack of connection to the education sector and other norm-formative institutions, such as family, faith, and cultural institutions and communities (sports, theater, pop culture, entertaining, gaming)
- » Lack of specificity on how to productively engage men and boys in prevention and curbing the spread of gendered disinformation

- » Lack of distinction between general gendered disinformation affecting all women and girls (e.g. to dissuade women voters or decrease support for specific law/issue, etc.) and targeted disinformation (e.g. attacking specific women or women-led group), and which responses are best suited for each
- » Inadequate actions to target bystanders and perpetrators and address impunity for abusive information engagement including creation and sharing of gendered disinformation narratives

Overall, all proposed mitigation actions could benefit from recognition that gendered disinformation, potentially more so than other types of disinformation, creates offline consequences for its subjects, including heightened risk of offline violence. Therefore, responses should require:

- » Deliberate inclusion of survivor-focused, trauma-informed approaches such as solidarity and safe space building
- » Explicit mitigation strategies to redress the intersectional nature of abusive content, targeting mechanisms, and impact on individuals and communities, such as women of color, women with disabilities and LGBTQI+ people
- » Differentiated solutions for the evolving types of gendered disinformation, e.g. misogynistic campaigns indiscriminately targeting women as a social group versus smear campaigns targeting high visibility women such as candidates for elected office
- » Strong connection to digital citizenship and digital ethics education and principles and rights-based approaches
- » Attention to creating incentives for those who often perpetrate gendered disinformation, e.g. political actors, to desists from attacks against women, and disincentives/consequences if they do not
- » Addition of comprehensive follow-through on the connection between digital and physical harm that gendered disinformation carries in responses; and

Finally, the conversation about responses should be linked to the broader impact that gendered disinformation has on communities, governance, democracy, economy (and more) as to engage relevant powerholders and organizations in solutions. They should also not shy away from designing and using realistic levers to change the practices of the digital platforms that enable and make gendered disinformation profitable.

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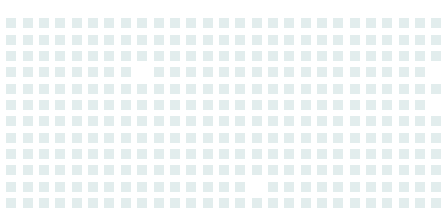
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