

GBV AoR HELPDESK

Gender Based Violence in Emergencies

Learning Series on Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence

Learning Brief 2: Strategies and actions for preventing and responding to technology-facilitated gender-based violence



Introduction

Digital and other information and communication technologies (ICTs) are potentially powerful tools for catalyzing women's empowerment and gender equality. Technology is, however, also changing women and girls' experiences of violence. Technology-facilitated GBV (TFGBV) is rapidly emerging as a significant form of GBV globally, including in contexts impacted by conflict, disaster and other humanitarian emergencies and there is a pressing need for strategies to prevent, mitigate and respond TFGBV in humanitarian contexts. Yet little is known about TFGBV or about effective approaches to addressing it in emergency-affected and fragile settings. To prevent and respond to this emerging problem as part of wider GBV in emergencies (GBViE) efforts, it will be critical that the GBViE community understands TFGBV and develops effective strategies and capabilities to address it.

This learning series seeks to: 1) build basic knowledge about TFGBV; 2) highlight existing strategies for preventing and responding to TFGBV that may be adapted for use in emergency-affected and fragile contexts; and 3) suggest priority actions for different stakeholders to take to begin to address the problem. The series is informed by research and practice evidence,¹ including review of published and grey literature and interviews with 25 researchers, practitioners and activists working across diverse contexts globally.² Those interviewed included GBV specialists, women's and digital rights activists, researchers and other experts working at the intersection of technology and GBV.

This second learning brief in the series³ overviews promising strategies currently being used in different parts

¹ In addition to undertaking review of literature and resources, the Helpdesk partnered with the GBV AoR Community of Practice (CoP) to undertake a survey on TFGBV among members to seek input on how TFGBV is manifesting in different contexts, how services are responding and challenges in addressing the problem. CoP members were invited to participate in an interview to share their knowledge, experience and expertise in addressing TFGBV.

² Those interviewed included GBV specialists and service providers working with survivors of TFGBV, researchers, women's rights activists, policy advisors and program managers, the majority in middle- and low-income contexts. Informants work for community-based and national NGOs, international NGOs, research institutions, UN agencies in Africa, Asia-Pacific, the Middle East, Europe and North America. While they are not individually named to protect the identity and location of some informants, they are all acknowledged and thanked for sharing their time, experience, knowledge and expertise in this area.

³ The first learning brief unpacks the issue by looking at different types of TFGBV, its prevalence, how it is manifesting in emergency

of the world to prevent and respond to TFGBV and highlights some key examples and resources. It also suggests five priority actions GBV practitioners and specialists can take to strengthen response to TFGBV, and five priority actions to enhance TFGBV mitigation and prevention.

Promising strategies to address TFGBV

Preventing TFGBV, as with other forms of GBV, will ultimately involve transforming the inequitable structures, norms, attitudes and practices that underpin gender-based inequality, discrimination and violence. As TFGBV is a relatively new form of abuse, there is no evidence-base on effective approaches for addressing different forms of TFGBV at this time. However, GBV, women's and digital rights organizations and their allies around the world are mobilizing to tackle the problem, and there are promising strategies emerging, including in middle and low-income countries, that build on expertise and models to address GBV offline developed over decades. These strategies may be helpful in mitigating risks associated with TFGBV, and supporting and empowering survivors in emergency-affected contexts. Strategies currently being adopted to address TFGBV fall into five categories, including:

1. Supporting and empowering survivors
2. Capacity-building
3. Community awareness and education
4. Legislative measures
5. Collective advocacy and action

1. Supporting and empowering survivors

GBV perpetrated using ICTs can have profound, long-lasting and severe impacts on a survivor.⁴ Even a single incident of technology-related abuse can have serious consequences for a woman or girls' physical and mental health and psychosocial well-being. The feelings of vulnerability, helplessness and powerlessness resulting from TFGBV, combined with significant stigma and victim-blaming, particularly in relation to image-based sexual abuse (IBSA) can erode a survivor's ability to trust others, feel safe and recover. And yet, TFGBV is not perceived as damaging as other forms of GBV by many of those who should be supporting survivors. Many GBV service providers and those in the wider protection community have limited knowledge or experience in addressing the issue and lack understanding of how dangerous it can be.⁵ Lack of awareness of the seriousness and nature of the issue, social stigma and blame placed on survivors, survivor's fear of reprisal and further abuse, lack of confidence in police and limited formal remedies available mean that survivors face significant barriers to disclosing the problem and in getting help.⁶

To overcome these challenges, and support and empower survivors, different actors are implementing a number of strategies including:

- 1.1 Establishing safe mechanisms for providing information and assistance
- 1.2 Integrating responses to TFGBV into case management processes and practices
- 1.3 Providing information and assistance to protect survivors from further abuse

contexts, and the impacts it has on women and girls, the third looks at wider implications of TFGBV on women's rights and gender equality and provides recommendations on priority actions that humanitarian agencies, donors and online industries can take to begin to fulfil their responsibilities to prevent and respond to TFGBV in emergency-affected settings.

sets out recommendations for different stakeholder groups to address the problem moving forward.

