

IGF 2020 Best Practice Forum on Gender and Access

Online meeting III | 11 June 2020

Summary report

The third online meeting of the IGF 2020 Best Practice Forum (BPF) on Gender and Access focused on discussing issues related to harm and violence online. The meeting was attended by 10 participants.

To set the scene, participants were reminded that the BPF is holding two online meetings to look more in depth at the issues explored this year: (1) online violence and harm and (2) online pleasure and consent. These meetings are intended to help clarify how the BPF understands the concepts explored; identify actors/processes focused on these issues; collect case studies, good practices, tools; and develop questions to be included in the BPF survey.

Ms Ani van der Spuy, former consultant at the IGF Secretariat, provided an overview of the experience with the first BPF Gender, back in 2015, and the difficulties encountered then: as the BPF was discussing issues related to gender-based violence online, the BPF work and people involved were targeted by serious online attacks. She noted that, since then, more discussions have emerged on gender-based online harm and violence, and the issues are taken more seriously. It may now be time to reflect on the 2015 experience and see what has changed (or has not changed) since then (including with regard to policies put in place to ensure that people participating in such discussions are protected). As a conclusion, it was noted that gender-based violence is a topic difficult to study and organise debates around, and that precautions are needed to protect people involved in such work.

Ms Neema Iyer, founder and executive director of [Pollicy](#) presented some initial findings of a study which looked at gender-based harm and violence in five African countries (with a focus on major cities):

- Most attacks are carried out anonymously, and are part of very well organised and coordinated campaigns, which involve not only verbal attacks, but also, for instance, non-consensual sharing of images and exposure to harmful content. Closed platforms are particularly used for disinformation and misinformation, as well as non-consensual sharing of personal information (e.g. phone numbers).
- In terms of policy frameworks to deal with online violence, cybercrime laws and classical penal codes are sometimes used, but they are often too vague to be applied effectively. What is even more concerning is that sometimes the legal frameworks are also used against the victims of online violence or against those who shed light on online violence cases. There is an opportunity for policy advocacy to strengthen online violence laws, but without abusing them.
- Among the 3300 women involved in the study, more than a quarter had experienced some form of online violence. Most cases of online violence occurred on Facebook and

Whatsapp. Women felt that the phenomenon of online violence was on the rise and becoming a wider problem.

- Among the women who experienced cases of online violence, more than half blocked the perpetrator, but many deleted/deactivated their account or stopped using the service altogether, which should be a very concerning issue.
- Many women were unaware of applicable laws in cases of online violence. They also noted that their reaching out to authorities often had little results.
- Many women did not know where to look for info on online safety and security. Some noted that they reported the incidents to the online platforms; in many cases, this led to the platforms either not responding or not taking any actions. This points to the need for more responsibility and accountability on the side of platforms.

The study is expected to be published in the upcoming weeks. As a conclusion, it was noted that there are several research gaps: There is a lot of data missing with regard to gender-based violence online, across many countries. There is no data on mental health implications. There is also little information about how women are reporting cases of online violence or what is the response to such reporting (from either authorities or platforms). Moreover, there is a need for more research into how online violence affects minorities, refugees, people in rural areas, and other marginalised communities. And, maybe most important, there is **a need for these issues to be more often raised in policy spaces**.

Next steps

- BPF meeting IV will focus on online pleasure and consent
 - The next meeting is on **25 June, 13:00 UTC**.
- The community is invited to further contribute to the [BPF collaborative document](#)