

ONLINE VIOLENCE AGAINST YOUNG FEMALE WORKERS

RISKS, THREATS AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES

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This Brief is a part of the Solutions for Youth Employment (S4YE) Knowledge Brief series on the design and implementation of youth employment programs.

The digital transformation is creating new job opportunities, especially for women, who are able to work from home and overcome time and mobility constraints. In the United States, 49.3 percent of women worked from home in 2020 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021), while data from Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries show that women have been more likely to telework than men during the pandemic (OECD, 2021). However, digital technologies also bring new risks—one of these is online violence. In addition to psychological harm, this form of violence may undermine the positive jobs effects of the digital transformation by increasing the likelihood that young women forgo or leave digital jobs. This Brief presents emerging evidence of the scale of such problems in low- and middle-income countries and their impact on the participation of young women in digital sectors. It then outlines suggested policy responses.

The Brief also includes insights from online consultations with members of S4YE's Impact Portfolio and Youth Advisory Group and highlights strategies that three S4YE partners—Laboratoria, Gaza Sky Geeks, and Digital Opportunity Trust—have adopted to prevent, mitigate, or respond to incidents of online violence.

This Brief is a joint product of S4YE and the World Bank's Gender Group.



Solutions for Youth Employment (S4YE) is a multi-stakeholder coalition that aims to provide leadership and resources for catalytic action to increase the number of young people engaged in productive work. The S4YE Secretariat is housed in the Jobs Group within the Social Protection and Jobs Global Practice at the World Bank.

1. INTRODUCTION

The spread of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed commerce, communication, and collaboration. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated this proliferation, with about two-thirds of the world’s population using the Internet in 2021—up from approximately 50 percent in 2019. Wealthier countries have the highest rate of access, with over 90 percent of individuals using the Internet. However, low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) have experienced the fastest growth—for example, in the Africa Region, the share of people using the Internet has increased from 2 percent in 2005 to about 33 percent in 2021. Additionally, mobile phones serve as key tools of interconnectivity: In almost half of the countries with available data, more than 90 percent of people own a mobile phone (ITU, 2021).

Technology has also brought about new ways to tackle gender inequality. Online work in particular offers women new opportunities to overcome mobility restrictions, limited flexibility, and restrictive social and gender norms. Digital jobs enable women to generate income, improve productivity, and increase financial autonomy. Furthermore, engaging women in online work could help tackle longstanding occupational sex segregation in the ICT sector globally (Solutions for Youth Employment, 2018).

Despite this promise, several barriers persist in the digital economy, driving differences between women and men in digital access, usage, and skills. High access and usage costs can make technology prohibitive for women. Furthermore, restrictive social and gender norms related to technology remain a challenge in many countries. For example, women in Algeria, Bangladesh, and Pakistan report lack of family approval among the top three barriers to mobile Internet use (GMSA, 2021). And, as more and more women come online, another salient challenge fueling the gender digital divide is the risk of online violence.

1.1 WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT ONLINE VIOLENCE?

No standard definition of online violence exists. Several international and non-governmental actors have attempted to create definitions and related terminology (Table 1). For example, the International Center for Research on Women uses *“technology-facilitated gender-based violence”* to refer to an action carried out using the Internet and/or mobile technology that harms someone because of their sexual or gender identity (Hinson et al., 2018). This definition aims to capture the broad spectrum of violence that shifts from online spaces into physical ones and vice versa. *“Cyber violence”* is another commonly used term, referring to gender-based violence perpetuated through electronic communication and the Internet (EIGE, 2021).

TABLE 1 : COMMON DEFINITIONS FOR ONLINE VIOLENCE

TERM	DEFINITION	RELATED TERMINOLOGY
Technology-facilitated gender-based violence	An action by one or more people that harms others based on their sexual or gender identity or by enforcing harmful gender norms. This action is carried out using the internet and/or mobile technology and includes stalking, bullying, sexual harassment, defamation, hate speech and exploitation.	
Cyber violence	Gender-based violence that is perpetuated through electronic communication and the Internet.	Online violence, digital violence, digital abuse, cyber violence against women and girls, cyber abuse, cyber aggression, technology-related violence.

Sources: Hinson L, Mueller J, O'Brien-Milne L, Wandera N. (2018). Technology-facilitated gender-based violence: What is it, and how do we measure it? Washington, DC: International Center for Research on Women; European Institute for Gender Equality. Cyber violence. <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/>; Backe, Emma Louise, Pamela Lilleston, and Jennifer McCleary-Sills (2018). “Networked Individuals, Gendered Violence: A Literature Review of Cyberviolence.” Violence and Gender 5, no. 3: 135-146; European Agency for Fundamental Rights (2015) Violence Against Women: An EU wide survey. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

In this brief, we use the terms *“technology-facilitated gender-based violence”*, *“cyber violence”* and *“online violence”* interchangeably. Regardless of the specific term used, there are several overlapping behaviors commonly associated with online violence, such as cyber harassment, cyber stalking, cyberbullying, doxing and non-consensual dissemination of intimate images (see Table 2) (Hinson et al., 2018).

TABLE 2: BEHAVIORS COMMONLY ASSOCIATED WITH ONLINE VIOLENCE

TERM	DEFINITION	RELATED TERMINOLOGY
Cyber harassment	Unwanted offensive and sexually explicit emails or text messages; inappropriate advances on social networking sites; threats of physical or sexual violence by email or text message; Hate speech, meaning language that denigrates, insults, threatens or targets an individual based on her identity (gender) and other traits (such as sexual orientation or disability).	Electronic harassment, Internet harassment, cyber gender harassment, cyber / online sexual harassment, technology-related / cyber violence against women and girls
Cyber stalking	Cyber stalking is stalking through email, text (or online) messages or the internet. Stalking involves repeated incidents, which may or may not individually be innocuous acts, but combined undermine the victim’s sense of safety and cause distress, fear, or alarm. Sending emails, text messages (SMS) or instant messages that are offensive or threatening; posting offensive comments about the respondent on the internet; sharing intimate photos or videos of the respondent, on the internet or by mobile phone.	Online stalking, digital stalking
Cyber bullying	An aggressive intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using mobile phones or the Internet, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself.	Electronic bullying, Internet bullying, cyber aggression, online bullying
Doxing	The publication on-line of personal information from the victim without any consent.	
Non-consensual dissemination of intimate images	The online distribution of sexually graphic images or videos without the consent of the individual appearing in the images. The perpetrator is often an ex-partner posting intimate relationship pictures in retaliation for conflict or breakup. In other cases, images are obtained by hacking into the victim’s computer, social media accounts or phone. The term includes the action of publishing the images online and threats to the victim regarding the publication of intimate material.	Revenge porn, non-consensual pornography

Sources: Hinson L, Mueller J, O’Brien-Milne L, Wandera N. (2018). Technology-facilitated gender-based violence: What is it, and how do we measure it? Washington, DC: International Center for Research on Women; European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). Cyber violence. <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus>; Backe, Emma Louise, Pamela Lilleston, and Jennifer McCleary-Sills (2018). “Networked Individuals, Gendered Violence: A Literature Review of Cyberviolence.” *Violence and Gender* 5, no. 3: 135-146; European Agency for Fundamental Rights (2015) *Violence Against Women: An EU wide survey*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union; Cassidy, Wanda, Chantal Faucher, and Margaret Jackson (2013). “Cyberbullying among youth: A comprehensive review of current international research and its implications and application to policy and practice.” *School Psychology International* 34, no. 6: 575-612.; European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). *Revenge porn*. <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1488>.