⁴ McGlynn, C., Johnson, K. and Rackley, E. (2020) 'It's Torture for the Soul': The Harms of Image-Based Sexual Abuse, *Social & Legal Studies* 1–22; Association for Progressive Communications (APC) (2017) *Online gender-based violence: A submission from the Association for Progressive Communications to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences*: https://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/APCSubmission_UNSR_VAW_GBV_0_0.pdf; Dunn, S. (2020) *Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence: An Overview*, The Centre for International Governance Innovation: <https://www.cigionline.org/publications/technology-facilitated-gender-based-violence-overview>

⁵ See Learning Brief 1 for further information on types of TFGBV and harms associated with it.

⁶ UN Women (2020) *Online Violence Against Women in Asia: A multi-country study*: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eseasia/docs/publications/2020/12/ap-ict-vawq-report-7dec20.pdf?la=en&vs=4251>

1.4 Creating safe peer support forums

1.1 Establishing safe mechanisms for providing information and assistance

Most women and girls do not have good information about ICT-related violence and abuse, what it is, what they can do in response, who they can report to or what help is available. To address this, many services are providing easily accessible information about TFGBV and how to safely and confidentially report the abuse and get help. Making available dedicated resources with relevant information can help survivors know what is happening to them is abuse, they are not alone, they are not to blame, and that supports are available to assist them. Telephone and online services may be particularly helpful, as survivors can access information anonymously without having to attend a service in person. Even where there are no effective legislative or institutional responses to TFGBV in place, having helplines or online portals available is important for supporting survivors. Having a safe reporting mechanism also enables collection of information about the nature and scope of the problem to assist in drawing attention to it, advocating for action to address it and developing risk mitigation and preventive strategies.

Examples and resources for information and assistance mechanisms

Pakistan's Digital Rights Foundation [Cyber Harassment Helpline](#)⁷ provides free and confidential legal advice, digital security support, psychological counselling and a referral system to victims of online harassment.

The Australian Government's E-safety Commissioner [website](#)⁸ provides information about different forms of online abuse targeting women, frequently asked questions, available civil redress mechanisms, links to relevant research, advice on how to remove content, including images and video, how to report to social media or websites, and how to get help from police and information for family and friends. It also has a portal for reporting and obtaining assistance from e-Safety for cyberbullying, IBSA and child sexual abuse material.

The UK [Revenge Porn Helpline](#)⁹ provides phone, email and web-based service for survivors, and professionals supporting them. The helpline provides non-judgmental and confidential advice, help reporting and removal of content, social media advice, reporting to the police, legal advice.

INHOPE (International Association of Internet Hotlines) is a [network of associations](#)¹⁰ focused on responding to criminally illegal content and activity, in particular child sexual abuse material, online grooming and online hate including xenophobia.

Cyber Civil Rights [Without My Consent](#)¹¹ initiative provides information about online harassment, including a guide called *Something Can be Done*

YWCA Canada has developed [information packages about IBSA](#)¹² for adolescent girls and young women to explain legal rights, how to report IBSA and where to get support.

1.2 Integrating responses to TFGBV into case management processes and practices

A number of GBV services in different contexts, particularly domestic violence services, are integrating specific responses to TFGBV into their service delivery to ensure survivors can access compassionate, non-judgmental care, support and protection to help them cope, increase safety, and decide what to do in response to the violence. To do this, services are equipping frontline staff with knowledge, attitudes and skills to validate and

⁷ www.digitalrightsfoundation.pk/cyber-harassment-helpline

⁸ <https://www.esafety.gov.au/women/online-abuse-targeting-women>

⁹ <https://revengepornhelpline.org.uk>

¹⁰ <https://www.inhope.org/EN>

¹¹ <https://withoutmyconsent.org/>

¹² <https://ywcacanada.ca/guide-on-sexual-image-based-abuse/>

address the fear, sense of helplessness and other impacts that survivors of TFGBV experience and providing survivors with relevant information about TFGBV, its impacts, and the options available to them. Services are also integrating technology-related abuse into safety assessments and safety planning for survivors, and creating relationships and referral pathways with services providers with capacity to address technology-specific needs of survivors, such as technical support to improve digital safety or have content removed (see 1.3 Information and assistance to remove abusive content and protect against further abuse for more information).

Examples and resources for integrating TFGBV into case management

WESNET has a number of [resources to support frontline GBV workers](#)¹³ provide information and support survivors in relation to TFGBV. These include:

- [Is Tech Abuse Happening to You?](#)
- [Technology Safety Plan](#)
- [Documentation Tips for Survivors of Technology Abuse and Stalking](#)
- [Assessing for Technology Abuse and Privacy](#)
- [Dealing with harassing calls, texts, and messages](#)
- [10 Easy Steps to Maximise Privacy](#)
- [Stalking and Technology-Facilitated Abuse Log](#)

1.3 Providing assistance to remove abusive content and protect against further abuse

Many survivors simply want the abuse to stop and want the abusive content and images removed. Organizations can provide information and assistance to enable survivors to reduce their vulnerability to further violence, and can support survivors to remove abusive content and images. Approaches to assisting survivors to remove content, improve their safety and prevent further abuse include:

- Providing survivors with technical advice and guidance on how to increase their digital safety, security and privacy, including assisting them to remove applications and software used for monitoring and surveillance, delete browsing history, change privacy and location settings, and managing passwords.
- Helping survivors use reporting mechanisms provided by online platforms to request the company take down abusive content. Social media platforms commonly have take-down policies and mechanisms for reporting inappropriate content and requesting its removal. While these policies can be effective, they are not always easy to navigate and unless an image or other content violates community standards, it can be difficult to get it removed.
- Establishing a direct communication channel with social media platforms at regional or country level and requesting content be removed on a survivor's behalf. Some social media platforms require the person affected to request content be removed, in which case, services provide guidance on how to do this.
- Engaging an online content removal expert to delete unwanted or abusive content. There are individuals and companies that remove online content on a fee-for-service basis and while this is not generally affordable to survivors, it is a cost that some support services include in their budgets.

