Pushing back against masculinist discourses online

Recommendations to the European Union and its Member States to fight sexist and lgbtiphobic cyberviolence

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Written by:
For Equipop:
Lou Bossis, Advocacy Assistant
Lucie Daniel, Advocacy Expert
For the Gender in Geopolitics Institute:
Rozenn Legal-Pallaro, Research Assistant
Mathilde Verrier, Research Assistant
Publishing directors:
Aurélie Gal-Régniez for Equipop, Déborah Rouach for the Gender in Geopolitics Institute
Editorial team: Lou Bossis, Camille Frouin, Louis Guinamard
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Acronyms

ACLU - American Civil Liberties Union

AEPD - Agencia Española de Protección de Datos [Spanish Data Protection Agency]

ARCEP - Autorité de Régulation des Communications Électroniques et des Postes [Regulatory Authority for Electronic Communications, Postal and Print media distribution]

ARCOM - Autorité de régulation de la communication audiovisuelle et numérique [Regulatory Authority for Audiovisual and Digital Communication]

BfDI - Bundesbeauftragter für den Datenschutz und die Informationsfreiheit. [Federal Commissioner for Data Protection and Freedom of Information]

BJP - The Bharatiya Janata Party [Indian political party]

CJUE - Court of Justice of the European Union

CNIL - Commission nationale de l'informatique et des libertés [National Commission on Informatics and Liberty]

DSA - Digital Services Acts

ECHR - European Court of Human Rights

EIB - European Investment Bank

EPP - European People's Party

ECR - European Conservatives and Reformists

EDPB - Comité européen de protection des données [European Data Protection Board]

EU - European Union

FEMM - Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

FNJ - Front National de la jeunesse [National Youth Front]

FRA - European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights

GDPR - General Data Protection Regulation

GAFAM - Google Apple Facebook Amazon and Microsoft

ID - Identity and Democracy

IFOP - Institut français d'opinion publique [French Institute of Public Opinion]

ILGA - International Lesbian and Gay Association

Incels - Involuntary Celibates

ITU - International Telecommunication Union

LIBE - Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs

LGBTI+ - Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans Intersex +

MGTOW - Men going their own way

NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NetzDG - Network Enforcement

PEF - Platform for Europeans Fathers

PUA - Pick-up artist

STEM - Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

TERF - Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist

TTDSG - Telekommunikation-Telemedien-Datenschutzgesetz [Law on data protection in telecommunications and telemedias]

VPN - Virtual Private Network

Executive summary

In March 2023, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) met at the United Nations headquarters to discuss an unprecedented theme: women's rights in the digital age. While reaffirming the emancipatory potential of digital tools for women and marginalised groups – particularly in terms of access to sexual and reproductive health services – the CSW also reasserted that online spaces are places of unprecedented violence for women and LGBTI+ people, and defined priority actions.

7 WOMEN OUT OF 10 SAY THEY HAVE BEEN VICTIMS OF ONLINE VIOLENCE IN THEIR LIFETIME.

Violence against women and LGBTI+ people is part of a continuum that extends from ordinary sexism to sexual violence, assault, and murder. They operate both offline and online. As elsewhere in the world, the countries of the European Union are affected by the scale of cyberviolence. 7 women out of 10 say they have been victims of online violence in their lifetime. The same statistical analysis has not been carried out for the entire LGBTI+ community in Europe, for which there is a lack of overall figures, but specific data from certain countries shows that LGBTI+ people are particularly affected by this violence. In the United Kingdom, 1 trans person out of 4 declares they have been a victim in the previous month. Yet, the official data are still a long way from reality according to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. In fact, several testimonies of feminist and LGBTI+ figures on online harassment have multiplied within the last few years. We need to raise the alarm, especially on a phenomenon that is on the rise with the increasingly widespread use of social networks: masculinism.

IN THE UNITED KINGDOM, 1 TRANS PERSON OUT OF 4 DECLARES THEY HAVE BEEN A VICTIM IN THE PREVIOUS MONTH.