1.2 PREVALENCE OF ONLINE VIOLENCE

Online violence, particularly in LMICs, is under-researched. However, available data from high-income countries indicate that this form of violence is prevalent. Large scale studies with large sample sizes are typically only found in high-income country settings but they help illustrate the challenge. In the US, over 40 percent of adults have experienced online harassment. Social media is the most common platform for this kind of behavior. In the US context, the largest share of people (14 percent) report that their online harassment is linked to their political views. Other reasons include appearance (9 percent), sex (8 percent), race or ethnicity (8 percent), religion (5 percent) and sexual orientation (3 percent). Younger adults, ages 18 to 29, are more likely to experience online harassment, ranging from behaviors, such as intentional embarrassment to online stalking. Women are twice as likely as men to report being targeted because of their sex. Among young women, 53 percent report having received explicit images that they did not request (Duggan, 2017).

Research from European countries also highlights the challenge. A survey of over 40,000 women from 28 countries across the European Union finds that 11 percent of women have experienced cyber harassment, specifically receiving offensive, unwanted or explicit emails or text messages since the age of 15. Women between 18 and 29 years are found to have the highest risk of online violence in Europe with 4 percent reporting experiences of cyberstalking a year before the survey; this figure was less than 1 percent for women over 60 years old. The survey finds that rates of online harassment are higher in countries with higher levels of internet penetration, such as Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Finland (and lower in countries with less Internet penetration, such as Lithuania, Portugal and Romania) (European Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2015). An Amnesty International study focused on Denmark, Italy, New Zealand, Poland, Spain, Sweden, the UK, and the US surveyed 4,000 women ages 18 to 55 years and found that 23 percent report experiences of online harassment (from 16 percent in Italy to 33 percent in the US). About two-thirds of women also shared that these experiences made them feel insecure in offline settings (European Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2015).

Smaller studies help fill the research gaps in LMICs. For example, the Web Foundation used household surveys and focus group discussions to assess women's rights online in nine countries.[1] One study focused on poor urban settings, including informal settlements. Overall, 13 percent of women and 18 percent of men reported incidents of online harassment and abuse by phone call or text message, while 13 percent of women and 11 percent of men reported abuse via social media or email (World Wide Web Foundation, 2015). With respect to incidents online, Kampala, Nairobi, and Maputo had the highest share of women reporting threats, harassment or stalking on the Internet in the last two years. Interestingly, in Lagos, the reported rate of online harassment is higher among men (see Table 3). However, the researchers note that the methodology is not conducive to gathering insights on intimate issues and therefore the data may underestimate the levels of online violence (World Wide Web Foundation, 2015).

TABLE 3: RESPONDENTS REPORTING ONLINE HARASSMENT

CITY, COUNTRY	Share of women (%)	Share of men (%)
Yaoundé, Cameroon	15	12
Bogota, Colombia	4	2
New Delhi, India	10	10
Jakarta, Indonesia	9	3
Nairobi, Kenya	21	19
Maputo, Mozambique	17	14
Lagos, Nigeria	10	17
Manila, Philippines	8	8
Kampala, Uganda	45	8

Source: Women and men who have experienced threats or direct personal bullying (including harassment or stalking) on the Internet in the past two years. World Wide Web Foundation (2015). Women's Rights Online: Translating Access into Empowerment. Washington, DC: World Wide Web Foundation.

Small-scale qualitative work, while not nationally-representative, also provides deeper insights. Interviews with 18 women rights activists from Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Nepal highlight reveal that half of participants report experiences of online violence and abuse and almost 90 percent report having witnessed another woman undergo this form of violence (Vlahakis, 2018). A small study in India with 500 social media users (majority women) found that almost 60 percent of respondents reported experiences of trolling, bullying, abuse, or harassment online. Respondents were from Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai, Hyderabad, and Kolkata. At the same time, the same number of respondents reported not encountering much violence online, pointing to potential issues around definitions of such violence (Pasricha, 2016).

[1] The study used a sample of 1,000 people per city, with a 75/25 percent split for women and men, respectively.

Youth-focused research highlights concerns about the dissemination of non-consensual intimate images or videos.

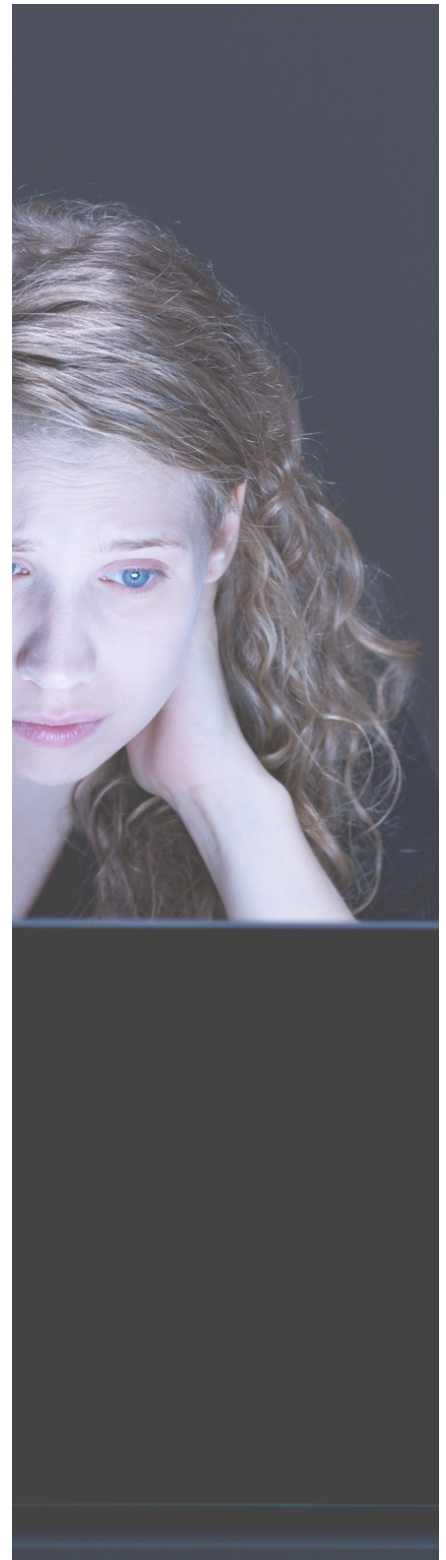
Research from 2020 focused on youth globally, found that an alarming 52 percent of female respondents report experiences of abuse or violence online. The most reported concern among youth— both female (35 percent) and male (29 percent) —referred to sharing intimate images or videos. Other concerns include humiliating messages (21 percent), abusive and threatening language (15 percent), sexual harassment (20 percent), and the sharing of false content (14 percent). The online medium with the most violence prevalence is social media, followed by texting or messaging apps (World Wide Web Foundation and World Association of Girls Guides and Girl Scouts, 2020).