Examples and resources to help survivors remove content and protect against further abuse

TacticalTech's [Data Detox Kit](#)¹⁴ is a toolkit for promoting digital safety.

TechSafety's [Safety Toolkit](#)¹⁵ provides guidance and links to tools to improve women and girls' digital safety, security and privacy, available in English and Spanish.

¹³ <https://techsafety.org.au/resources/resources-women/>

¹⁴ <https://tacticaltech.org/projects/data-detox-kit>

¹⁵ <https://www.techsafety.org/resources-survivors>

Cyber Civil Rights has an [online content removal guide](#)¹⁶ and can also refer survivors to a free service to help secure the removal of private images, videos and other content.

TakeBacktheTech provides information and guidance for survivors to protect against [online stalking](#),¹⁷ [online extortion](#),¹⁸ [hate speech](#),¹⁹ and [trolling](#).²⁰

Chayn's Online Safety Guide²¹ was written to support survivors of intimate partner violence and stalking, though is also applicable to other forms of online GBV.

Cornell Tech runs a [Computer Security Clinic](#)²² for survivors of intimate partner violence where trained volunteers work individually with clients to improve their safety and reduce technology-related abuses. They also offer a range of [how-to-guides](#)²³ to support survivors experiencing technology-related abuse.

Cyber Rights website has [detailed advice](#)²⁴ on a large number of social media platform's policies and reporting mechanisms for IBSA.

1.4 Creating safe peer support forums

As noted, the impacts of violence and abuse perpetrated via technology may be profound and long-lasting, causing significant social rupture and ongoing psychological distress. Even if the individual case is addressed, the lingering fear and distrust can continue to cause distress and harm. Similar to peer support groups for survivors of other forms of GBV, some survivors of TFGBV find mutual support from others who have experienced similar abuse to be a particularly helpful coping strategy. Providing an anonymous and safe online forum for survivors to engage with others with similar experiences to share experiences and coping strategies may be helpful for some survivors. Virtual safe spaces have potential for providing a moderated forum for peer support. It is noted that there is no evidence-base around the benefits and risks of such an approach at this time, and it is recommended that further information be sought on establishing such a service before doing so. Any virtual peer support service needs to be carefully managed and moderated by someone trained to manage group dynamics and provide appropriate support, including intervention if a member expresses self-harming or suicidal ideation. It is also vital that there is a high level of security on such services to protect survivor's confidentiality and safety.

Examples and resources for online peer support forums

HeartMob is a [site where those facing online harassment can get support from others](#)²⁵ who have similar experiences.

TechSafety offers [information on managing online support groups](#)²⁶ for survivors.

Bloom is a [free, web-based support group](#)²⁷ for domestic abuse survivors and anyone experiencing GBV. Run by Chayn volunteers, it aims to recreate the trust, engagement, and confidentiality of a physical group setting online.

¹⁶ <https://www.cybercivilrights.org/online-removal/>

¹⁷ <https://www.takebackthetech.net/be-safe/cyberstalking-strategies>

¹⁸ <https://www.takebackthetech.net/be-safe/extortion-strategies>

¹⁹ <https://www.takebackthetech.net/be-safe/hate-speech-strategies>

²⁰ <https://www.takebackthetech.net/be-safe/extortion-strategies>

²¹ <https://chayn.gitbook.io/diy-online-safety/>

²² <https://www.ceta.tech.cornell.edu/clinic>

²³ <https://www.ceta.tech.cornell.edu/resources>

²⁴ <https://www.cagoldberglaw.com/how-to-report-revenge-porn-on-social-media/> <https://www.cagoldberglaw.com/how-to-report-revenge-porn-on-social-media/>

²⁵ <https://iheartmob.org/>

²⁶ <https://www.techsafety.org/online-groups>

²⁷ <https://bloom.chayn.co/>²⁷

Each group offers daily tips, tricks, tools, and comforting words. With courses ranging between 4 weeks to 2 months, survivors learn, reflect, complete homework, and process what they've experienced in a safe and invested space. Bloom's content and methods are validated by trauma therapists and leading experts in the field.

UNICEF Virtual Safe Spaces Following successful piloting of [virtual safe spaces](#)²⁸ (VSS) for adolescent girls in Iraq and Lebanon, a second version of a more interactive VSS platform is in development to provide information on GBV. As a component of VSS Version 2.0, UNICEF plans to create a virtual forum which enables girls to seek support, ask questions, receive linkages to specialized services, and in time, replicate the sense of a safe social network (that women and girls note they value from physical safe spaces) on the platform with peers. The VSS platform will help provide support to girls who have been exposed to online violence and make sure they receive the appropriate level of care and support.

Maru Chatbot aims to support and empower people who are experiencing, witnessing or fighting online harassment by providing advice and resources from experts and activists. Users can learn more about online harassment, how to protect themselves from it, report and respond to it, or [support others](#)²⁹ going through it.

