Gender-based cyberviolence: Parliament calls for EU law to tackle the problem

- Need for a minimum level of protection and reparation for victims, in line with Istanbul Convention standards
- Cyberviolence against women and LGBTIQ people is a continuation of gendered violence offline
- Gender-based violence should also be added to the list of “EU crimes”

Seven out of ten women have experienced cyber-stalking, according to the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) © AdobeStock_Rido
Parliament asked on Tuesday for a European directive to stamp out gender-based cyberviolence and ensure convergence at national and EU level.

Following a plenary debate on Monday, MEPs adopted a legislative initiative report on tackling gender-based cyberviolence with 513 votes in favour, 122 against, and 58 abstentions. The text reiterates the EU’s lack of an adequate legal framework to combat the phenomenon, and to protect and support victims. A common definition of gender-based cyberviolence is needed in criminal law, say MEPs, as are harmonised minimum and maximum penalties.

Parliament urges the Commission to criminalise gender-based cyberviolence, and calls for the Council to extend the list of ‘EU crimes’ - i.e. to officially recognise that gender-based violence is a particularly serious crime with a cross-border dimension.

A non-exhaustive list of actions that the legislation should address includes cyber harassment; cyber stalking; violations of privacy; recording and sharing images of sexual assault; remote control or surveillance (including spy apps); threats and calls to violence; sexist hate speech; induction to self-harm; unlawful access to messages or social media accounts; breach of the prohibitions of communication imposed by courts; and human trafficking.

Quotes

Co-rapporteur Elissavet Vozemberg-Vrionidi (EPP, EL) said: “Gender-based cyberviolence has a major impact on people’s fundamental rights and freedoms, on their dignity and on their lives at all levels. We call for legislation, without delay, to combat gender-based cyberviolence, which, in addition to a common definition and measures to protect and support victims, should also include measures to support Member States’ actions in the field of prevention. Gender-based violence, in all its forms, is a crime to which we must show zero tolerance!”

Co-rapporteur Sylwia Spurek (Greens/EFA, PL) commented: “This report sends a strong message to the Commission, emphasising yet again that we demand specific action to combat gender-based cyberviolence. The legislative measures we recommend should be included in the comprehensive Directive against gender-based violence in all its forms. It’s about the law, it’s about human rights, it’s about democracy: we need to guarantee every woman is safe from violence.”

Next steps

The Commission has indicated that it will propose a law in March 2022 to combat violence against women that includes prevention, protection, and effective prosecution, online and offline.

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a dramatic increase in gender-based cyberviolence. Seven out of ten women have experienced cyber-stalking, according to the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE).
Since September 2021, Parliament has called for offline gender-based violence to be criminalised under EU law. The Istanbul Convention remains the most comprehensive international treaty addressing the root causes of gender-based violence in all its forms.

Further information

The adopted text will be available here (14.12.2021)
Press release after committee vote (30.11.2021)
Legislative train
Procedure file
EP Research Service - Combating gender-based violence: Cyber violence (March 2021)
Legislative train
European Commission - Ending gender-based violence
Free photos, videos and audio material - Violence against women

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