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The Team Europe Democracy (TED) Network

United for Democracy

Team Europe united against Technology-facilitated Gender-based Violence: Building inclusive and democratic digital spaces

Online Webinar Report

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) is one of the most pressing challenges at the intersection of gender equality, digital transformation, and democratic governance. The prevalence of personally experiencing online violence against women globally is at [38 per cent](#).

For the European Union, addressing TFGBV is a core part of its human-centric approach to digital transformation, which places fundamental rights, equality, and democratic participation at the centre of technological development. This commitment is reflected in the [Directive \(EU\) 2024/1385 on combating violence against women and domestic violence](#). This first EU-wide binding legislation criminalises certain forms of violence against women, including online violence. It also requires Member States to implement robust prevention, protection, victim support, access to justice, and coordination measures. This Directive is complemented by a range of strategic frameworks for 2020–2025, including the [Gender Equality Strategy](#), and the [Victims' Rights Strategy](#).

Online harassment, threats, disinformation and abuse are increasingly used to silence women's voices, restrict civic participation and undermine democratic debate. These practices particularly target women journalists, human rights defenders, feminist leaders and women in public life. At the same time, digital spaces remain **critical enablers of women's participation, leadership and empowerment**. They provide access to information, public debate, economic opportunities, political engagement and collective action across borders.

Ensuring that women can participate **safely and freely online** is therefore not only a matter of protection. It is also a prerequisite for inclusive digital transformation and resilient democracies.

Against this backdrop, the [Digital for Development \(D4D\) Hub](#) and the [Team Europe Democracy \(TED\) Initiative](#) jointly convened a public webinar on 16 December, bringing together EU institutions, EU Member States, international organisations and feminist civil



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society. The discussion was moderated by Brigitte Luggin, Policy Officer at the European Commission's Directorate-General for International Partnerships. During the discussion, participants emphasised that TFGBV is not a marginal or purely digital issue, but rather a **systemic threat to democratic participation**. They also highlighted that **coordinated and multi-stakeholder action can address this challenge**.

As Mia Steninge (Program Manager, Digital Democracy Initiative at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Denmark and Co-Chair of the Team Europe Democracy (TED) Working Group on Media and Digital) underlined, *“TFGBV erodes democratic participation as it silences diverse voices.”*

The webinar also showcased how **Team Europe initiatives**, including the [Digital Democracy Initiative \(DDI\)](#), the [EU-funded ACT to End Violence Against Women and Girls programme](#), and the upcoming **Team Europe Initiative on Women's Leadership in the Public ICT Sector**, are increasingly aligning digital inclusion, safety and governance into a coherent response.

Evidence, impacts and lived realities of TFGBV

Presenting findings from [UN Women's recent report *Tipping Point: The Chilling Escalation of Online Violence Against Women in the Public Sphere*](#), Yeliz Osman (Policy & Programme Management Specialist, UN Women) warned that TFGBV has reached a critical moment. According to the research, 70% of women human rights defenders, activists and journalists surveyed experienced online violence in the course of their work, and four in ten reported offline harm linked to online abuse. As she stressed, *“what starts online doesn't stay online.”*

The report also highlights the growing role of emerging technologies. Artificial intelligence is used to sexualise, discredit and intimidate women, amplifying abuse at unprecedented scale. From a regional and grassroots perspective, Laura Porrini (Head of Knowledge Area for Advocacy, [Fondo de Mujeres del Sur](#)) described how TFGBV is increasingly deployed as political violence against feminist and democratic actors in Latin America.

Drawing on the work of the Latin American Alliance of Women Funds, which jointly supports more than 1,600 women's rights organisations, she explained how coordinated digital attacks lead to self-censorship, withdrawal from public debate and weakened democratic accountability. *“When women's rights organisations are silenced or pushed out of the digital space, the public debate becomes less plural and less representative,”* she warned.



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What works: Feminist and community-led responses

UN Women emphasised that while progress exists, major gaps remain in legislation, prevention and survivor support, and called for increased investment in feminist expertise and digital resilience. Despite the scale of the challenge, the discussion highlighted **approaches that are already delivering results**.

Laura Porrini outlined that the Latin American Alliance of Women Funds is implementing the initiative NET-that-WORKS (supported by DANIDA within the framework of the DDI). The initiative applies a multi-level feminist approach that combines individual, organisational and structural action. It links flexible, long-term funding for grassroots organisations with digital security, psychosocial support, coalition-building and advocacy to strengthen democratic safeguards.

Sarah Hermanutz (Senior Project Manager at Expertise France, Joint Initiative Women Leadership in the Public ICT Sector) presented concrete examples of community-led innovation. These include an AI-powered WhatsApp chatbot that provides survivor-centred support in West and Central Africa, and a youth-led digital safety campaign in the Dominican Republic that reached over one million people. These experiences inform the design of the upcoming **Team Europe Initiative on Women's Leadership in the Public ICT Sector**. The initiative will combine institutional support, civil society financing, and structured dialogue between actors.

Strengthening Team Europe coordination

The final part of the webinar focused on how **Team Europe can amplify impact through stronger coordination** across regions and sectors. UN Women underlined the importance of multilateral platforms such as the [Generation Equality Action Coalitions](#) and the **Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse**, while emphasising the **need for deeper engagement with the technology sector** to ensure that online safety is *“designed into platforms and products from the start.”*

From a feminist funding perspective, Laura Porrini emphasised preparedness, strong networks and sustained resourcing, noting that *“a systemic problem requires systemic answers.”* Sarah Hermanutz illustrated how the Team Europe approach brings together multiple Member States and implementing agencies across Africa, Latin America, Central Asia and Southeast Asia. This approach creates opportunities to share experience, scale solutions and reinforce trusted partnerships.



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A shared responsibility

The session highlighted that **addressing TFGBV is central to safeguarding democratic participation in the digital age**. By aligning policy reform, grassroots action, digital inclusion and international cooperation, Team Europe initiatives contribute to safer and more inclusive digital civic spaces.

Continued coordination with **civil society, feminist organisations and activists on the front line** will be essential to scale impact and ensure that digital transformation truly serves entire societies without leaving anyone behind. **At the same time, the discussion underlined the critical role of the private sector**, particularly technology companies, in shaping the environments where abuse occurs. Ensuring women's safety online cannot be an afterthought. Safety and rights must be built into the design, governance and moderation of digital platforms from the outset.

Together, by strengthening partnerships between public authorities, civil society and the technology sector, Team Europe and its partners can help ensure that the digital space support **participation, leadership and rights—rather than exclusion and silencing**.

Key takeaways

- **TFGBV directly affects the quality of democracy**, both online and offline, by silencing women's voices, restricting civic participation, and undermining pluralistic public debate.
- **Safe digital spaces are essential for women's leadership and participation**. They enable access to information, political engagement, economic opportunities, and collective action.
- **Feminist, community-led approaches are effective**, particularly when they combine prevention, survivor support, digital resilience and long-term funding for grassroots organisations.
- **Team Europe coordination strengthens impact** by aligning policy, programming, and regional expertise across EU institutions, Member States and partners.
- **Engaging the technology sector is critical** to ensure that safety, accountability, and human rights are integrated into the design and governance of digital platforms from the start.