Women in specific occupations, especially in politics and journalism, have become main targets of online violence.

In a study conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina, about 60 percent of women reported experiences of violence because of their participation in politics, with online tools serving as the main channel of perpetration (UN Women, 2019). And research conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union reveals that women parliamentarians have been targets of psychological violence, especially through social media. Women’s political affiliation, age—with younger women being more at risk—and membership to a minority group are aggravating factors of this phenomenon (IPU, 2016). UNESCO’s global survey on online violence against journalists revealed that 73 percent of women journalists had experienced online violence in the course of their work, 25 percent had received threats of physical violence, 18 percent had been threatened with sexual violence, and 20 percent reported being attacked offline in connection with online violence they had experienced (UNESCO, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the incidence but also the awareness of online violence.

With a surge in the use of social media and digital services more broadly during the pandemic, some organizations reported an escalation in cases of online violence against women (Washington Post, 2020). The pandemic is also associated with the emergence of new threat tactics, such as “Zoombombing”, which refers to the act of someone taking part in a meeting they have not been invited to, with the aim of disrupting the meeting, often to spread harassment and hate speech (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022). The psychological consequences of online violence could increase as many have been confined to their households with additional stress factors such as increased working hours, more care and domestic responsibilities, and exacerbated risks of intimate partner violence (UN Women, 2020).



Two-thirds of women report that online harassment made them concerned about their physical safety.

1.3 HOW DOES ONLINE VIOLENCE AFFECT YOUNG FEMALE WORKERS?

As technology changes how people work, women's safety considerations are increasingly relevant in online spaces. However, women's concerns about online violence might prevent them from getting online or result in women going offline after bad experiences, thereby restricting their online participation (World Bank, 2018). Research undertaken in India suggests that women who have suffered online abuse may be inclined to reduce their online presence (Pasricha, 2016). With more online services and tools, the consequences of online violence may affect additional aspects of women's life and decrease their wellbeing. The Economist Intelligence Unit reports that 78 percent of women are unaware that they have options to report harmful online behaviors and have little knowledge of strategies to mitigate risk of online violence. Women and girls with low levels of digital literacy are more at risk, as they may lack full awareness of the threats of online violence, which could even increase their vulnerability vis-à-vis offline violence.

Like 'offline' spaces, safety concerns can be a barrier to access and retention in digital employment opportunities. Research from Egypt, India, Mexico, and Uganda finds that 25 percent of non-Internet users between the ages of 14 and 17 reported that their families were opposed to their being online because they perceive it as a safety risk (Intel Corporation, 2013). As a result of feeling unsafe or unwelcome in online spaces, young women's opportunities to develop digital skills and access better paying jobs can be further restricted.

Online violence has psychological impacts that affect young women's ability to thrive in digital jobs. Literature focused on cyberbullying helps to shed some light on the potential impact of online violence on youth well-being. Research from the United States, Canada, and Australia focused on cyberbullying among heterosexual adolescents highlights that this practice is often linked to anxiety, poor performance in school, depression, and stress (Backe, Lilleston, & McCleary-Sills, 2018). Moreover, available evidence notes that adolescent girls in Canada and Sweden are more likely to be targeted for their weight, sexuality or appearance (Berne et al., 2013). This could also impact the way girls view digital job opportunities in often, higher paying sectors; however, research is needed to establish a causal link.

While there is limited evidence on the impact of behaviors such as online harassment and cyber stalking, smaller studies are starting to help fill knowledge gaps. These efforts point to a range of impacts, such as self-censorship, thereby silencing women and reducing their participation in public dialogue. Other effects include isolation and reduced mobility as women withdraw from public spaces and psychological and emotional harm, such as anxiety, stress, or panic attacks (Vlahakis, 2018). These impacts can inhibit young women's willingness and ability to participate in the digital economy.

1.4 WHAT ACTIONS HAVE BEEN TAKEN TO PROTECT WOMEN FROM ONLINE VIOLENCE?

Online violence is not only a security issue but also an economic one. Online violence increases medical costs related to mental health. In addition, the toll of this form of violence might also result in women leaving their jobs, thereby reducing their labor force participation. For instance, the Economist Intelligence Unit's 2020 survey on the subject reports that 7 percent of women surveyed lost or had to change their jobs due to online violence. In addition, 35 percent of women reported mental health issues, and 1 in 10 experienced physical harm due to online threats (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2020). Research from The Australia Institute estimates that online harassment and cyberhate have cost Australians an estimated total of 3.7 billion dollars in health costs and lost income (The Australia Institute, 2019).

There has been progress on legal reforms addressing online violence. A comparative legal analysis on the dissemination of non-consensual intimate images finds that many countries—including Australia, Japan, New Zealand and others—have developed specific legislation on the issue. Europol published a list of 28 online reporting platforms for cybercrime from among its member states (EUROPOL, 2021). On the other hand, some countries such as Brazil, Colombia, Cameroon among others respond through existing criminal, privacy or cybersecurity laws (Neris, Ruiz, & Valente, 2018).

