



MEDUSA

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



Co-funded by
the European Union

Deliverable information

Grant Agreement No.	KA220-YOU-000099917
Project acronym	MEDUSA
Project title	Empowering youth and youth workers to recognize and respond to cyber violence by transgressing gender stereotypes
Project timeframe and duration	1. 4. 2023-30. 9. 2025
WP	5: Communication and dissemination
Deliverable	Evaluation report on beta testing
Status	Final version
Deliverable responsible	IPES Maribor
Dissemination level	Public
Due date	31. 8. 2025
Date of submission	21. 7. 2025

Project coordinator

Organization	IPES Maribor
Email	info@ipes-si.org
Postal address:	Glavni trg 17, 2000 Maribor, Slovenia

Summary of the Project

The project **MEDUSA - Empowering youth and youth workers to recognize and respond to cyber violence by transgressing gender stereotypes** with its activities aims to contribute to the construction and implementation of an integrated approach for the recognition and prevention of and informed response to online gender-based violence and harassment among young people. Based on the principle of gender equality, MEDUSA inherently aims to promote **inclusivity** and **diversity** among **young people** and **youth workers** through a series of **awareness-raising, education** and other **preventive activities**, which at the same time strengthens the international aspect of awareness about the problem of online violence. From the center of the intersection of the above priorities, a project idea was born that, on one hand, enables a long-term change in the behavior and thinking of young people, and on the other hand, immediately offers youth workers recommendations for effective action in the area of recognizing and preventing online gender-based violence and harassment. Inclusivity and diversity are integrated into the project in the widest possible way, because only a safe life (also in the virtual space), which is not limited by the existing unequal distribution of power between genders, can offer both men and women an equal democratic experience.

The **main goals** of the MEDUSA project are:

- i. development of innovative and customized content for young people and youth workers to empower them with knowledge about and skills to respond in an informed manner to online gender-based violence,
- ii. education and sensitization of young people for recognizing and preventing online gender-based violence,
- iii. education and sensitization of youth workers for a strengthened response for victims of online violence,
- iv. raising public awareness of the connection between online violence and the aspect of gender,
- v. contribute to an increased and more efficient addressing of the issues associated with online gender-based violence on the national and European level,
- vi. enable the exchange and transfer of good practices between partner countries.

Table of Contents

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS	1
Deliverable information	2
Project coordinator	2
Summary of the Project	3
Table of Contents.....	4
Introduction	5
Recommendation 1	6
Integrate gender-sensitive and intersectional perspectives into all online violence-related legislation and policy	6
Recommendation 2	7
Establish clear legal definitions for online violence, including gender-based forms..	7
Recommendation 3	8
Make ethical and gender-aware digital education a mandatory part of school informatics curricula	8
Recommendation 4	9
Launch sustained public awareness campaigns to change norms and empower local communities.....	9
Recommendation 5	10
Empower teachers and youth workers to recognize and respond to online gender-based violence	10
Recommendation 6	11
Strengthen the digital and gender-sensitive skills of frontline professionals supporting survivors	11
Recommendation 7	12
Invest in research and disaggregated data collection on online gender-based violence	12
Recommendation 8	13
Introduce enforceable national standards for content moderation, including gender-sensitive training for moderators.....	13

Introduction

Despite its increasing prevalence, online gender-based violence (OGBV) often remains under-recognized in national legal systems, under-reported by victims, and under-addressed by digital platforms. Victims frequently face disbelief, blame, or dismissal, and many are left without adequate support or recourse. Moreover, the gendered nature of online violence is still not sufficiently integrated into policymaking or public discourse. Women and other marginalized groups, particularly young people, are disproportionately targeted, and their experiences must inform the development of effective solutions.

This document presents a set of policy recommendations aimed at improving national responses to online violence, and especially OGBV, in Slovenia, Italy, and Croatia. Importantly, the recommendations have been co-developed with the input of 30 young people from the three partner countries, who participated in the MEDUSA summer school on OGBV, held in Ljubljana, Slovenia in July 2025. Through collaborative learning and dialogue, participants explored the complexity of OGBV, examined existing gaps in support systems, and proposed innovative grassroots and policy-level interventions. Their insights have been integrated throughout this document, reflecting not only their lived experiences and concerns but also their aspirations for safer, more inclusive online environments.

