

Internet Governance Forum (IGF)
The Internet We Want - Empowering All People

UNFPA Open Forums Submission
8 - 12 October 2023
Kyoto, Japan

Session Title: **Disrupt Harm: Accountability for a Safer Internet**

Subtheme: Cybersecurity, Cybercrime & Online Safety

Timing and Format: 60 minute panel

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), is an international development agency that works to deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every child birth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled. UNFPA is the lead UN agency that expands the possibilities for women and young people to lead healthy sexual and reproductive lives. UNFPA works to address gender-based violence in humanitarian, peacebuilding and development contexts in over 150 countries and territories around the world in pursuit of the transformative result to end gender-based violence and harmful practices as iterated in the UNFPA 2022-2025 Strategic Plan.

The rise in the use and availability of technologies, including the internet and other digital applications, has provided new and continually emerging spaces and opportunities for the perpetration of gender-based violence. UNFPA are advocating a comprehensive and survivor-centered response to GBV which requires a raft of guidance, capacity building and interventions to respond, prevent and regulate the incidence of technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TF GBV). UNFPA is actively combating TF GBV by providing survivors with the response services when and where they need it, transforming regulatory spaces through right-based law reform and to prevent TF GBV through transformation of harmful gender and social norms and support to ensure safe and ethical use of technology. UNFPA also works to support safe and ethical data generation, analysis and research to enable evidence-based laws, policies and programmes.

For a range of reasons, including identification of perpetrators, jurisdictional issues, evidentiary procedures, capacity and the laws themselves, TF GBV is often perpetrated with impunity. Indeed, in many cases, poor formation of law may in fact be weaponized against those it is seeking to protect.

As the world continues to evolve and expand in the use of technology and platforms, so too does the expansion of spaces through which violence can be perpetrated. Technology and online spaces are increasingly being misused and weaponized against women and girls on the basis of their gender.

UNFPA understand Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TF GBV) as “an act of violence perpetrated by one or more individuals that is committed, assisted, aggravated and amplified in part or fully by the use of information and communication technologies or digital media against a person on the basis of their gender.”

TF GBV can take many forms and is committed across a continuum of online and offline spaces. This form of violence can have serious consequences for survivors, including mental and physical well being, social isolation, physical harm, economic and political exclusion and even femicide.

Addressing TF GBV is no longer negotiable. The use of technology and online spaces should serve as a tool for accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women instead of a tool of subjugation, the perpetration of violence and silencing of women in all their diversity.

TF GBV is often perpetrated with impunity. Given that it can be committed anonymously, by groups and individuals, is constantly evolving and may be committed from a distance, there are multiple challenges in development of rights-based law reform to address TF GBV. There are also challenges in law enforcement including compliance with evidentiary procedures, a need for increased digital literacy across the law enforcement and justice systems and enforcement of laws across jurisdictions. All these challenges, including that some laws have in fact contributed to the increased perpetration of TF GBV, has led to a culture of impunity. Combating impunity requires a multi-pronged approach that involves education, awareness-raising, rights-based law reform as well as whole-of -government approaches to implementation and enforcement.

States hold the responsibility to develop legislative, policy and regulatory frameworks to address TF GBV in order to ensure accountability but also to ensure the safety of online platforms, digital spaces and the design and use of technology for all, including women and girls in all their diversity. However, current legal frameworks and policies do not consider TF GBV within existing laws and policies as standard. Further, while some countries may have laws and policies for online safeguarding and security, they may be generic and gender-blind thereby failing to take appropriate action to address TF GBV specifically. These regulatory spaces may also lack sufficient flexibility to take account of emerging technologies and means through which new forms of TF GBV are perpetrated and amplified.

Ending TF GBV requires building bridges across governments, multilateral organizations, private companies, women's organizations, and digital rights communities. We must collectively work to foster authentic partnerships, rights-based regulation, and human-centered technology grounded in survivor-centered approaches and feminist principles in order to collectively prevent the amplification and normalization of misogyny, build systems of accountability and work toward a safer internet for all.

Our panel conversation will explore the possibility of future regulatory frameworks grounded in findings from seminal landscaping research of existing TF GBV regulation globally. We will hear from the only current intergovernmental regulatory body, feminist digital rights activities and community leaders, as well as hear from leading multilateral organizations bringing this work together.