Many country examples of legal reform are promising. These include the aforementioned Olimpia Melo law in Mexico, which was passed in April 2021. The law defines digital violence as: *“any malicious action carried out through information and communication technologies by which real or simulated images, audios or videos of intimate sexual content of a person are exposed or shared without their consent, without their approval or without their authorization and that causes psychological, emotional damage, or in any area of their private life or in their own image.”* It was named after Olimpia Coral Melo who has been fighting to criminalize this form of conduct since 2013 when a private video of her was posted online (Lockwood, 2021). Another example includes Guatemala, which has attempted to address online violence through a gender lens by regulating the capture, storage, and dissemination of non-consensual private material and obtaining or disseminating images captured by a third party (Ley de Guatemala, 2022). And, the Philippines has enacted specific laws that enables victims of online violence to seek recourse. Law enforcement officers have undergone training on investigating cyberviolence against women, and a few cases have resulted in arrests (World Wide Web Foundation, 2015).

Yet many legal reforms remain insufficient, especially as implementation often lags. For example, Cote d'Ivoire has developed an online reporting mechanism to report incidences and coordinate law enforcement on cybercrimes, with 4500 to 5000 cases per year. However, only half of them were resolved in the past year (Government of Cote d'Ivoire, 2021).



2. WHAT ARE YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ABOUT ONLINE VIOLENCE?

S4YE organized online consultations to understand how S4YE partners are thinking about online violence within their youth employment programs. S4YE held interviews with members of S4YE's Youth Advisory Group who are working in different youth entrepreneurship areas. Box 1 provides an overview of key messages from these consultations.

BOX 1 | Key Messages from Youth Consultations

Digital platforms can increase opportunities but also create vulnerabilities for young women: Digital communications tools (including social media platforms) are often used for networking and to facilitate community-building. However, there can be drawbacks. For example, women can receive inappropriate, unwanted messages from customers, peers, and/or mentors through LinkedIn, WhatsApp, and e-commerce platforms.

In the entrepreneurial space, unequal power dynamics can exacerbate these risks: Female entrepreneurs can find it difficult to balance unequal power dynamics with funders, where they feel pressured to maintain professional relationships with stakeholders who engage in inappropriate communication.

Context matters: In many communities, there is a culture of silence around abuse which makes young women reluctant to speak about these incidents. There may also be a culture of leniency, where cases of abuse are rarely prosecuted, and are typically 'resolved' by the family, and not the legal system. Even when there are effective reporting mechanisms in place, youth experiencing harassment or abuse may be discouraged from reporting because of fear of losing their jobs, harming their professional reputation, or other forms of retaliation.

Restrictive social norms often inhibit online interactions: In some cultural settings, family members—including husbands, or in the case of younger women, their parents or siblings—often have control over young women's decisions. When female entrepreneurs receive messages from male customers, they fear upsetting the male members of their, even when messages are strictly professional.

Social media platforms could play a stronger role: There is a huge correlation between online violence and hate speech. Social media platforms should increase their security and ramp up mechanisms to tackle hate speech. Besides, social media guidelines/terms of use should consider the different forms of violence that could take place online. Clearer rules and definitions need to be developed. There should be more awareness about options available for victims.

Women may not feel empowered to speak up: Online violence could reduce women's confidence to speak up and possibly reduce their likelihood to seek help for other issues, such as sexual harassment or intimate partner violence due to lack of redress for online violence incidents.

3. WHAT CAN PRACTITIONERS DO?

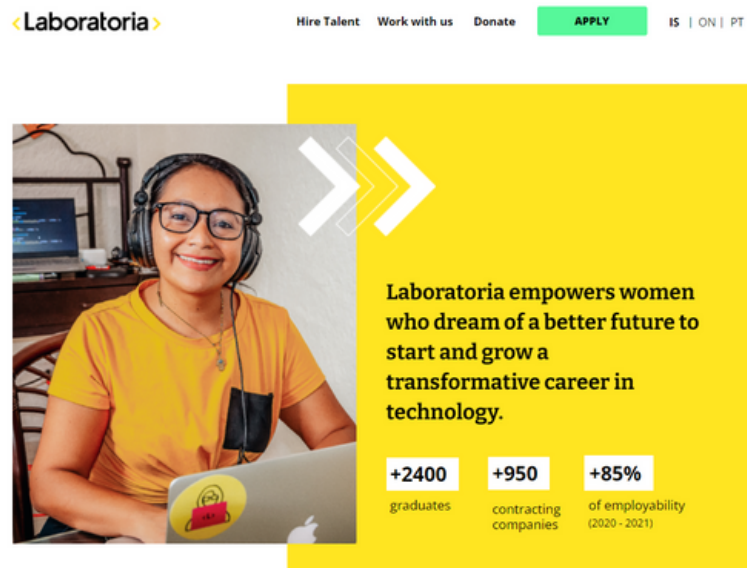
The S4YE team also consulted three organizations from [S4YE's Impact Portfolio](#), a community of practice of 44 innovative youth employment projects that are working on youth employment and especially promoting opportunities in the digital economy for women. [Laboratoria](#) is a coding bootcamp operating in Latin America that empowers young women from disadvantaged backgrounds by training them for careers in tech. [Gaza Sky Geeks](#) is a program of Mercy Corps that provides co-working space, operates as a startup accelerator, and provides digital skills training to youth in the West Bank and Gaza. [Digital Opportunity Trust](#) is a social enterprise that delivers technology, entrepreneurship, and leadership training programs to youth in Africa, the Middle East, and Canada.

The consultations sought to understand practitioner perspectives for identifying, mitigating, and preventing risks of technology-facilitated GBV for youth beneficiaries. The following sections showcase creative strategies that Laboratoria, Gaza Sky Geeks, and Digital Opportunity Trust have adopted to avoid, mitigate, and respond to online violence against young women.

3.1 LABORATORIA: INCORPORATING GENDER EQUALITY WORKSHOPS INTO THE TRAINING CURRICULUM

Laboratoria combines applied coding education, socio-emotional training, and employer engagement to create digital job opportunities for students.

The bootcamp targets low-income women who are, on average, in their mid-twenties. Students pay for the program in monthly installments only after completing the six-month bootcamp and securing a job. Laboratoria operates in Colombia, Peru, Chile, Mexico, and Brazil, and has trained over 2,400 women since beginning operations in 2014 (Solutions for Youth Employment, 2018). Laboratoria's overall program structure is replicated across all cities, but each site has the flexibility to adjust the training curriculum to meet the needs of local context.