Masculinism can be defined as an ideology that opposes the emancipation of women and LGBTI+ people and promotes male domination. Alongside offline gatherings, masculinists establish what is known as the "manosphere" online, where a genuine unleashing of hatred takes place.
Masculinism, deeply rooted in digital spaces, is a multifaceted movement, that adapts according to the eras and regions of the world, but which has sexist and lgbtiphobic speeches at its epicentre. This forms the basis for online harassment and can lead to attacks and murders. The Isla Vila attack in California on 23 May 2014, which killed almost 6 people, is one of the most obvious historical examples of killings motivated by hatred of women.

To regulate this digital space and combat violence, the current measures at the European Union level are far from sufficient. This is all the more crucial as masculinist movements take advantage of the constant expansion and change of the digital sphere.

This report highlights the different players of the manosphere, the influence of masculinist communities and their links with various groups and ultra-conservative political parties within the European Union. It aims to improve the understanding of how this phenomenon works,

between technological, financial and socio-political dynamics, while underlining the scale of the violence that emanates from it and its devastating consequences. Finally, this report puts forward a list of recommendations to the authorities of the European Union and its 27 Member States. To move towards a digital sphere that guarantees the rights, safety and freedom of women and LGBTI+ people, we must vigorously combat masculinist discourses online.

Recommendations

Five areas of action

1. **Strengthening and completing the legal, political and financial arsenal for combatting the continuum of sexual and gender-based violence and hate speeches (based on gender identity and sexual orientation)**
2. **Integrating the fight against sexual and gender-based violence and the fight against masculinist discourses into public digital policies**
3. **Regulating the digital and technology multinationals**
4. **Supporting and protecting the feminist and LGBTI+ associations and activists**
5. **Raising awareness among citizens of masculinist discourses and giving them the means to defend themselves**

Introduction

On the 17th of August 2022, a private video showing Finland's Prime Minister, Sanna Marin, dancing in a festive context, was released on social networks. Following this, she has been the target of cyber-harassment and sexist discourses, especially on Twitter where her capacity to govern was put into question. This example is far from anecdotal: it reveals a difference in treatment between male and female politicians, illustrating a global misogynist trend.

Those last years have witnessed the development of global feminist mobilisations, such as #MeToo, which should have paved the way for profound changes in society. Nevertheless, at the same time, those evolutions have also met with conservative outcry all around the world, a phenomenon called "backlash". This term, theorised for the first time by American journalist Susan Faludi, is usually used to designate "the action of conservative and masculinist movements that react violently whenever new advances are made in women's rights. [The latter] deploy strategies not only to undermine these advances but also to roll back women's rights in general[1]". In the United States, this "backlash" hit the headlines after Roe v. Wade was overturned, calling into question the right to abortion. This dramatic backsliding is one of the consequences of Donald Trump's reactionary politics, who appointed particularly conservative judges to the Supreme Court. Six months later, under the influence of the Republican Party, the House of Representatives followed this same rationale by adopting two anti-abortion bills. In India, the rise to power of Narendra Modi's BJP Party has been accompanied by an authoritarian drift and attacks on civil society, especially against feminist movements. Despite the latter mobilisations, sexual violence persists in the country on a particularly high scale. These abuses are linked to "the ideological founding principles of the BJP, directly inspired from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a far-right Hindu paramilitary faction created in 1925, of which the Prime Minister was an active member[2]". In Egypt, the authoritarian regime of President Abdel Fattah al-Sissi rests on a conservative vision of Islam to justify its reactionary politics. Within the European Union, a hotbed of tension is forming, largely influenced by traditional conservative ideologies. The rise of the far-right in several countries like Hungary, Poland, Italy, Malta, Sweden or France, creates, to varying degrees, a hostile climate to women's rights and LGBTI+ people.

