

Commission on the Status of Women 70

Side Event: Access to justice in cases of digital violence. Countering the manosphere.

Date and time: Wednesday, 11 March 2026, 1:00-2:15 PM

Place: Permanent Mission of Germany (871 UN Plaza)

Background: With more than 5.5 billion people online worldwide, and nearly as many on social media, digital spaces have become central to how we learn and connect. But alongside its benefits, the internet is also used to spread hate, abuse and misogyny. One growing corner of the digital world is the manosphere: a loose network of communities that claims to address men's struggles - for example dating, fitness or fatherhood - but promotes harmful advice, regressive gender norms, and toxic models of masculinity. Two-thirds of young men regularly engage with masculinity-influencers online. As the UN Secretary General's report on violence against women and girls highlights, these groups are united by an opposition to gender equality and misrepresent men as "victims" of the current social and political climate. Their harmful narratives distort understandings of relationships and aim at a retraditionalization of gender roles with unequal power relations. Experts are finding that the popularity of extreme language in the manosphere not only normalizes violence against women and girls but has growing links to radicalization and other extremist ideologies. The manosphere creates echo chambers for these violence-promoting ideologies and often leads to online violence against women and girls.

While the law (such as the EU Digital Services Act) and those applying it endeavor to adequately address this online violence and provide access to justice, there is a lack of in-depth understanding of the various forms of digital violence and its serious consequences. Furthermore, there are gaps in the law. For instance, criminal law does not fully grasp digital forms of violence, such as hate speech, cyberstalking and image-based sexualized abuse. The rapid and extensive radicalization of the manosphere is, amongst other things, caused by the platform's algorithms designed to keep the users online (attention economy) by showing more extreme content every day. The unique features of the internet – absence of authority and of gatekeepers, perceived anonymity, speed of distributing information – increases the extent and intensity of gender-based violence. These aspects are not yet met by the existing laws.

Objective:

Ending digital violence against all women and girls is a social and legal obligation. The Istanbul Convention, a human rights treaty to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence, obligates states to prevent and combat online violence. The EU Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence requires EU member states to effectively combat cyber stalking, cyber harassment, image based sexual violence, and other forms of gender based digital violence. Platforms must be accountable for their contribution to extremism and gender-based violence and provide a safe and non-discriminatory environment.

Only through joint efforts at local, national and international levels can we create safe digital spaces. It requires a whole-of-society approach to eliminate discriminatory practices, policies and laws and support services and law enforcement. It is important to disrupt harmful narratives, foster equitable masculinities and fight toxic masculinity, as well as to engage in prevention and support of survivors and activists. What are best practices, how can we learn from each other?

Target group:

Representatives of governments, corporate sector, NGOs, academia, lawyers, tech companies, funders, activists.

Key questions:

- What are the structural causes and mechanisms of the mansphere?
- What can stakeholders like the HeForShe Alliance do to build equitable masculinities, design interventions that disrupt harmful narratives and foster healthier masculinities?
- What systemic and legislative changes are necessary, and what role do technology companies and governments play in creating safe online spaces? What can be learned from EU law, such as the Digital Services Act?
- How can legislators ensure that legal measures do not impair fundamental rights of women and other marginalized groups?
- Which strategies and initiatives empower women and girls online and support their active involvement in shaping safe digital spaces?

Program:

Opening remarks:

- **Katharina Jestaedt**, Head of the Department for Women and Equality, Federal Ministry for Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth - Germany
- **Auður Edda Jökulsdóttir**, Special Envoy for Gender Equality, Ministry for Foreign Affairs - Iceland
- **Dr. Angela Langenkamp**, President of the Board, UN Women National Committee Germany

Panel discussion:

- **Vesna Jaric**, Global Lead, HeForShe Initiative
- **Verena Haisch**, Vice-President, German Women Lawyers Association
- **Nina Jankowicz**, CEO, American Sunlight Project
- **Megan Ortwein**, Student, NYU's Stern School of Business
- Intervention: **Samet Beşyaprak**, DGVN Youth Delegate
- **Discussion with the audience**

Moderator: **Dr. Carolin Weyand**, UN Women National Committee Germany