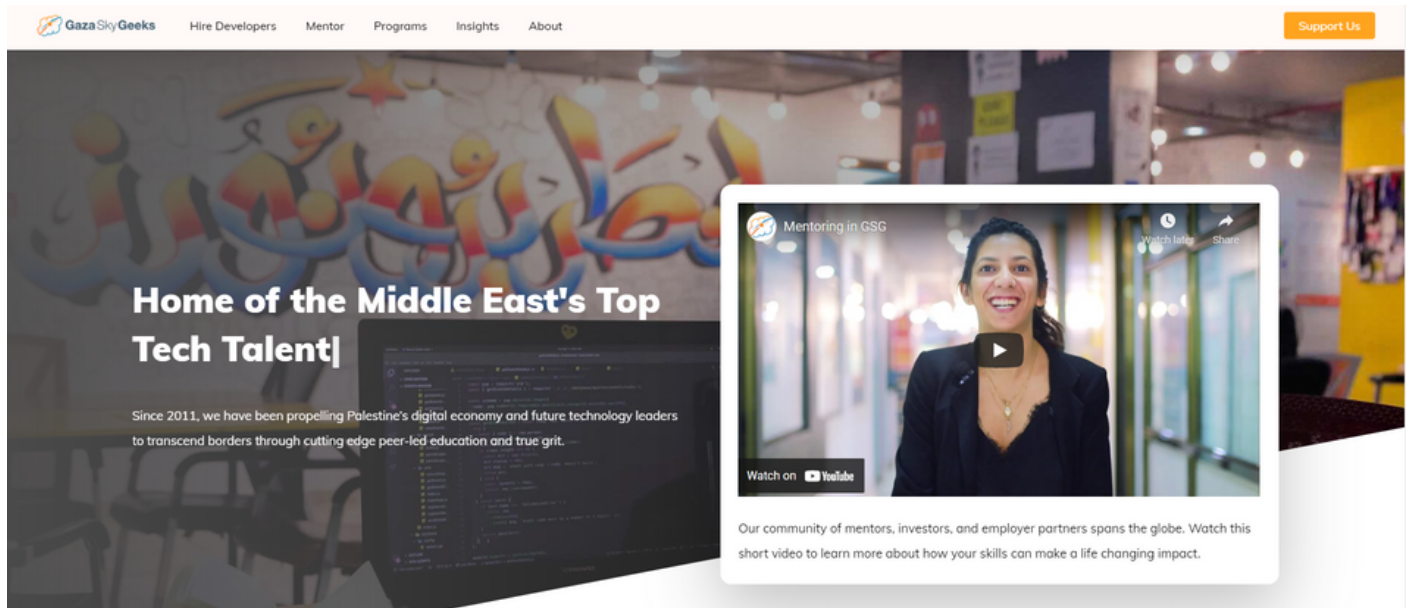
Workshops focused on gender equality are offered across all Laboratoria program locations. These sessions provide beneficiaries with an introduction to themes in three main areas: (i) Basic concepts including: the difference between sex and gender; gender identity and sexual orientation; identifying gender stereotypes; feminism; and the history of women in technology; (ii) Inequality and workplace violence, including cyberviolence; and (iii) Empowerment and sorority.

Rising levels of violence against women in Mexico led Laboratoria's staff to develop a supplementary workshop focused on gender-based violence. The workshop presents an overview of different types of violence—for example, physical, psychological, and sexual violence—with the goal of raising awareness about the prevalence of GBV in Mexico. Laboratoria specifically highlights the phenomenon of “digital GBV,” and describes six ways this type of violence can manifest: cyber bullying and harassment; cyber extortion; online defamation; cyber hacking; online gaslighting; and technology-facilitated human trafficking. Importantly, the training emphasizes the fact that these behaviors are now recognized as crimes in the Mexican legal framework. The “Olimpia Melo” law sanctions “digital violence” in 13 states across Mexico, with punishment from three to 12 years (Moloney, 2019). The bootcamp provides students with information for reporting incidents of offline and online violence to local authorities as well.

The Laboratoria team has also adopted operational approaches to complement their workshops. The program recruits women from diverse backgrounds and experiences and works to facilitate a sense of community based on mutual trust, respect and allyship. Laboratoria encourages students to see themselves as equals, building the self-confidence for them to expect and demand to be treated as equals outside of the program. These networks of support persist in alumnae groups other informal communities and are critical to help women who may face technology-facilitated GBV to continue digital job training and careers. One example is a channel/group on Slack, Laboratoria's main communication platform, called “powerful women” where different topics are discussed.

Laboratoria staff acknowledge that raising awareness is not enough to solve the problem. By providing this information to beneficiaries, they hope to improve the likelihood that young women who do experience online GBV will report these incidents. In 2021 Laboratoria organized a “personal development for coordinators” training to prepare them to assist students or graduates who are facing abuse/violence in relationships. Through this, the team also hopes that young women facing online, or offline violence would feel comfortable and confident in accessing health services, counselling and other resources.

2.2 GAZA SKY GEEKS: LAUNCHING A HACKATHON ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN THE WEST BANK AND GAZA



Gaza Sky Geeks seeks to create sustainable income-generating opportunities for skilled and semi-skilled youth in the West Bank and Gaza through digital jobs. The team runs four programs: (1) a six-month web development training bootcamp; (2) online freelancing training to help youth find job opportunities in the global digital marketplace; (3) a start-up accelerator for pre-seed stage youth-led tech startups; and (4) local community building. Throughout its wide range of activities, Gaza Sky Geeks maintains a focus on closing the digital gender gap by encouraging young women's participation in the tech industry.

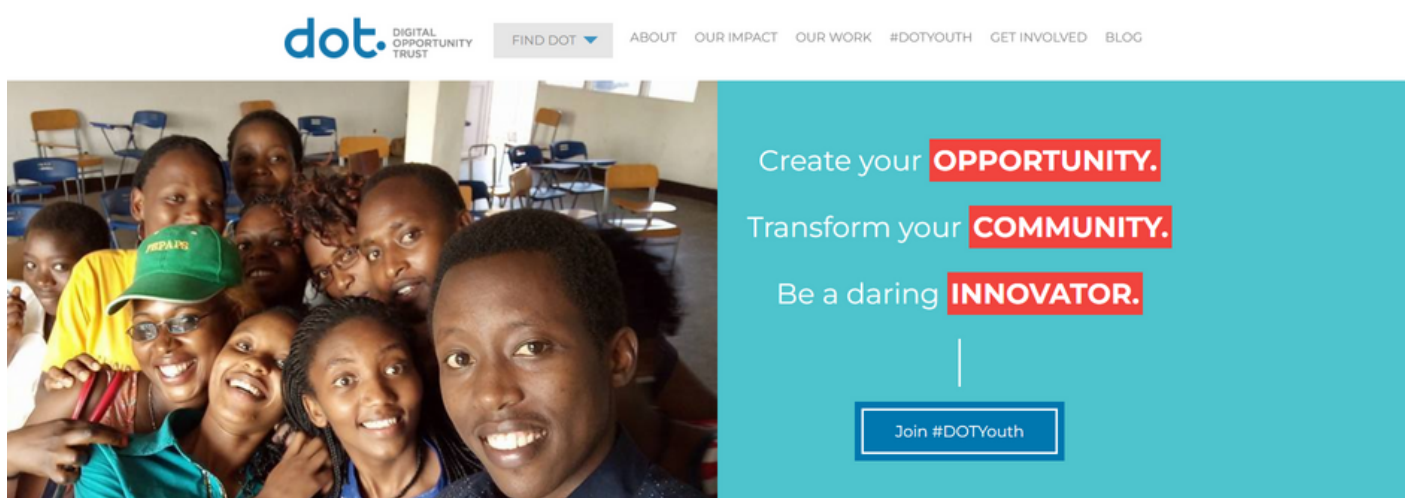
In December 2019, Gaza Sky Geeks hosted the "Speak Out Hackathon", a four-day event on gender-based violence. Program staff selected GBV as the topic for the 2019 Hackathon for several reasons. GBV in Gaza is common, under-reported, and exacerbated by limited economic opportunities. Perpetrators are rarely penalized for their behavior, and violence against women in the context of marriage is not considered a crime (UN Women, 2017). These factors make it difficult for organizations to explicitly operationalize these issues within the curriculum—the program may lose community and family support, and beneficiaries may face increased risk of retaliatory violence.