In this context of rising of ultra-conservative parties and "backlash" against women's rights and LGBTI+ people, particularly violent and misogynistic discourses multiply, called "masculinists"[3]. Developed as a reaction to feminist movements, these movements have been organised since the 1980s notably by fathers' groups in various European countries, such as *SOS Papa* in France. These movements advocate a return to traditional values, and violently attack women, particularly feminists, who they believe are behind a deterioration in their living conditions, a curtailment of their rights, and, more generally, a "decline" in Western societies. Therefore, by developing on the principles of victimisation and hatred towards women and LGBTI+ people, these men perpetuate sexist, homophobic, and transphobic violence while giving it a platform for large-scale expression. They are trying to discredit feminists and LGBTI+ combats by invalidating the violence women face, in particular discrimination or sexist and sexual harassment, or by denigrating the battles fought by women

THE RISE OF THE FAR-RIGHT IN SEVERAL COUNTRIES LIKE HUNGARY, POLAND, ITALY, MALTA, SWEDEN OR FRANCE, CREATES, TO VARYING DEGREES, A HOSTILE CLIMATE TO WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND LGBTI+ PEOPLE.

activists, such as parity in decision-making authorities. Furthermore, members of those movements speak in favour of the perpetuation of gender stereotypes, that value virility, machismo, and aggressiveness in men.

These movements are nothing new, but they have been able to mobilise in a more concerted way with the rise of digital technologies. According to the latest estimations of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 5 billion of people are now connected to the Internet, compared with 4.1 billion in 2019[4]. Well aware of the mobilising potential this represents, the masculinist movements know how to use social networks at the service of their anti-feminist agenda, to increase their visibility and widen their audience. These networks represent powerful economic players, increasingly used as platforms for virtual free trade. Accessible to all, these are spaces where hate speech can proliferate due in particular to a lack of regulation and the scale of internet traffic. Social networks being the reflection of our societies, reproduce the existing balance of powers (sexist discourses, invisibilization of women and racialised or LGBTI+ people, etc.)

THEY BELIEVE FEMINISTS ARE BEHIND A DETERIORATION IN THEIR LIVING CONDITIONS, A CURTAILMENT OF THEIR RIGHTS, AND, MORE GENERALLY, A "DECLINE" IN WESTERN SOCIETIES.

The masculinists see the use of digital technology and social networks as a way to spread their hate speech, find new members, and organise their struggle against the emancipation of women and LGBTI+ people. Whether it is mainstream social networks such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, TikTok, or more specific networks like Reddit, 4Chan, Twitch or online discussion forums, masculinist movements seize all forms of expression. Digital technology permit diversifying distribution channels and rallying a larger public: the absence of borders participates in the creation of new communities, claiming similar values. By taking over the digital space, these internet users are creating new spaces of extra-freedom where hatred towards women and LGBTI+ people can be made explicit, without real restraint. The masculinist movements carry out actions of cyberviolence and use all resources available on the internet to discredit, humiliate and destroy their victims, mainly women and LGBTI+ people. In addition to trampling their rights, these attacks have serious consequences on their victims, their mental health, and their personal, professional and family lives, concretely endangering them and their loved ones.

The masculinist movements' violence reaches its climax with acts such as the one committed in May 2014 in California when Elliot Roger stated in a manifesto that he would "destroy women" because they never took an interest in him[5], before killing six people. The discourses and actions of these movements are part of a continuum of violence perpetuated daily both online and offline against women and LGBTI+ people. Some of these groups have links – implicit or explicit – with far-right European political parties. Just as it is important to occupy the political field in the face of ultra-conservative movements, it is also necessary to invest the digital space so as not to leave it completely in the hands of the anti-rights groups which use it maliciously.

MASCULINISTS SEE THE USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL NETWORKS AS A WAY TO SPREAD THEIR HATE SPEECH, FIND NEW MEMBERS, AND ORGANISE THEIR STRUGGLE AGAINST THE EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN AND LGBTI+ PEOPLE.