While the legal and cultural contexts vary across Slovenia, Italy, and Croatia, many of the challenges – and potential solutions – are shared. The recommendations below are therefore general and adaptable, intended to inform both national and cross-border policy efforts. They address key areas, namely: legal and regulatory frameworks; victim-centered support and prevention; education, awareness, and digital literacy; research, data, and cross-sector collaboration.

Recommendation 1

Integrate gender-sensitive and intersectional perspectives into all online violence-related legislation and policy

Online (gender-based) violence presents a multifaceted and evolving threat that disproportionately impacts marginalized populations, particularly women and LGBTQIA+ individuals. However, the nature and severity of harm are not uniform across these groups. A gender-sensitive approach to legislation acknowledges the specific mechanisms through which gender roles, stereotypes, and systemic inequalities exacerbate digital harm. Beyond this, the application of an intersectional framework reveals how various factors of identity, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability status, socio-economic position, and age, interact to shape individuals' exposure to and experiences of online violence in complex and compounding ways.

Current legislative and regulatory frameworks frequently rely on the premise of a universal or »neutral« user, which results in generic responses that fail to capture the differentiated realities of digital harm. This neutrality risks obscuring the structural and social inequalities that underpin online abuse, thereby rendering policies insufficient or even inadvertently discriminatory. To ensure that legal instruments effectively protect those most at risk, it is imperative to adopt an inclusive and evidence-informed approach that embeds gender and intersectionality at every stage of policy development.

Policy actions include:

- Conduct comprehensive gender impact assessments during the formulation, review, or amendment of any legislative or regulatory measures concerning digital platforms and online violence.
- Institutionalize participatory processes by engaging a broad spectrum of affected communities and subject-matter experts (youth representatives, LGBTQIA+ organizations, racial and ethnic minority groups, persons with disabilities, and survivors of online harm) through inclusive consultations.
- Mandate disaggregated data collection (e.g., by gender, age, sexual orientation, etc.) to inform more tailored policy responses.

Recommendation 2

Establish clear legal definitions for online violence, including gender-based forms

The absence of precise and comprehensive legal definitions for online violence constitutes a major impediment to justice for survivors and a critical gap in national and international legal frameworks. While the digital environment has enabled new modes of expression and connection, it has also facilitated the proliferation of gendered and technologically mediated forms of abuse, such as non-consensual deepfake pornography, cyberstalking, image-based sexual exploitation, doxxing, and coordinated digital harassment campaigns. These acts often remain under-regulated or unrecognized in existing laws, resulting in inconsistent legal interpretations, limited recourse for victims, and impunity for perpetrators.

Legal ambiguity not only hinders law enforcement and judicial actors from responding effectively but also dissuades victims from coming forward, reinforcing cycles of harm and silencing. The lack of codified terminology and definitional clarity makes it difficult to categorize, investigate, and prosecute online offenses, especially when they intersect with gender-based violence. Furthermore, without formal legal recognition, survivors are often denied access to protective measures, legal remedies, and psychosocial support.

Policy actions include:

- Formally define a range of emerging online harms within national criminal codes, digital rights legislation, and regulatory frameworks.
- Develop and implement specialized training programs for prosecutors, judges, and law enforcement personnel that address the unique characteristics and evidentiary challenges of online violence. This will promote uniform interpretation, strengthen enforcement capacities, and reduce institutional bias in the adjudication of such cases.

Recommendation 3

Make ethical and gender-aware digital education a mandatory part of school informatics curricula

Current approaches to digital education in elementary and secondary schools tend to prioritize technical proficiency, such as mastering basic software, coding fundamentals, or managing privacy settings, while insufficiently addressing the socio-cultural and ethical dimensions of online interaction. Yet, the digital sphere is not merely a technical environment; it is a deeply social space shaped by power dynamics, gender stereotypes, discriminatory behaviors, and the prevalence of online harassment and abuse. Without adequate education in these areas, children and youth are left ill-equipped to critically evaluate digital content, recognize harmful online behaviors (including OGBV), and engage ethically and empathetically in virtual spaces.

A comprehensive model of digital literacy must extend beyond functional skills to cultivate ethical awareness, critical thinking, and resilience in online interactions. Such a curriculum should empower pupils and students to recognize and challenge harmful stereotypes, understand the implications of their digital footprints, and develop strategies for safe and respectful communication. It should also provide guidance on identifying online harms while offering clear pathways for seeking help and support. By embedding principles of gender equality, inclusivity, and digital ethics, schools can prepare children and youth not only to avoid online harm but also to contribute positively to digital communities as informed and responsible citizens.