Gaza Sky Geeks designed the hackathon to showcase female tech talent and help ensure that women played a major part of developing tech-based solutions for violence against women in Gaza. Gaza Sky Geeks required that women make up the majority of each team of 3-5 persons. During the initial application process, many teams proposed ideas focused on increasing awareness of GBV. In November 2019, the project team hosted a design-thinking workshop to encourage teams to think outside of the box, by researching different types of GBV—including physical and online abuse and harassment—and developing a software solution that targets one specific problem. The Gaza Sky Geeks team hoped that the design-thinking workshop and hackathon would shift perspectives for participating teams, while encouraging the local tech community to think about solutions within their own work.

The 2019 "Speak Out" Hackathon featured solutions from seventeen teams. Gaza Sky Geeks partnered with the Aisha Association for Woman and Child Protection (AISHA), a local organization that works to protect, support, and empower women and children with legal, economic and mental health issues. During the Hackathon, teams developed software solutions to further AISHA's mission to reduce violence against women. The three winning teams were: AMENA, an app to help women facing domestic abuse to report an emergency; FRAMEN, an app that connects women with affordable lawyers to help them with local legal advice on domestic abuse situations; and SHE, a secure online social platform that encourages women to speak out and share their challenges safely and connect with social support centers. The top three teams won cash prizes of US\$1000, \$700 and \$300, along with follow-up mentorship sessions. Discussions are ongoing to explore strategies to pilot and scale these solutions

In addition to hosting this Hackathon, Gaza Sky Geeks is implementing several strategies to create a supportive environment for young women to prepare for digital jobs. Each program has key indicators on women's inclusion. For example, the start-up accelerator program is required to help at least three women-led startups from each cohort to get seed funding (Each cohort includes 6-8 digital startups). The team recently started working with the International Yes Foundation—which specializes in soft skills training and capacity building—to build socioemotional skills for female beneficiaries. For the curricula on online freelancing, Gaza Sky Geeks reviews the safety features of online freelancing platforms, including payment processes and policies for experiencing and reporting harassment and harmful interactions with clients. The program team only recommends those freelancing platforms which already have established systems for reporting incidents, as well as guidelines for behavior, and are considered safe for beneficiaries.

3.3 DIGITAL OPPORTUNITY TRUST: CREATING SAFE ONLINE SPACES THROUGH DIGITAL PLATFORMS



Digital Opportunity Trust (DOT) is incubating the development of two digital platforms and engaging social media communities to improve entrepreneurial and employment opportunities for youth around the world. DOT's *Innojo* platform was created to support young entrepreneurs to scale their social enterprises from the ideation stage towards product prototyping, development, and implementation. *Innojo* enables emerging social innovators to build a network of like-minded peers and mentors (Digital Impact Alliance, 2018). In partnership with UNICEF Lebanon, DOT has also incubated *Bridge. Outsource. Transform. (B.O.T.)*, Lebanon's first impact sourcing platform. B.O.T. provides youth with access to jobs through online outsourcing and offers an opportunity for young people to earn an income by tapping into global market demand (Ramadan & Wazzan, 2018). DOT leverages social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter, to engage with young job-seekers, social innovators, and entrepreneurs to elevate youth leadership, highlight potential opportunities, and build a supportive online community for DOT youth.

During the research and design phase of these platforms, DOT launched a series of user research initiatives to understand how women experience online spaces. DOT consulted with 48 young social entrepreneurs (75 percent women) in Jordan, Lebanon, South Africa, and Kenya to understand the barriers to women's online participation, among other research questions. DOT found that safety was a significant factor for women. They were more likely to use platforms that were highly moderated, and those that were used by other people in their trusted networks. Furthermore, women wanted to be in full control of their online experience: this included making decisions about what information and content would be shared, who it would be shared to, and how. Additionally, women in Jordan reported feeling more comfortable engaging anonymously with people from other countries or regions, because they anticipated less potential harm or repercussions to them offline.

The team identified three necessary features that digital platforms should have to make them safe for young, female jobseekers, and entrepreneurs. Based on their user experience (UX) research, DOT determined that platforms must be highly moderated and feel safe to women. Women reporting incidents of online GBV through digital platforms prefer a human response that is empathetic and understanding. Secondly, for young women to continue using online platforms, they require a transparent and explicit process for incident reporting and resolution and need to know that there is a procedure for following-up on reports that have clear action steps. Finally, young women need to feel completely in control of their experience—including how much they share, with whom, and how. Without these features, young women are less likely to use online freelancing and networking platforms.

DOT then supported the platform design teams to address the specific concerns of young women and incorporate several additional features in their design. DOT developed a set of UX best practices for inclusive platforms, which include: (1) clear, visible, and intuitive privacy controls so that users can easily manage their profile privacy; and (2) dual consent for direct messaging, which means that if someone wants to contact a user on a platform, the other user must accept the invitation to communicate. This feature helps to ensure consent for initial and continued interactions. The team also recommends documented, visible processes for reporting incidents of online violence and how to receive support or help from moderators.