The purpose of this report is twofold: first, to understand the origins of masculinist movements within the European Union, and analyse their agenda and strategies, especially in the digital sphere, in order to combat them more

JUST AS IT IS IMPORTANT TO OCCUPY THE POLITICAL FIELD IN THE FACE OF ULTRA-CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENTS, IT IS ALSO NECESSARY TO INVEST THE DIGITAL SPACE SO AS NOT TO LEAVE IT COMPLETELY IN THE HANDS OF THE ANTI-RIGHTS GROUPS WHICH USE IT MALICIOUSLY.

effectively. To this end, it is necessary to take an interest in the links between those movements and the ultra-conservative European political parties: how the latter institutionalise masculinist ideas on the one hand, and how the masculinist movements contribute to the rise of these parties on the other? Secondly, it proposes a series of recommendations for the European Union and its Member States, particularly those that are currently pursuing feminist foreign policies, to combat masculinist groups and the spread of their ideas in the digital sphere. What is at stake is also to ascertain the conditions for developing a digital space that respects human rights and is guided by feminist principles.

WHAT IS AT STAKE IS ALSO TO GUARANTEE THE CONDITIONS FOR DEVELOPING A DIGITAL SPACE THAT RESPECTS HUMAN RIGHTS AND IS GUIDED BY FEMINIST PRINCIPLES.

Overview
of masculinism:

increasingly visible hate speech in an international context of backlash against women's rights and LGBTI+ people

1 • Definition of masculinism

It is difficult to give a single definition of masculinism, which can take many forms depending on the era and the world's region. Drawing inspiration from the works of several historians and sociologists, the definition of the "masculinist" movements in this report is understood as a form of antifeminism, which opposes feminist rhetoric and any advances in gender equality in a particularly virulent and often violent way. The masculinist movements defend "the idea that women are now dominating men[6]", against which they need to "restore the lost virile identity[7]". They are trying to keep a sexist and misogynistic social order and men-women binarity which gives them a dominant position in all the spheres of society – political, economic, sexual – and where the rights and the very existence of LGBTI+ people are utterly denied. In the West, some masculinist followers mention an ideological closeness with other ultra-conservative and far-right movements, in conspiracy circles and close to white supremacists notably.

Masculinism has been manifesting itself since the early 1980s in the form of organisations demanding rights for fathers deemed to have been "trampled", as well as through killing targeting women, and violent gatherings and actions on the internet. Amply invested by young men, the online masculinist spheres are nowadays prime locations for the radicalisation of followers of masculinist movements on the one hand, and for the spreading of their ideas to a wider audience on the other.

"Antifeminism" and "masculinism": pluralist movements

What are the differences between the notions of masculinism and antifeminism? Although often used as synonyms, it is important to define them in order to understand the realities they refer to.

Antifeminism is a set of counter-movements which oppose throughout the age to feminism, women's aspiration for emancipation, and any person challenging the societal norms of gender and sexuality, particularly homosexual and trans people. The term has its roots in the 19th century, shortly after the common use of "feminism". It would be more accurate to talk about "antifeminisms" in the plural, following the French historian Christine Bard: "The diversity of feminisms is matched by the diversity of antifeminisms[8]". What brings together antifeminisms is the same binary, gender-differentiating discourse, i.e. a natural difference between women and men and, consequently, the defence of hierarchical social order. This differentialist thinking encompasses the rejection of what is perceived as a "deviant" gender or sexuality, which does not conform to the established gender roles and therefore to the heteronormative model[9]. Antifeminisms are thus part of the same current of thought, with convergences and divergences. Their configuration/structure is also plural throughout time: antifeminisms were fuelled by free spirits, like the journalist and politician Eric Zemmour, but also by organisations and associations such as the *National League for Opposing Women Suffrage*, founded in London in 1910.