2. Capacity-building

GBV service providers have had to embrace new knowledge, skills and capabilities to be able to prevent and respond to TFGBV. Many GBV practitioners do not yet have a good understanding of TFGBV, how it is manifesting and impacting survivors, or how to respond to and protect those targeted.³⁰ Baseline knowledge among frontline GBV workers and others supporting survivors in many settings is generally extremely low. This lack of knowledge contributes to TFGBV not being taken seriously, and a lack of appropriate services and responses to support survivors. Further, GBV services in general, and in particular in humanitarian contexts, do not have protocols, tools and practices in place for their own digital safety to protect their services and workers from TFGBV. In response to this gap, GBV services are focusing on building knowledge and skills and other capabilities of their own services and of other service providers with a role in responding to TFGBV.

Promising strategies for capacity-building

Strategies currently being used to build capacity of GBV workers, services and referral networks to be able to safely address TFGBV include:

- Building technological capabilities of GBV service providers, including training staff in how to ensure digital privacy, safety and security and training and equipping those engaging with survivors with knowledge and information about TFGBV and attitudes and skills for responding to survivors of different forms of abuse, including:
 - Non-judgmental attitudes and behaviors to reduce victim-blaming.
 - Skills in responding to the significant psychological, emotional and social impacts TFGBV can have, and the associated risks and harms, including self-harm and in some contexts, honor-related harm.
 - Skills for working with adolescents who may be particularly targeted in some contexts.
 - Information, resources and skills in providing survivors with technical support and guidance in removing abusive content and protecting themselves from further technology-related abuse.
- Partnering with technology and cyber-security services to provide technical support to clients to protect themselves from further abuse. For example, a GBV service for survivors of intimate partner violence partnering with a technology service so that technology professionals can work with GBV caseworkers or with clients to provide technical support to improve technology-safety.³¹
- Integrating relevant services that can support survivors of TFGBV into referral pathways and protocols for interagency responses to TFGBV.
- Raising awareness and training other actors in survivor-centered response to TFGBV, especially the police and the judiciary to build institutional understanding of TFGBV, the legal framework and appropriate

²⁸ <https://www.whf.london/blog/reaching-girls-across-the-digital-access-continuum-digital-solutions-to-address-gender-based-violence>

²⁹ <https://maruchatbot.co/>

³⁰ The majority of people that completed the survey undertaken with the GBV AOR CoP as part of the development of this learning brief indicated that they did not feel they had a good understanding of TFGBV or how to address it.

³¹ <https://www.ceta.tech.cornell.edu/clinic>

responses to reports. Capacity-building training must challenge victim-blaming beliefs and norms, particularly in contexts where it may be considered particularly shameful for the survivor if her friends, family and wider community are aware that intimate images exist.

Examples and resources for capacity-building

Technology Safety has developed [resources for services](#)³² working with survivors on safely using technology to communicate with survivors, technology safety for programs and data safety and confidentiality. They also hold an annual [technology safety summit](#)³³ for organizations working with survivors to share information and increase knowledge and skills of those working with survivors to enhance response to technology abuse, support survivors in their safe use of technology, and harness technology to improve services.

Tactical Tech's Gendersec Curricula³⁴ is a holistic, feminist resources for delivering privacy and digital security training and is available in English, Spanish, and Portuguese.

AccessNow's Digital Security Helpline³⁵ provides real-time, free technical assistance and advice to civil society groups and activists, to improve their digital security and is available in English, Spanish, French, German, Russian, Arabic, Filipino, and Italian.

Association for Progressive Communications Feminist Tech Exchange project³⁶ (FTX) has developed a training curriculum for trainers who work with women's rights and sexual rights activists to use the Internet safely, creatively and strategically. The training was developed in collaboration with a global network of trainers, writers and activists to embed a feminist approach in digital security training. The training includes a module on online GBV, as well as on creating safe online spaces, mobile safety and risk assessment for organizations. APC has also developed a [digital security first aid kit](#)³⁷ for human rights defenders is designed to help activists deal with the most common security issues that might jeopardize the integrity of devices and communications. It is available in English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese.

Digital Defenders Digital First Aid Kit³⁸ is a resource to help digital security trainers, and activists to better protect themselves and the communities they support against the most common types of digital emergencies. The DFAK is available in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, Russian, and French.

3. Community awareness and education strategies

Baseline knowledge about TFGBV across communities is very low. To address this, different actors are raising community awareness, generating conversations and dialogue, and building skills of different groups in the community in relation to TFGBV. Community awareness and education can contribute to preventing TFGBV, and is very important for reducing the significant stigma and victim-blaming attached to some forms of TFGBV, such as IBSA. Targeted initiatives to educate and build digital knowledge and skills of women and girls is also considered vital, as it contributes to fostering their digital literacy and agency and ability to promote their own safety, security and privacy. Education programs for boys and young men may also be an important strategy for preventing TFGBV.

Strategies currently being used to raise awareness and build skills within different groups in the community include:

- Public awareness and education campaigns about the problem and how to respond to it. While social media is a helpful tool for engaging with those with access to the Internet, it is important to remember that many

³² <https://www.techsafety.org/resources-agencyuse>

³³ <https://www.techsafety.org/technology-summit>

³⁴ <https://tacticaltech.org/news/gendersec-training-curricula/>

³⁵ <https://www.accessnow.org/help/?ignorelocale>

³⁶ <https://en.ftx.apc.org/shelves/ftx-safety-reboot>

³⁷ <https://www.apc.org/en/irhr/digital-security-first-aid-kit>

³⁸ <https://www.digitaldefenders.org/digital-first-aid-kit/>

women experiencing violence through mobile phones may not have access to the Internet. Public awareness and education campaigns should therefore use a variety of communication channels and include opportunities for generating safe community conversations and dialogue offline.