Moderation emerged as a critical part of DOT's strategy to mitigate the risk of online violence against young women. Each participating country is represented by a moderator, to help reduce challenges created by cultural differences, time zones, and languages. Moderators help shape the tone of the platforms by role modeling positive ways for users to engage online and ensuring adherence to DOT's Code of Conduct for staff, affiliates, and participants. They are trained in a wide range of topics, including respectful and inclusive online engagement and survivor-centered bystander intervention. Although the moderation team is primarily made up of women, male moderators also help to serve as role models for male participants on constructive interactions; they are available to step up to handle discussions that are sexist in nature, thereby removing the burden from women to respond to situations where they may feel attacked. DOT also provides a clear roadmap to moderators which outlines how they should respond to and address reports of online violence on the platforms.

3.4 LIMITATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Consultations with youth employment practitioners identified several potential strategies for programs to respond to the threat of online violence (summarized in Box 2). As policymakers and practitioners create more programs to connect women with online work, and as internet penetration expands globally, more *ex ante* strategies are needed in program design to address such risks.

BOX 2 | Strategies for Digital Jobs Youth Employment Programs to Address Online Violence

Develop codes of conduct: Codes of conduct for staff, mentors, and beneficiaries can also outline behaviors which are and are not acceptable, share links to resources and organizations for reporting or seeking counseling. Also, provide guidance to staff on how to interact with beneficiaries who experience online violence. These could also include non-discrimination and anti-harassment policies.

Engage men: It is particularly important for co-ed programs to engage both female and male participants, highlight the types of behaviors that constitute online violence, and work to shift norms. In addition, ensuring a gender-balanced staff that is trusted and well-trained can help to create safe spaces.

Ensure effective and anonymous reporting mechanisms: Systems of anonymous reporting can also help to protect victims and reduce possible risks of retaliation. Good practice systems include prevention and response strategies, as well as accountability mechanisms. Other features include redress mechanisms and sanctions for those who breach them.

Provide access to services and resources: Programs can include modules or courses on how to identify, report, cope with, and recover from online violence. Programs should also work to connect survivors to psychosocial support services.

For youth employment programs that have components on digital jobs and skills, raising awareness among their staff and also the beneficiaries, is critical. Having well-trained moderators can help improve young women's experiences on digital platforms. Developing clear guidelines is important, while also keeping in mind nuances across contexts.

While raising awareness and encouraging reporting are key— tackling this challenge cannot rest on trainees alone. Similarly, while large events such as code sprints, hackathons, business plan competitions, and other public challenges can help increase awareness and stimulate innovative problem-solving, challenges persist with sustainability and scalability. These short-term approaches should not minimize recognition of complex social challenges that women face in accessing good, well-paying job opportunities. Long-term shifts in attitudes and behaviors often require complex, complementary, and sustained activities targeting individuals, communities, and systems.

4 .WORLD BANK GOOD PRACTICES

World Bank initiatives have also started to explore good practices at the intersection of gender-based violence and technology. In 2016, the World Bank and the [Sexual Violence Research Initiative \(SVRI\)](#) launched the [Development Marketplace to Address Gender-Based Violence](#). This partnership provides funding to support evidence-based research and innovative GBV prevention and response programs in LMICs. Over five years, the partnership has funded 50 research projects in 34 countries, totaling \$5 million USD in award funding. Highlights of research activities are included below:



- **Digital Storytelling and Podcasting:** A team of physicians, academics, practitioners and journalists from Fondation Hirondelle, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Addis Ababa University School of Public Health and Women and Health Alliance International Ethiopia explored using podcasts to prevent intimate partner violence among Somali refugees in Dollo Ado, Ethiopia. Podcasts were created in partnership with community members and focused on gender norms, healthy and unhealthy relationships, and constructive ways to handle conflict.
- **Using Technology to Make Public Transport Safer:** The Urban Institute and the Information Technology University Punjab formed a partnership to map hotspots where transport users have experienced violence or harassment, or felt unsafe in Lahore. The team used a custom-built smartphone application to explore how variations in transport operations, vehicle facilities, transit station design and urban land use affect citizens' perceptions of safety. Building on the results from the pilot, impact evaluation will assess the most promising approaches emerging from Lahore's revitalized transit system.
- **Survivor-Centered Approach to Forensic Medical Examination:** MediCapt is a mobile application created by Physicians for Human Rights that clinicians in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Kenya use to collect, document, and preserve forensic medical evidence to support prosecutions of sexual violence crimes. Physicians for Human Rights is undertaking a preliminary study of MediCapt, to help close a gap in evidence about the use of mobile health technology for collecting quality evidence and its role in a survivor-centered approach to forensic medical examination of sexual violence.
- **Preventing Teen Dating Violence:** ZonaSegura is a trauma-informed, youth-centered innovative research study and mobile solution to address teen dating violence in Honduras. Led by Youth + Tech + Health in partnership with the Public Health Institute's GOJoven International Program and GOJoven Honduras, this aims to study the impact of a mobile app and WhatsApp messaging campaign. The goal is to reduce dating violence through providing prevention information, healthy relationship education, and linkages to teen dating violence services and resources.

In addition to research innovations, operational teams are also tackling online violence at a larger scale. For example, the [Digital Republic of the Marshall Islands Project](#) highlighted research from the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development's Pacific Girls Program, which identified cyberbullying as a major challenge for girls in the Pacific, along with the need to develop cyber safety skills. In the Republic of the Marshall Islands specifically, stakeholders highlighted concerns about online bullying and harassment through social media platforms. Furthermore, community members were concerned that increased access to and use of digital technologies could increase harmful digital communication, particularly violence and sexual imagery. In response, the project will facilitate legislative reform to criminalize harmful digital communications, integrate this lens into the broader cybersecurity policy framework, and launch targeted awareness campaigns to bridge knowledge gaps within communities, with a focus on youth. Similarly, the [Federated States of Micronesia Project](#) aims to tackle online violence, specifically the non-consensual dissemination of intimate images. Community consultations revealed high levels of concern about this type of online violence coupled with a lack of knowledge about how to seek support. As a part of the interventions, the project allocated \$1M to support the integration of gender equality into a new law related to harmful digital communications.

Another initiative is led by Women, Business and the Law, which has begun to analyze global legislation to address online violence. Preliminary data find that 29 percent of economies (56 of 190 economies) have legislation to address cyber harassment. Regionally, South Asia leads with respect to relevant legislation, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East and North Africa. It has also identified some good practices to protect against cyber harassment. For example, [Australia](#) has established an eSafety Commissioner, who is tasked with addressing complaints about online violence. While an initiative in [Bangladesh](#) launched an all-woman police unit to facilitate the increase of reporting of online harassment. Further research is underway to examine the types of legislation that are promising in this area (Wang & Affoum, 2021).