Masculinism is a specific form of antifeminism. By developing from the 1980s onwards in a Western world witnessing the comeback of state conservatism, it is a contemporary manifestation of those currents of thought. The French anthropologist Mélanie Gourarier defines masculinism as "any ideology centred on masculine subjectivity conceding to men if not the place of the victim, at least the "problematic" character of men's social and psychological experience – as men – in a confrontation/rivalry with feminists and women[10]". Masculinism, encompassing a range of different groups, is rooted in and for patriarchal societies and is developing as a reaction to the quest for the emancipation of women and gender and sexual minorities. By developing an approach to what would be masculinity, characterised by strength, rationality, violence, and hierarchy – hence the opposite of what they associate with femininity –, they seek to maintain the sexist and misogynist social order giving them a dominant position. What makes them special is their reversal of the feminist rhetoric of oppression, by claiming that men are the real victims of a society dominated by women. They present themselves as "activists for the rights of men", which would be endangered by feminists and LGBTI+ activists. The Quebec sociologists Mélissa Blais and Francis Dupuis-Déri, experts on these movements[11], explain that masculinists play on the action strategies used by feminist movements by adopting them, in order to sow confusion in the general public's perception of them: the Fathers 4 Justice movements, for example, have taken up the colour purple, a symbol of feminism since the Suffragette at the beginning of the 20th century. The aim of this mimicry is a polished presentation of the self, in parallel with the feminists. Masculinists also use expressions such as "defender of men's rights", following the same tactics as other movements, as indicated by the sociologist Francis Dupuis-Déri: "Usually, antifeminists do not say they are antifeminists. [...] They conceal, they hide. [...] The best example is the pro-life movement in the United States, which is against the right to abortion, with a completely positive term, "pro". So generally, masculinists themselves do not call themselves masculinists, it is rather a term developed by feminists in their critical analyses[12]". And since the #MeToo movement in 2017, opening a new of visibility for feminist and LGBTI+ activists in the public sphere, masculinist attacks have risen, both online and offline, and endangered human rights across the globe.

The masculinist movements have in common what they call "the crisis of masculinity[13]", an expression popularised by media at the turn of the millennium when masculinist movements are becoming more visible through the media. These "crisis discourses" aim to consolidate the certainty of men's victim status: women, under the influence of feminism, would have become the dominant one. They are seeking to overturn the idea of male domination, from a patriarchy to a matriarchy, where women would now oppress men in all spheres of society. This would result in several phenomena, including "the absence of positive male role model, boys' academic failure, men's inability to seduce women, even the decline in male libido, divorced and separated father's loss of control over their child·ren, women's violence against men and the male suicide rate[14]". However, this argument is unfounded. On the one hand, many of these behaviours are the result of a wider socialisation of men and norms of "masculinity" – behaviours that feminists are precisely calling on to deconstruct. On the other hand, men still largely control the political, economic, scientific, and religious institutions, but also media and digital ones, within which their rights and hegemonic visibility are assured[15]. By claiming they are victims of feminism, they are seeking to keep hold of male privileges from a sexist power system, converging with other forms of oppression like racism, classism, and lgbtiphobia that are co-constructed[16]. It is a rhetorical strategy that targets women and feminist movements, with the aim of thwarting their demands, actions and gains acquired throughout the different historical contexts.

WHAT MAKES THEM SPECIAL IS THEIR REVERSAL OF THE FEMINIST RHETORIC OF OPPRESSION, BY CLAIMING THAT MEN ARE THE REAL VICTIMS OF A SOCIETY DOMINATED BY WOMEN.

History of masculinist discourses in Europe

Social science researchers consider that the birth of masculinism in Western countries was in the 1970s and 1980s, in reaction to the feminist movements of the period, known as the "second wave of feminism". As a result of a certain number of advances in women's rights, particularly in terms of sexual and reproductive rights, the right to financial independence, easier divorce, child custody and LGBTI+ rights, the masculinist discourses develop over the long run, pointing the finger at a feminism that has gone "too far". They gain in visibility from the 1990s onward thanks to a large media exposure given to misogynist attacks perpetrated by them[17].

Several masculinist associations are set up, initially characterized by the defence of "fathers' rights": for example, *SOS Papa* in France (1990), *Fathers 4 Justice in Great Britain (2001, SYGAPA* in Greece (2005) or *Prawo Dziecka* in Poland (2016). Growing rapidly from the late 2000s onwards, and establishing in a majority of European countries, these associations have set out to create a "fathers' springtime" with an international focus. They organise at the European Union level through a network founded in Brussels in 2011, *Platform for European Fathers* (PEF), gathering 25 organisations from 16 European countries. These associations have imposed the idea on the public debate that separated fathers would be taken away from their children by a justice system favouring women, and yet, they conceal a well-constructed masculinist ideology. One of their strategies is to get recognition for the "parental alienation syndrome" theory, which claims that children's rejection of or accusations against their fathers are the result of manipulation by their mothers, in the context of a conflictual separation. Without scientific foundations, this theory casts a veil over the reality of violence committed by fathers against their wives and children, as well as on the lack of fathers' commitment to the lives of their wives and children[18]. They are thus doing worrying lobbying work at the national and supranational levels.