- Undertaking action research on TFGBV in the community to learn more about the issue and educate women and girls and others about the problem in the process.
- Targeted education and skill-building programs for young people in child friendly spaces, youth programs, women and girl safe spaces, primary schools, high schools, universities and other community institutions on digital abuse, digital safety and digital ethics, onlooker and bystander strategies, and on sexuality and respectful relationships.³⁹
- Developing and disseminating resources to build awareness among young people about common forms of TFGBV, including IBSA where it is occurring.
- Developing and disseminating information and resources for parents, teachers and other supportive adults about TFGBV, its impacts and support girls and young women who are experiencing digital violence.
- Providing women and girls with safe spaces, such as closed groups on social media platforms to learn about and share information about what is happening in their context.
- Providing digital literacy training for women and girls on how the Internet works, safely using technology, privacy and location settings on social media accounts and mobile phone applications to empower them to safeguard their online and ICT security and privacy and know how to act when they experience or witness abuse or digital violence.

Examples and resources for community awareness and education

The Internet Society is building awareness about online abuse in Barbados through the [C.A.R.E – Combating \(online\) Abuse through Research and Education](#)⁴⁰ project, which includes an awareness campaign about the effects of online abuse on women and girls, and community dialogue on the issue. In [Palestine](#),⁴¹ the same organization is undertaking awareness sessions with secondary school children.

PeaceWomen Across the Globe and Palestinian NGO Women and Media Development are implementing a joint project [To be safe](#)⁴² which is seeking to build capacity of teachers and social workers in Palestinian schools to support survivors of online GBV and build students skills in protecting their digital privacy and security. The project also includes a plan for students to implement initiatives to further raise awareness among their peers.

Digital Rights Foundation Pakistan has developed [The Art of Digital Security for Pakistani Women](#),⁴³ a manual to support women and girls to develop digital literacy and safety.

Webwise Ireland's online [educational resources on IBSA](#)⁴⁴ include free teaching resources for schools and for adolescents, including a campaign video, facts about sexting and what to do if an image is shared without permission. It also includes resources for parents.

[The Cybersafe Toolkit](#)⁴⁵ is for teachers or other professionals working with young people, who want to address online violence against women and girls, including online sexual harassment and online safety, in the classroom or other settings. The toolkit provides materials to facilitate four workshops on the topics of non-consensual sharing of sexual images, exploitation, coercion and threats, sexualized bullying, and unwanted sexualization, including an online tool that encourages discussion and role play and a guide with practical information for facilitators.

³⁹ Interview with Nicola Henry, *Revenge porn: do Australian laws go far enough?* <https://www.latrobe.edu.au/nest/revenge-porn-do-australian-laws-go-far-enough/>

⁴⁰ <https://www.internetsociety.org/beyond-the-net/grants/2017/project-care/>

⁴¹ <https://isoc.ps/>

⁴² <https://www.swisspeace.ch/apropos/preventing-online-gender-based-violence-in-palestine/>

⁴³ <https://digitalrightsfoundation.pk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Hamara-Internet-Guidebook-English-Version-2016.pdf>

⁴⁴ <https://www.webwise.ie/teachers/resources/>

⁴⁵ <https://www.stoponlineviolence.eu/cybersafe-toolkit/>

YWCA Canada has developed [a package for those supporting girls experiencing digital violence](#),⁴⁶ including parents, teachers, service providers, police and ICT professionals, with practical tips for providing compassionate and non-judgmental support.

4. Legislative measures

As with other forms of GBV, effective national legal frameworks are an important pillar of State responses to TFGBV. While states are responsible for enacting and implementing legislation on TFGBV, GBV and women's rights actors play an important role in advocating for law reform and in shaping new laws to ensure they protect and fulfill women and girls' rights as set out in international human rights frameworks, and reflect the experiences, rights and needs of survivors. See Brief 3 for more information on human rights frameworks of TFGBV.

Prior to engaging in law reform efforts or efforts to support survivors' access to justice, it is important for GBViE actors to be aware of the challenges and limitations in legislative responses to TFGBV. Women and girls face significant obstacles in accessing justice systems, and pursuing a civil matter is even more prohibitive than criminal cases due to costs.⁴⁷ Seeking legal protection or remedy for TFGBV through law enforcement, criminal or civil courts may expose survivors to further shame, blame, and revictimization, for example, through further public exposure of intimate images. Further, legislation commonly doesn't address the broad spectrum of behaviors that constitute different forms of TFGBV, and/or has limited scope of application. For example, laws on image-based abuse may only apply in the context of intimate relationships. The rapid changes in technology also present a challenge to legislating to regulate TFGBV.⁴⁸ Also, the transnational nature of the Internet⁴⁹ makes prosecuting or holding accountable perpetrators or online companies located in other jurisdictions extremely difficult. Perhaps most concerning, laws seeking to regulate online abuse have been used to erode civic space protections and silence dissent, impacting human right defenders, LGBTIQ+ and women's rights activists and organizations, instead of protecting women and girls who are victims of violence perpetrated online.⁵⁰ They may also inadvertently impact freedom of expression, including sexual freedom, and increase vulnerability of certain groups to criminalization, such as sex workers and young people sharing consenting images.