5. GUIDANCE FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT STAKEHOLDERS

5.1 INVEST IN RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

More research is needed to fill knowledge gaps on how to effectively address online GBV. There are large data and knowledge gaps on the prevalence and impact of online violence, particularly in LMICs. Research institutions can contribute by gathering more representative and reliable data on this issue, particularly outside the US and Europe.

Evidence is also lacking on what strategies are effective in different contexts. As youth employment projects continue to help young women to access new livelihoods opportunities through online work and digital tools, stakeholders across the public and private sectors need to invest in and contribute to building this evidence base. Building on the work of the Development Marketplace to Address Gender-Based Violence, similar partnerships are needed to help researchers, practitioners, and policymakers develop a rigorous evidence base on technology-facilitated GBV.

5.2 LEVERAGE ONLINE SAFETY TOOLS FOR YOUNG WOMEN

Several organizations have put forth specific tools that women can use to protect their safety online. For example, efforts like [Take Back the Tech](#) provide the "Security-in-a-Box" guide, which provides tips on ways to keep one's devices safe, effective passwords as well as privacy. [Crash Override](#) is a crisis help/ resource center and advocacy group for people experiencing online abuse. Its resource center includes an [automated cybersecurity helper](#) that guides the user on strategies to secure their online accounts, hide their personal information and mitigate the risk of someone taking control over one's computer or phone. While there is some overlap, [HeartMob's Technical Safety Guide](#) is also worth highlighting along with the [Technology Safety guide](#) developed by the US-based National Network to End Domestic Violence.

While online tools are a critical first step, they are insufficient and can also shift the onus of protection onto those who are at-risk. Furthermore, tech-based tools and other solutions should reinforce existing mechanisms and complement efforts to ensure appropriately trained professionals can support survivors. Importantly, they should be developed with end-users in mind and should involve youth, particularly young women, in the design phase to ensure solutions are relevant and culturally appropriate (Hammond, Maruo, & Arango, 2019). This is an important area for further—and more rigorous—research.

5.3 STRENGTHEN THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

Current legislation on cybercrime and data protection generally lacks specific measures on technology-facilitated GBV. It is important for countries holding legal reform processes to incorporate a gender lens in their cybercrime and data protection policies and related legal frameworks. These safeguards should balance privacy and government surveillance concerns, while preserving freedom of expression and ensuring that activists are not inadvertently penalized. Additional research is needed to identify specific legal approaches that are effective for tackling this form of violence. In addition, implementation of these policies should also facilitate the development of appropriate and confidential reporting mechanisms through online platforms or hotlines; develop and build the capacity of law enforcement to respond and investigate these occurrences (for example, avoiding aggressive/sexist interrogation and the minimization of online violence; as well as ensuring the skills to investigate using cyber-forensic tools) (World Bank, 2021).

5.4 PROMOTE PRIVATE SECTOR-LED SOLUTIONS

Technology companies could play a stronger role in ensuring safe online spaces for women. The Tech Policy Lab, led by the World Wide Web Foundation, launched an initiative to improve online safety for the most marginalized women on social media platforms. The initiative focuses on **content curation** and **reporting commitments**. Content curation commitments involve giving women better ways to easily navigate safety tools; offer more ways to understand who can see, share, comment, or reply to posts; and proactively reducing online abuse to shift the burden away from women. Whereas reporting commitments refer to offering users the ability to track and manage their reports; establishing ways for women to access support; expanding capacity to address differing contexts and additional languages; and providing more policy and product guidance during the reporting process (World Wide Web Foundation, 2021). As a result of these engagements, four of the largest social media companies announced a package of commitments to tackle online abuse and improve women's safety on their platforms (World Wide Web Foundation, 2021).

Article 19—a British human rights organization focused on freedom of expression—has also developed recommendations for social media companies based on an analysis of their online safety policies. For example, Article 19 advocates for improved transparency around the type of algorithms used to detect online abuse; human rights and gender discrimination assessments to mitigate how their operations might limit the privacy and freedom of expression of women, with a specific focus on women journalists; provide access to datasets to facilitate independent research; and explore partnerships with civil society groups to help develop community-led solutions to online violence (Article 19, 2020).

5.5 DEVELOP MULTI-STAKEHOLDER APPROACHES

To effectively prevent, mitigate and respond to the problem of online GBV, there needs to be a combination of policy and practice that prioritizes online safety. In addition, to legislative reforms and better tools from private sector tech companies, other actors are also key. For example, civil society organizations can support awareness-raising efforts, cyber safety training, and push for legal reform; researchers can expand the evidence base; educators can support teaching healthy online behaviors; and donor organizations can help scale innovations.

There are promising country examples of a multi-sectoral approach—particularly advancing legal and public policy approaches, in partnership with educators and civil society. The Danish Safer Internet Centre aims to increase the safe use of digital and social media among children and youth. The coalition consists of three organizations that work to raise awareness and educate stakeholders on the safe use of online technologies; maintain a hotline where users can report abusive images; and a center that provides online counseling to young people (Safer Internet Centre Denmark, 2021). Similar efforts exist in Australia, Belgium, Croatia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, and the Czech Republic (Better Internet for Kids, 2022). Another example comes from New Zealand, which has established NetSafe, an independent non-profit online safety organization supported by the Ministries of Justice and Education. NetSafe provides a range of services, including mediation, managing takedown requests to internet intermediaries, and public education campaigns. The organization also helps determine if the violation falls under the Harmful Digital Communications Act (NetSafe, 2022).

No single strategy or organization that can solve the problem. Stakeholders like technology companies, governments, researchers, civil society, and educators will need to grapple with this complex challenge and work together to develop appropriate responses. Given the lack of rigorous research, S4YE hopes that this knowledge brief helps raise awareness among youth employment practitioners as they design programs to support young women access new types of work, often enabled by digital tools and platforms.



This S4YE Knowledge Brief is result of collaboration between S4YE and the Gender Group. It was prepared by Alicia Hammond (Gender and Digital Specialist, World Bank); Danielle Robinson, (former Consultant, S4YE); and Angelica Munoz (S4YE) under the overall guidance of Namita Datta (S4YE Program Manager). The team is grateful to Ian Walker, Manager, Jobs Group, Hana Bixi (Global Director, Gender Group), and Andrea Kucey (Manager, Gender Group) for their guidance, support, and feedback. Diana Arango and Mirai Maruo also provided valuable comments.

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This knowledge brief does not necessarily reflect the views of the World Bank or each individual S4YE partner. For additional resources on digital jobs for youth, please visit <https://www.s4ye.org/digital-jobs>.

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