Policy actions include:

- Reform existing informatics curricula to include mandatory modules on digital ethics, gender stereotypes in the virtual sphere, and respectful online behavior.
- Collaborate with educators, youth organizations, and gender experts to develop age-appropriate and engaging materials.
- Provide training and support for teachers to deliver this content confidently and sensitively.
- Ensure content is inclusive of LGBTQIA+ and minority perspectives, recognizing diverse digital experiences.

Recommendation 4

Launch sustained public awareness campaigns to change norms and empower local communities

Public understanding of online violence, particularly OGBV, remains limited across many segments of the population. Despite its increasing prevalence and severe psychological, social, and economic consequences, OGBV is frequently minimized, misunderstood, or dismissed as inconsequential, especially by those unfamiliar with digital cultures. This is compounded by entrenched social stigma, widespread victim-blaming, and a general lack of accessible information, which together contribute to the silence, isolation, and retraumatization of survivors.

Transformative public education is essential not only to disseminate accurate knowledge about the nature, forms, and impacts of online (gender-based) violence, but also to catalyze normative change. Public awareness campaigns – particularly those that are sustained over time, culturally sensitive, and locally grounded – can play a powerful role in reshaping attitudes, disrupting harmful stereotypes, and promoting accountability. To be effective, such campaigns must go beyond one-off messaging. They should employ narrative strategies that center survivors' voices, normalize help-seeking, and mobilize collective action, especially in communities where access to digital literacy resources or support structures may be limited.

Policy actions include:

- Develop and implement nationwide awareness campaigns addressing OGBV and digital harm. These campaigns should be co-designed with diverse stakeholders, including youth-led organizations, survivor advocates, gender justice activists, and influencers with trusted community reach.
- Adopt multi-platform dissemination strategies that combine digital channels with analog outreach, ensuring broad accessibility across age, literacy, and connectivity levels.
- Integrate bystander intervention training into awareness initiatives, fostering collective responsibility and empowering individuals to recognize, disrupt, and report online abuse. This includes (but is not limited to) equipping parents and educators with the tools to engage constructively with issues of online harm.

Recommendation 5

Empower teachers and youth workers to recognize and respond to online gender-based violence

Evidence from MEDUSA's youth-centered interventions highlights a critical finding: when confronted with online violence, young people rarely seek help from parents or guardians. Instead, they are significantly more likely to approach teachers, youth workers, or other trusted non-familial adults in their immediate environments. This positions educators and youth workers as vital first responders in identifying, mitigating, and preventing OGBV. However, this role often comes without adequate preparation, guidance, or institutional support.

Many education and youth professionals report feeling ill-equipped to understand the rapidly evolving dynamics of digital platforms and online harm. A generational digital divide, coupled with limited training in the specific psychological and socio-cultural dimensions of OGBV, can hinder their ability to offer effective, sensitive, and nonjudgmental support. The complexity intensifies when online abuse intersects with other factors such as mental health issues, socioeconomic challenges, sexual orientation, disability, or racial and ethnic discrimination. In such cases, without a solid foundation in intersectional and trauma-informed practice, well-meaning interventions may inadvertently exacerbate harm or alienate the young person in need.

Policy actions include:

- Embed mandatory modules on online violence, gender-based harm, and intersectional sensitivity into pre-service education, certification, and ongoing professional development for teachers and youth workers. These should include case-based learning, survivor-centered practices, and digital fluency.
- Develop accessible toolkits and protocols that guide professionals through prevention, identification, and referral steps for online (gender-based) violence.
- Provide ongoing training opportunities on the role of gender norms, power dynamics, and intersectional vulnerabilities (e.g., how sexual orientation, ethnicity, or disability intersect with gender in online abuse).
- Encourage and support schools and youth organizations to adopt and regularly review survivor-centered policies on digital safety and online harassment.

Recommendation 6

Strengthen the digital and gender-sensitive skills of frontline professionals supporting survivors

Frontline professionals, such as social workers, psychologists, police officers, and victim support staff, play a pivotal role in responding to and mitigating the effects of online (gender-based) violence. However, many of these practitioners continue to operate without the specialized knowledge needed to recognize, assess, and address digital forms of abuse, particularly those with gendered dimensions. As the use of technology to harass, control, and traumatize individuals becomes more sophisticated, this knowledge gap poses a serious risk to the quality and consistency of support provided to survivors.