Despite the challenges, in some jurisdictions, survivors are using existing laws to seek protection or remedy for different forms of digital violence, such as IBSA. The legal instruments frequently used are cybercrime and other criminal laws, dedicated GBV laws, and laws on data protection, privacy and defamation.⁵¹ Where there are no specialized laws in place, survivors who choose to pursue legal responses have to rely on a patchwork of civil and criminal laws. In response to the rise in TFGBV and the inadequacy of existing legal frameworks, a number of States have begun updating their legal frameworks to address different forms of technology-related GBV in both criminal and civil codes.⁵² Some countries have also created dedicated law enforcement units for addressing cybercrime.

The benefits of having a clear set of laws in relation to TFGBV include:

- Asserting and enshrining women and girl's rights to be protected from this form violence;

⁴⁶ http://projectshift.ca/wp-content/uploads/YWCA-Guide-for-Trusted-Adults-Jan.-18_FormattedV4.pdf

⁴⁷ See GBV AOR Helpdesk (2020) *Strengthening Access to Justice for GBV Survivors in Emergencies*: <https://www.sddirect.org.uk/our-work/gbv-in-emergencies-helpdesk/>

⁴⁸ Interview with Nicola Henry, *Revenge porn: do Australian laws go far enough?*, available at: <https://www.latrobe.edu.au/nest/revenge-porn-do-australian-laws-go-far-enough/>

⁴⁹ Muhoro, G. (2016) *Policy Brief: Minding the Gaps: Identifying Strategies to Address Gender-Based Cyber Violence in Kenya*, African Development Bank.

⁵⁰ See <https://africanfeminism.com/accessing-justice-for-image-based-sexual-abuse-a-challenge-for-victims-in-malawi/>

⁵¹ Simonovic, D. (2018) *Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on online violence against women and girls from a human rights perspective*: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1641160?ln=en#record-files-collapse-header>

⁵² For examples, see End Cyber Abuse country factsheets: <http://endcyberabuse.org/country-factsheets/> and Council of Europe's CyberViolence website <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cybercrime/legislation>

- Making it clear to the community and to private sector Internet companies and platforms that TFGBV is unacceptable and communicating social condemnation of it;
- Placing responsibility for abuse and violence onto perpetrators and Internet companies;
- Acting as a deterrent to perpetrators;
- Placing accountability and responsibility for addressing TFGBV, including enforcement of laws in relation to it, onto the State;
- Providing survivors with legal options for protection and redress, including financial damages, take-down orders directing a perpetrator, an individual or a corporation such as a social media company or a website operator, to remove images or content, and orders that a perpetrator refrain from certain actions, such as contacting the survivor, or posting sexual images online.⁵³

Examples and resources for legislative responses to TFGBV

Association for Progressive Communications [submission to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences](#)⁵⁴ contains key issues and recommendations regarding legislation and regulation pertaining to online GBV.

End Cyber Abuse [website](#)⁵⁵ has information on core legislative elements, good practices elements, gaps and challenges and country factsheets detailing legal remedies available in Bangladesh, Canada, England, France, Germany, India, Japan, Pakistan, the Philippines and the USA.

The Council of Europe's Cyberviolence [website](#)⁵⁶ provides information regarding criminal justice and other legislative and policy responses to technology-related violence, including on domestic and international legal instruments.

Cyber Civil Rights Organization [website](#)⁵⁷ has information on drafting effective legislation to address IBSA and examples of laws from different jurisdiction in the USA.

5. Collective advocacy and action

TFGBV currently receives inadequate attention and responses from governments, online and telecommunication industries, civil society, and from humanitarian actors. While some governments are implementing legislative responses, and some social media companies are taking steps to improve women's safety online,⁵⁸ there remains a need for significant and concerted advocacy to mobilize attention, commitment, resources and responses the issue deserves. Partnerships and collaboration across sectors, organizations and groups are vital for drawing attention to the problem of TFGBV, and demanding action and accountability from governments and other authorities, and equally critically, from online industries.

Strategies currently being used to raise awareness and mobilize resources and action to prevent and respond to TFGBV include:

- Advocating with online industries and social media companies at national, regional and global levels to take greater responsibility for preventing harassment, threats, intimidation, and the incitement and perpetration of GBV through their platforms. An example includes mandatory age-verification to prevent the use of abusive, exploitative content, such as images and videos featuring children, adolescents and people who have been sex-trafficked or otherwise sexually exploited. Advocacy efforts seek to educate companies on TFGBV in the different countries in which they operate, the harmful consequences it has on women and girls, including avoidance of online spaces, and requesting them to take proactive steps to address online

⁵³ See End Cyber Abuse, Core Legislative Elements and Good Practices: <http://endcyberabuse.org/>

⁵⁴ <https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/online-gender-based-violence-submission-association-progressive-communications-united-nations>

⁵⁵ <http://endcyberabuse.org/>

⁵⁶ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cybercrime/legislation>

⁵⁷ <https://www.cybercivilrights.org/guide-to-legislation/>

⁵⁸ For example, FaceBook has allocated resources to improving women's safety online, including developing dedicated policies and convening a Women's Safety Advisory Board, <https://about.fb.com/news/2019/10/inside-feed-womens-safety/>

sexism, misogyny and violence by creating new online norms and gender-sensitive responses. for example, by creating safe country-specific reporting mechanisms for IBSA, or by implementing age or other identity-verification systems.

