

Press Release HateAid gGmbH

HateAid warns: Millions of women affected by digital violence! International petition calls on EU to act immediately

HateAid warns of an escalation of violence against women and young girls in social media. The organization criticizes major online platforms such as Facebook and Twitter for not doing enough to protect their users. With an international petition, HateAid, together with 11 European organizations, is now addressing the European Union (EU) and calling for the protection of women and girls from digital violence.

Berlin, 13th October 2021

The situation is alarming: every second woman is insulted, threatened and attacked in social media. With the experience of counselling more than 1400 victims of digital violence, HateAid states: It is women and young girls who are most affected by hate, incitement and harassment online. With a new EU law, the Digital Services Act (DSA), EU politicians now could put an end to this nightmare. Together with 11 organizations, HateAid launches the petition "Stop violence against women online! #makeitsafe" and calls on the EU to make the web a safe space for women and girls.

Women and girls are targets of digital violence on social media. Hate speech, insults and sexualized threats of violence on the internet have become a norm. Their private addresses are leaked. Secretly filmed videos of women and young girls are distributed en masse on porn platforms. According to a survey¹, every second woman in France is afraid that their intimate images could be published without consent. 9 out of 10 women report² that digital violence worsens their well-being. One in four victims records poorer performance in school or job due to online attacks. One in three suffer from depression because of digital violence.³

However, those affected have so far found it difficult to defend themselves against digital violence: Those who report illicit content often wait a long time, if not in vain, for a reaction from the platforms. In a recent analysis⁴ by HateAid and Reset, it was proven that every third reported manifestly illegal comment on Facebook remains online. Every third woman or girl withdraws from social media because they no longer have a way to protect themselves⁵.

A new EU law, the **Digital Services Act**, which is currently being negotiated, aims to create more security and responsibility in the digital space. EU policymakers have a unique opportunity right now to formulate clear rules for protection against digital violence. But the EU seems to be turning down this opportunity. The current draft law barely takes victims of hate and violence into account.

That is why HateAid, together with 11 other European initiatives, is calling on the EU with the international petition "Stop violence against women online! #makeitsafe". Until the end of the year, EU citizens are called upon to demand protection against digital violence by signing the online petition at www.hateaid.org/petition. HateAid will bring the voices of thousands from all over the EU to Brussels and demand effective measures to stop the violence against women online.

¹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1098614/fear-exposure-sexual-content-france/>

² <https://onlineviolencewomen.eiu.com/>

³ https://www.idz-jena.de/fileadmin/user_upload/_Hass_im_Netz_-_Der_schleichende_Angriff.pdf

⁴ https://hateaid.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Reset_Facebook_Bundestagswahl_DE.pdf

⁵ https://www.plan.de/fileadmin/website/05_Ueber_uns/Maedchenberichte/Maedchenbericht_2020/Free_to_be_online_report_englisch_FINAL.pdf

Anna-Lena von Hodenberg, executive director of HateAid, commented:

"For women and girls, social media have been spaces of violence. Every second woman in Europe has experienced hatred, rape threats or non-consensual publication of intimate photos there. In our consulting work, we see every day how victims of digital violence fail to assert their rights on Facebook, Twitter and the online platforms alike. We can no longer accept this! With the DSA, EU policymakers now have a unique opportunity to enshrine clear rules to put an end to violence. So far, they have not done so, leaving women and girls systematically unprotected."

Therefore, HateAid demands:

- **Take down stolen nudes! Every day intimate images get stolen, faked and uploaded to porn platforms without consent. We demand effective measures to prevent the frequent abuse of intimate images EU-wide.**
- **Oblige online platforms to remove illegal content!** Reported illegal content must not continue to remain online for months.
- **Let users decide what is displayed on social media!** Users must be able to decide which system is used to display posts in social media.
- **Make courts accessible to users!** We want to be able to defend ourselves - without having to plunge into financial ruin! Legal proceedings must become cheaper and simpler. **We demand fast-track access to courts for all users.**
- **Provide easy and effective contact options for users!** Users need easy-to-reach contact points for complaints to online platforms in every country - accessible to users in one of the official languages.

The petition is supported by:

Anna Nackt (Germany), Associação Não Partilhes (Portugal), BeLonG To (Ireland), Das Netz (Germany), Digitalt Ansvar (Denmark), INACH (International), PantallasAmigas (Spain), Media Diversity Institute (International), neue deutsche medienmacher*innen (Germany), Stop Fisha (France), Zara (Austria)

Further information:

For the petition and more information on the policy process, please visit our website:

<https://hateaid.org/petition> and <https://hateaid.org/dsa>

HateAid gGmbH

The non-profit organisation HateAid gGmbH was founded in 2018 and has its headquarters in Berlin. HateAid offers support for victims of digital violence: legal cost funding, emotionally stabilising initial, safety, and communication counselling. The founding managing director is Anna-Lena von Hodenberg. Advocating for victims of digital violence at the European level is part of the Landecker Digital Justice Movement of the Alfred Landecker Foundation.

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