At the same time, there is an evolution in the discourses around new themes in the public sphere, which are becoming society issues – particularly through the masculinist spheres which are turning these into a new hobbyhorse. As historian Christine Bard explains, "masculinist discourses express a strong "intersectionality of hatred: misogyny and virilism rub shoulders with lgbtiphobia, antisemitism, islamophobia…[19]": a reconfiguration of masculinist discourse occurs at the beginning of the 19th century, turning the so-called "gender theory" and LGBTI+ movements into targets of attacks. The ambivalence lies in the fact that with the visibility and

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Christine Bard, historian

legitimation of social advances, also develop critics and attacks in parallel. In this sense, the development of gender studies, decolonial and postcolonial studies constitute a field for masculinists. They execute cyber-attack against universities, academics, meetings and conferences on the subject[20]. Against the LGBTI+ rights movements, far-right masculinist groups go on the offensive, with, for example, the creation of "hetero pride" in Roma initiated by the far-right neofascist party *Forza Nuova*. These activists promote the idea they would be discriminated against because of their white cisgender, heterosexual men, which gender studies, antiracist studies and related activist movements would threaten[21].

The influence of the masculinist ideology has been growing since the 2000s[22], especially since the turn of the 2010s, with the global rise of the internet and social networks which are widely

used throughout the world. The same applies to all social mobilisations, anti-rights or not, as indicated by sociologist Francis Dupuis-Déri: "#MeToo is an incredible example of women's movements, of what has been accomplished by social networks.[23]". But while movements in defence of women's and LGBTI+ people's rights are experiencing a boom in the digital space, with easier access to feminist content for young girls for example, masculinist movements are finding on the internet a fertile ground to unfold their violence more widely. For sociologist Mélissa Blais, "web acts as an echo chamber. Besides, it makes it possible to amplify the message, hence more support to this kind of discourse online[24]". An actual manosphere is establishing – the informal network of masculinists on the internet[25]. Various trends have developed and overlap to shape the manosphere: the Incels (*Involuntary Celibates*), the PUA (*pick-up artists*), the MGTOW (*Men going their own way*), but also influencers. These networks "have in common, each in their own way, to display a kind of distancing from women, that allows them to regain control of an idealised high-performance masculinity[26]". The manosphere is particularly invested by young men with the rise of social networks, which now combine it with specific use of the internet, such as memes[27], hashtags or pop culture. These cultural references, arranged in a humorous tone for greater persuasiveness, are used to turn misogynist, racist and lgbtiphobic on their head. "Humour is used extensively online, with influencers, always with the same existing rationale offline: persuasion. To persuade men, young men, to join their cause, and to persuade the entire population that feminism is the problem[28]." The masculinist nebula thus overlaps with other characteristics, including conspiracy and racist ideologies using a recognisable vocabulary ("grand remplacement" - The Great Replacement -, "lobby LGBT" - LGBT lobby -, "féminazies" - feminazis -, "islamogauchisme" - islamo-leftism -)[29]. The diversity of masculinism makes them difficult to apprehend: by playing on the rhetoric of a supposedly rational pro-equality position, the confusion they cause allows them to intervene in the public debate.

The "backlash" in the background

Masculinist discourses are developing into genuine movements, often under the aegis of personalities or ultra-conservative political parties. Although different in their composition and organisation, masculinist movements defend the same project of society based on a deeply sexist and misogynist vision of relations between men and women. These discourses underpin demands that overlap those of certain ultra-conservative parties, particularly on the far-right: a defence of the heterosexual nuclear family as the sole model, an anti-abortion stance against people's freedom of choice over their own bodies, the upholding of traditional values based on religious heritage, an exacerbated patriotism factor of racism, such as the defence of anti-migratory values[30], but also the withdrawal of rights acquired by the LGBTI+ people, for example with regard to the same-sex marriage[31] and the health of trans people. It is possible to talk about an ideological closeness/porosity between masculinist movements and ultra-conservative political parties, which raises questions about their links – whether explicit or implicit.