- Creating local and national networks to share knowledge, strengthen coordination and build partnerships among those working to prevent or eliminate online violence and abuse,⁵⁹ including national, regional and international allies in law enforcement, media, civil society, human rights groups, digital rights groups, women's civil society groups, researchers and feminist technology actors to promote safe data collection on different forms of TFGBV, and explore ways to exchange knowledge and facilitate collective advocacy about the problem.
- Partnering with feminist digital, technology and cyber-safety organizations to learn more about strategies for addressing TFGBV, share information and build knowledge about the problem in different contexts and regions, and build alliances between GBV and technology experts to strengthen advocacy and action on TFGBV.
- Harnessing technology to create safe digital and online spaces for women and girls to reclaim and use digital platforms to speak out about and demand action to address violence, abuse and discrimination. While social media platforms are sites of violence, they can also provide women and girls with an avenue for raising awareness and demanding action to address violence perpetrated using these platforms.
- Using research to advocate for attention and resources and influence policy responses.
- Holding workshops to bring together diverse groups such as artists, activists, technologists, designers, students, and journalists to generate ideas for collective action to address TFGBV.

Examples and resources for advocacy and collective

Association for Progressive Communications⁶⁰ is an [international network of civil society organizations](#) dedicated to empowering and supporting people working for peace, human rights, development and protection of the environment through the strategic use of information and communication technologies (ICTs). One strategic area for APC is women's rights and co-creating a feminist Internet. [TakeBackTheTech!](#)⁶¹ is APC's global, collaborative campaign project that highlights the problem of tech-related violence against women, together with research and solutions from different parts of the world. The campaign offers safety roadmaps and information, provides an avenue for taking action and implements campaigns:

The Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe undertook research on online violence against women journalists and produced a range of advocacy materials and campaign events, including a [resource guide with comprehensive recommendations and actions](#)⁶² for different actors to improve safety of women journalists online, and factsheets and [videos](#).⁶³

International Federation of Journalists implemented [a campaign to draw attention to the issue of online trolling](#)⁶⁴ of women journalists and encourage media organizations and journalists' unions to take concrete steps to eradicate online trolling.

Policy undertook research on [women and girls' experiences of online violence in five African countries](#)⁶⁵ as well as produced [a comparative analysis on legal frameworks](#)⁶⁶ protecting women from online violence.

⁵⁹ Muhoro, G. (2016) *Policy Brief Minding the Gaps: Identifying Strategies to Address Gender-Based Cyberviolence in Kenya*, African Development Bank.

⁶⁰ <https://www.apc.org/>

⁶¹ <https://www.takebackthetech.net/>

⁶² <https://www.osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media/468861>

⁶³ <https://www.osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media/369446>

⁶⁴ <https://www.ifj.org/actions/ifj-campaigns/online-trolling-you-are-not-alone.html>

⁶⁵ <https://ogbv.policy.org/report.pdf>

⁶⁶ https://ogbv.policy.org/legal_analysis.pdf

UN Women in Turkey launched a [campaign against online GBV](#)⁶⁷ as part of the 2020 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign.

Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET), Digital Literacy Initiative, Defend Defenders, and Encrypt Uganda undertook [research and produced an advocacy brief](#)⁶⁸ on online GBV in Uganda, existing legal frameworks and measures to tackle online GBV.

Polaris Project undertook research on the role of social media in human trafficking and published [a roadmap with recommendations for social media platforms](#)⁶⁹ to address human trafficking via social media.

GenderIt⁷⁰ is a think-tank for women's rights, sexual rights and Internet rights activists, academics, journalists and advocates. It has articles, news, podcasts, videos, comics and blogs on Internet policy and cultures from a feminist and intersectional perspective, privileging voices and expressions from Africa, Asia, Latin America, Arabic-speaking countries and parts of Eastern Europe. It includes resources specific to [addressing online GBV on different platforms](#).⁷¹

Priority actions for preventing and responding to TFGBV in emergency contexts

There is an urgent need for action to prevent and respond to TFGBV in emergency-affected contexts. The problem is growing and the impacts on survivors can be severe, even life-threatening. GBViE services urgently need to build capacity to be able to provide timely, tailored support to survivors, particularly those at risk of further violence or harm. The GBViE community also needs to urgently develop, test and roll-out strategies to mitigate risks associated with TFGBV and to prevent it. The following priority actions are suggested as practical first steps GBV practitioners and specialists can take to help prevent and respond to TFGBV in emergency contexts.

Five actions for improving responses to TFGBV survivors

1. **Establish and publicize safe mechanisms for survivors and their supporters to obtain information and assistance.** Explore options for partnering with others to create a dedicated helpline or digital portal for survivors, their families and others, such as teachers and child protection workers to obtain information and assistance. Be sure to include information packages for parents, teachers, child-friendly space workers and other adults engaging with girls and young women on image-based and other digital abuse to build their knowledge, supportive attitudes and skills in protecting and supporting girls who experience this form of violence.
2. **Build capacity of GBV services to respond to TFGBV survivors by:**
 - **Training caseworkers on TFGBV and on digital literacy and technology safety and security.**
 - **Making available specialist technical support to survivors for TFGBV survivors** to facilitate technology safety, secure devices, data and accounts etc. and/or report to social media companies. This can be done through training GBV caseworkers to be 'tech champions' or key workers for survivors experiencing TFGBV,⁷² or by identifying a third party to provide technical support.
 - **Integrating technology-related abuse into case management protocols and practice.** This includes ensuring safety assessments and safety planning processes reflect TFGBV and that staff have