A lack of familiarity with platform-specific abuse mechanisms, combined with limited awareness of digital trauma and online power dynamics, can lead to the minimization of harm, disbelief of survivors, or inappropriate interventions. These responses not only result in missed opportunities for meaningful support but also contribute to secondary victimization, whereby survivors feel re-traumatized by the very systems meant to protect them. Moreover, younger survivors may feel especially alienated when their digital realities are dismissed or misunderstood by professionals unfamiliar with the online environments in which abuse occurs.

Policy actions include:

- Design and implement comprehensive, interdisciplinary training programs focused on online violence for professionals in frontline support roles. These should include modules on digital trauma, platform-specific abuse tactics, online consent, gendered patterns of harm, and intersectional vulnerabilities.
- Mandate the inclusion of digital violence education in national certification, licensing, and continuing professional development frameworks for psychologists, social workers, police officers, legal professionals, and victim advocates.
- Establish and fund cross-sector partnerships between anti-violence organizations, digital rights experts, and technology specialists to co-develop practitioner-facing resources, tools, and guidelines for safe, informed, and effective survivor support. These resources should be evidence-based, adaptable, and accessible across diverse institutional contexts.

Recommendation 7

Invest in research and disaggregated data collection on online gender-based violence

Effective policy responses to OGBV depend on robust, comprehensive, and intersectional evidence. However, most national data collection systems either do not capture online violence as a distinct category or fail to disaggregate findings by relevant identity factors such as gender, age, race, sexual orientation, disability, or geographic location. This lack of specificity severely limits the ability of policymakers as well as civil society actors to assess the scope, patterns, and evolving nature of OGBV, and to tailor interventions to those most at risk.

Moreover, reliance on quantitative indicators alone offers an incomplete picture. While statistical data is essential for measuring prevalence and identifying trends, it must be complemented by qualitative research that illuminates the lived experiences of survivors, particularly those from marginalized and underrepresented communities. Narratives and in-depth accounts provide critical insight into how power, discrimination, and digital technologies intersect to shape the dynamics and consequences of online violence in context-specific ways.

Policy actions include:

- Mandate regular, nationwide data collection on online violence (including OGBV) using standardized definitions and ensuring disaggregation by gender, age, geographic region, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, and other relevant identity markers.
- Fund academic and civil society-led qualitative research projects to explore the experiences of different groups affected by online violence, especially OGBV.
- Ensure that findings are made public and accessible, to inform both policy and grassroots action.
- Create a shared national database or observatory to track trends and outcomes over time.

Recommendation 8

Introduce enforceable national standards for content moderation, including gender-sensitive training for moderators

Content moderation is a central mechanism through which digital platforms govern user interaction, shape online discourse, and mediate exposure to harm. However, moderation systems frequently fail to recognize or respond adequately to OGBV, particularly when such abuse is context-specific, coded, or culturally nuanced. Moderators are often under-resourced and insufficiently trained to assess the dynamics of power, gender, and identity that underpin online abuse. This results in inconsistent decisions, wrongful content removals, under-enforcement against harmful actors, and a lack of protection for survivors and marginalized groups.

To ensure that content moderation protects vulnerable users rather than exacerbating harm, it is imperative to establish enforceable national standards that mandate contextual, intersectional, and gender-aware moderation practices. Regulatory interventions should promote accountability, transparency, and cultural competence. At the same time, platforms must be required to invest in specialized training and community partnerships that enhance moderators' understanding of local contexts and lived realities.

Policy actions include:

- Require platforms operating nationally to implement moderator training on gender norms, and intersectionality.
- Define national guidelines for fair, timely, and consistent moderation, including escalation procedures for complex cases.
- Monitor platforms' compliance through independent oversight bodies, empowered to investigate and recommend changes.
- Incentivize the use of local moderation teams or partnerships with civil society organizations for improved cultural competence.
- Fund partnerships between anti-violence organizations and tech specialists to create resources and tools for practitioners.



MEDUSA

PARTNERS

COORDINATOR

Inštitut za proučevanje enakosti spolov (IPES)
Slovenia
ipes-si.org

CESIE
Italy
cesie.org

MREZA MLADIH HRVATSKE (MMH)
Croatia
www.mmh.hr

ZAVOD MLADINSKA MREZA MAMA (MaMa)
Slovenia
www.mreza-mama.si



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the European Union or the National Agency. Neither the European Union nor the National Agency can be held responsible for them.

2022-2-SI02-KA220-YOU-000099917