

## CRSV & TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED GBV

“ Today, digital technologies shape our lives, organisations, economies and societies, creating opportunities that we must take and risks that we must tackle – including disproportionate risks of online abuse and exploitation of women and girls.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Our Common Agenda (2023)

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The proliferation of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the rise of artificial intelligence have facilitated various forms of online and offline violence, including online gender-based hate speech, image-based sexual abuse, online harassment and trafficking in persons, which can ultimately result in and exacerbate situations of CRSV.

**TFGBV** can be defined 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 (ICTs), (e.g. the Internet, personal computers and smartphones) or digital media, against a person on the basis of their gender” ([UNFPA](#)).

### **TFGBV can impact situations of CRSV in several ways:**

- **Exacerbate** the root causes of CRSV, including gender inequalities, by dismantling feminist movements and promoting extremist ideologies, particularly through online hate speech.
- **Facilitate** harmful actions such as doxxing individuals, providing their personal information exacerbating the risk of sexual assaults and rape.
- **Inflict** further harm on survivors of CRSV by recording incidents, disseminating that content, and placing the burden of removing it on the survivors, leading to re-traumatisation.

CRSV and TFGBV have similar root causes, including patriarchal norms and structures, gender-discriminatory laws and policies, and social and political ideologies targeting specific groups.

The inter-connectedness of digital and physical spaces in conflict zones means that technologies shape the way individuals experience violence, enabling the spread of harassment, invasion of privacy, and anonymous abuse. The direct and indirect role of ICTs in the perpetuation of CRSV is not new, having been extensively documented in Iraq and Syria in 2014, when ISIL held online slave auctions of Yazidi women and girls, for example.

The 2023 Secretary-General's annual Report on CRSV highlighted increasing trends of online gender-based hated speech, gendered disinformation, and incitement to violence in numerous conflict zones. This intersection is increasingly of interest under the CRSV mandate.



## WHO IS VULNERABLE?

As with any form of CRSV, women and girls are disproportionately affected. People who either depend on 58 percent of girls and young women have experienced some form of online harassment.

Individuals in public life, human rights defenders, activists, journalists and lawmakers, face increased rates of violence as a result of their work taking them online more often. LGBTQI+ people are more likely to be targeted, as well, due to this population's general propensity to find community online where they are unable to do so offline.

Individuals are more likely to experience both online forms of violence while in violent conflict when facing intersecting forms of discrimination based on disability, religion, caste, ethnicity, race, age, class, and rural or urban residency directly or indirectly linked to a conflict.

## TYPES OF ONLINE VIOLENCE




**Image-based sexual abuse** is used to deter survivors and witnesses from coming forward and to silence women human rights defenders and feminist organisations, with severe consequences on the provision of services to survivors, who are less likely to seek or be referred to services, preventing their immediate and long-term recovery.

**Tech-facilitated trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation** extends to any act of trafficking in person that is perpetrated by one or more individuals, committed, assisted, aggravated and amplified in part or fully by the use of ICTs or digital media. In conflict and post-conflict settings, ICTs can notably be used to lure vulnerable individuals into situations and/or used to facilitate through online markets.

**Online hate speech and disinformation** refers to any act of hate speech perpetrated by one or more individuals, committed, assisted, aggravated and amplified in part or fully by the use of ICTs or digital media. In conflict and post-conflict settings, hate speech can, directly or indirectly, lead to or exacerbate instances of sexual violence.

**Online harassment** refers to the use of ICTs by an individual or group to repeatedly cause harm to another person. By inciting hate and violence and exposing personal information, these actions allow perpetrators to move from virtual harassment to physical attacks and exacerbate the risks of CRSV.

## SOME KEY NORMATIVE FRAMEWORKS

-  **United Nations General Assembly Resolution 70/1 (2015)** highlights the importance of the proliferation of ICT, along with global interconnectedness, to potentially significantly enhance human progress, close the digital divide, and foster the development of knowledge societies.
-  **United Nations General Assembly Resolution 77/150 (2022)** emphasises the importance of implementing science, technology, and innovation strategies that specifically promote the empowerment of women and girls and reduce the gender digital divide.
-  **United Nations Security Council Resolution 2713 (2023)** raises concerns about terrorist groups' strategic use of ICTs, and urges Member States to collaborate with the Government of the Federal Republic of Somalia (GFRS) to prevent Al-Shabaab's exploitation of social media for criminal activities.



“Once you say you are a women's rights defender, it's a warrant for sexual advances, because [for them] what else do you want to liberate women for? On my social media accounts, people send private messages [through fake accounts]: lots of threats saying things like, 'If we get our hands on you, we will rape you, show you what women's rights are, beat you.'”

*Sarah, a women's rights defender from Libya, Amnesty International, 2018*

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## CASE STUDY: LIBYA

In 2023, in Libya, sexual assaults were filmed and posted online, as a form of reprisal for speaking against an armed group on social media platforms. The use of sexual violence to silence journalists, prisoners, migrants and women is prevalent and numerous cases of online hate speech and threats of sexual violence were recorded. One female politician was notably threatened with death and sexualised defamation. Human rights defenders expressed concerns about their safety due to persistent online threats of sexual violence. In some cases, sexual attacks were recorded and shared online, including one incident where the victim had criticised an armed group on social media.

