

International Day of the Girl Child 2023

States must ensure safe and inclusive digital spaces for girls' activism

On the occasion of the International Day of the Girl Child, we seize this opportunity to raise our collective voice as the members of the [EDVAW Platform](#) (*Independent Expert Mechanisms on Discrimination and Violence against Women*), undersigned below, to celebrate the meaningful contributions made by girls mobilizing worldwide to demand and catalyse change. At the same time, we recognize many of the barriers, threats and experiences of discrimination and violence that they face in the physical and the digital world, at home and in public. On this day, we place our focus on girls' human rights online and we call for safe and inclusive digital spaces for girls' activism to fully flourish and for girls to thrive and come into their full potential.

Girls as agents of change

Girls around the world play crucial roles as agents of change. They are an integral part of the struggle for more democratic and fairer societies and their activism has brought about unique contributions to the advancement of human rights, gender equality, social justice, sustainability and prosperity.

Nevertheless, while in recent years their participation has increasingly been promoted, major gaps persist. Girls continue to face barriers in participating in public and political life, as a result of persistent harmful stereotyping, misogyny, and ageism within families, communities and society at large.

We stress that the empowerment of girls through the respect, protection and fulfilment of their fundamental human rights is an indispensable precondition for just, inclusive, peaceful and sustainable societies and the achievement of gender equality.

Digitalization: new opportunities and challenges for girls' activism

Internet and social media are useful tools for girl activists who are frequently confronted with exclusion from formal decision-making processes.

While digitalization has provided girl activists with crucial opportunities to make their voices heard, it has also created new challenges for their activism.

On one hand, digital technologies may be used to blackmail, control, surveil, coerce, harass, humiliate or objectify girls and their bodies, including by resorting to "deep-fake" child abuse material and death threats. Available studies in some countries have shown that girls are increasingly suffering from the hyper sexualization of girls on the internet, and a pressure to conform to "ideal" beauty standards that societies try to impose on them.

As a result, many victims of these practices limit their online activities, leading to common mental health problems and emotional difficulties that include, depression, self-harm, as well as to suffering from stigma by their families and communities, or flee online spaces altogether.

On the other hand, the global gender digital divide has restricted online activism for many girls. According to UNICEF, for every 100 male youth who have digital skills, only 65 female youth do. Girls in rural and underprivileged areas are especially affected, as they often lack access to the Internet or do not have sufficient digital literacy, including on digital safety and security.

Call for safe and inclusive digital spaces for all girls

Today, as the international community commemorates this International Day, we applaud girls worldwide for their great achievements and brave activism, and call upon States, private companies, families, communities, and all stakeholders concerned to take appropriate measures to ensure online access and safety for all girls, without discrimination. Safe and inclusive digital spaces, free from online violence and harassment, are needed so that girls can step into their full potential, and for their well-being and prosperity to be attained.

The Commitment by members of the EDVAW Platform:

Since its inception, the EDVAW Platform has been on the forefront of the fight against the digital dimension of violence against women and the protection of women's and girls' human rights.

In 2022, in its first thematic paper on the digital dimension of violence against women, the EDVAW Platform [stressed](#):

All forms of violence against women, including its digital dimension must be understood within the framework of gender-based discrimination. Thus, State Parties are obliged, based on art. 5 of CEDAW and applicable regional instruments, to combat such forms of discrimination in order to eliminate the causes that facilitate and endorse the digital dimension of violence against women.

Moreover, [CEDAW's General Recommendation no. 35](#) clearly established online and technology-facilitated violence as a new form of gender-based violence against women that is within the scope of the CEDAW. In 2018, [the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences produced a landmark report](#) analysing the impact of emerging technologies on violence against women and girls. In 2022, the African Commission, including [the Special Rapporteur of the Rights of Women in Africa, adopted a specific Resolution on the Protection of Women Against Digital Violence in Africa](#). In 2021, [GREVIO adopted its first General Recommendation on the Digital Dimension of](#)

[Violence Against Women](#), outlining the specific application of the Istanbul Convention to online and technology-facilitated violence against women and girls. In 2022, [the UN Working Group on discrimination against women and girls issued a report on ‘Girls’ and young women’s activism.’](#) In the same year, MESECVI launched a comprehensive thematic report called [Cyberviolence and Cyber-harassment against women and girls within the framework of the Belém Do Pará Convention](#). The IACHR Rapporteur has referred to the digital dimension of violence against women in its [reports](#).

As we mark this year the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 30th anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, and the 20th anniversary of the Maputo Protocol, our collective voice grows even stronger and more resolute.

Responding to new digital challenges for girls’ activism, the members of the EDVAW Platform call on States, private companies and all stakeholders concerned to:

- Facilitate safe and inclusive digital spaces for girls’ self-expression, contribution, and activism, and ensure the accountability of service providers for facilitating accessibility;
- Expand the accessibility and affordability of digital technology to all girls including girl activists by investing in programmes tackling the gender and age-related digital divide and the digital exclusion of certain groups of girl activists;
- Take robust and effective measures to foster a safe online environment for girls, in particular by creating comprehensive regulatory frameworks, including for content moderation and reporting mechanisms, sanctioning perpetrators and providing reliable information to address online gender- and age-related discrimination and violence;
- Ensure that that the multi-media outlets and providers foster environments where the stereotyping of girls and women can be stopped, where girls can feel valued, and which contribute to girls developing healthy images of themselves.

The following members of the EDVAW Platform expert mechanisms endorsed this statement:

- [UN Working Group on discrimination against women and girls](#) (WGDAWG),
Chair
- [UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls](#) (SR VAWG)
- [UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW Committee)
- [Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence](#) (GREVIO)

- **Committee of Experts of the Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI)**
- **African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa (A SRWHR)**
- **Inter-American Commission on Human Rights' Rapporteur on the Rights of Women (IA RWHR)**