⁶⁷ <https://fireflies.digital/>

⁶⁸ <https://wougnet.org/website/publications/publicationsingle/30>

⁶⁹ <https://polarisproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/A-Roadmap-for-Systems-and-Industries-to-Prevent-and-Disrupt-Human-Trafficking-Social-Media.pdf>

⁷⁰ <https://www.genderit.org/>

⁷¹ https://www.genderit.org/sites/default/files/online_violence_-_prevention_reporting_and_remedy_ebook_0.pdf

⁷² These staff would receive targeted training on technology safety, security and privacy and be able to provide survivors with technology-related support, in addition to standard case management services

guidance on using relevant social media and online industry policies for reporting and removing discriminatory, abusive or violent content or content that violates community standards.

- **Incorporating digital literacy and technology safety into organizational policies** to improve staff and service's digital security and protection. This should include developing specific policies as well as integrating digital safety into existing policies, such as codes of conduct.
3. **Identify channels for communicating directly with social media platforms** to highlight the problem of TFGBV among populations impacted by emergencies, enable reporting of TFGBV and escalating take-down requests.
 4. **Build referral pathways and capacity of services with a role in supporting TFGBV survivors.** For example, where acts of TFGBV are criminalized, find allies within the police who are committed to addressing the issue who can serve as a focal point for survivors. Link with services that can provide safety to TFGBV survivors at risk of further violence or harm. This includes services and professionals with expertise in responding to survivors at risk of self-harm.
 5. **Identify and test approaches for providing psychosocial support to TFGBV survivors, such as peer support fora,** so that women and girls who wish to can connect with and receive support from others with lived experience of TFGBV. Consider how to build these into virtual safe spaces and how to tailor interventions to meet the needs of different group of survivors, such as adolescents and young women, women and girls with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ women and girls, and women and girls from racial, ethnic or religious minorities.

Five actions for mitigating and preventing TFGBV

1. **Generate public awareness and discussion about the issue of TFGBV.** Partner with women's and digital rights organizations to raise awareness across the community to build knowledge about TFGBV and catalyze community dialogue about it. Engage adolescents and young people in particular, and build safety to talk about, reduce stigma and victim-blaming and mobilize community action to address TFGBV.
2. **Build women and girls knowledge and skills in relation to technology and TFGBV by:**
 - **Providing information to women and girls about TFGBV,** including through safe space programming, education and child protection programming, considering online and offline avenues. Consider how to best provide tailored information to specific groups, such as adolescents and young women, women and girls with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ women and girls, women and girls from racial, ethnic or religious minorities, and those with lower literacy levels.
 - **Providing training for women and girls in digital and technology literacy** and digital safety and security through physical and virtual safe spaces, to reduce the gender divide in technology literacy, skills and confidence, including for female staff.
3. **Integrate TFGBV into existing prevention interventions.** For example, incorporate TFGBV into programs seeking to create gender-equitable, non-violent and respectful social norms, and work with child protection and education sectors to integrate TFGBV into life-skills, sexuality and respectful relationships programs for children and young people.
4. **Partner with allies including women's and digital rights and other actors already working at the intersection of violence and technology** in different services, organizations, professions and sectors, including activists, journalists and lawyers to develop advocacy and policy materials and briefs on TFWAG and undertake collective advocacy targeting:
Government and other national decision-makers, to:

- Address legal and policy gaps in preventive, protective and remedial measures in relation to TFGBV in a manner that protects and promotes the rights of survivors, does not infringe on freedom of expression, including sexual freedom, places accountability for TFGBV onto perpetrators and onto social media and online companies and platforms.
- Resource law enforcement and other services to be responsive to TFGBV.

Social media and other online companies and platforms, to:

- Advise them how their companies are harming women and girls, particularly in emergency-affected contexts.
- Request action to remediate the problem, including listening to women and girls, providing resources to fund solutions, identifying solutions they can implement to address the problem and where relevant, tailoring policies on community standards to reflect the realities for women and girls.

5. Advocate within the humanitarian system through relevant clusters and structures and with donors to ensure that:

- Attention and resources are directed towards preventing and responding to technology-related abuse and exploitation where it is occurring.
- Agencies and sectors take steps to mitigate TFGBV risks and respond appropriately when reports of TFGBV are made, including in relation to their own staff.

The GBV AoR Help Desk

The GBV AoR Helpdesk is a unique research and technical advice service which aims to inspire and support humanitarian actors to help prevent, mitigate and respond to violence against women and girls in emergencies. Managed by Social Development Direct, the GBV AoR Helpdesk is staffed by a global roster of senior Gender and GBV Experts who are on standby to help guide frontline humanitarian actors on GBV prevention, risk mitigation and response measures in line with international standards, guidelines and best practice. Views or opinions expressed in GBV AoR Helpdesk Products do not necessarily reflect those of all members of the GBV AoR, nor of all the experts of SDDirect's Helpdesk roster.

The GBV AoR Helpdesk

*You can contact the GBV AoR
Helpdesk by emailing us at:
enquiries@gbviehelpdesk.org.uk*

*The Helpdesk is available 09.00 to
17.30 GMT Monday to Friday.*

Our services are free and