Although antifeminist and masculinist movements have always been rooted in political circles, a growing influence of masculinist discourse is perceptible in the political agendas of the most conservative parties. This is partly due to the rise of conservatism around the world, including in the Member States of the European Union, following several dynamics. Since the late 20th century, Europe has seen the electoral rise of reactionary right-wing parties, in the first instance, and of the far-right in the second. Respectively in power since 2010 and 2015, the conservative parties of Viktor Orbán, *Fidesz* (Hungary), and Andrzej Duda, *PiS* – Right and Justice (Poland), are progressively distancing themselves from human rights values defended by the European Union to the point of breaking the rule of law[32]. Recent electoral surges have led ultra-conservative political parties to the head of governments, including in countries that were once pioneers in women's rights:

A GROWING INFLUENCE OF MASCULINIST DISCOURSE IS PERCEPTIBLE IN THE POLITICAL AGENDAS OF THE MOST CONSERVATIVE PARTIES.

from September 2022 onward, the Swedish Parliament is led by a coalition of right-wing conservative and far-right parties (*Moderate Party, Sweden Democrats*). Since the end of 2022, the Italian government is also led by the far-right party *Fratelli d'Italia*, with Giorgia Meloni. In Latvia and Slovakia, the far-right parties *Nationale Alliance* (*Nacionālā Apvienība*) and *We are a Family* (*Sme Rodina*) are part of the government but do not lead it. This political context is also characterised by the development of far-right parties in a certain number of countries, with a growing number of voters: in France, Marine Le Pen's *Rassemblement National* has been in second place since the last two presidential elections in 2017 and 2020, while Vox in Spain is gaining ground in the regional election in 2022.

This rise of conservatism in Europe has given rise to anti-rights policies, characteristic of the *backlash* against women and LGBTI+ minorities[33]. The anti-rights movements are organising at the transnational and global levels, supported by funding networks – notably public funds[34]. In Spain, between 2014 and 2018, 1.8 millions of euros were transferred to 5 anti-abortion organisations[35]. In Hungary, between 2018 and 2020, Viktor Orbán's office has transferred 2.53 millions of euros to Hungarian Centre for fundamental rights, which is actively fighting against the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combatting Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence)[36].

In the same way, while anti-rights movements are largely vocals, States and political parties are playing an increasingly important role in them; but the involvement of conservative and far-right parties varies depending on the national contexts[37]. Civil society groups are well organised and, through their mobilisations and lobbying to politicians, have sometimes succeeded in getting governments to back down on draft bills. For example, the anti-gender and lgbtiphobic campaigns in France of the association *La Manif Pour Tous*, at the time of the law on the same-sex marriage and the "ABCD de l'égalité" (ABCD of equality) by the Education nationale in 2013 and 2014[38], are symptomatic of these ideological convergences between parties and activist movements[39]. A populist Italian organisation, *Sentinelle in Piedi*, act in the same way since 2014[40]. At the European Parliament level, ultra-conservative parties, affiliated with various parliamentary groups (the groups *European Conservatives and Reformists* (CRE), *Identity and Democracy* (ID), and *European People's Party* (EPP)) have a significant impact[41] [42] . They regularly accuse the European Parliament of being the instrument of an egalitarian policy imposed on countries[43]. Ultra-conservative political parties and their masculinist allies are also often part of Eurosceptic movements which undermine the European Union's efforts to advance gender equality and jeopardise European values.
Furthermore, associations and groups of masculinist and identity activists, particularly young men activists, often support the most conservative political parties by participating, for instance, in their electoral campaigns. The French journalist Pauline Ferrari, an expert on online masculinism, observes that these circles represent a fertile recruiting ground for conservative political parties: "Feelings of hatred and frustration that masculinists can feel – especially young people, *Incels*, those who are single, those who hate women – is a very fertile ground for the far-right in terms of recruitment, and that is what we are seeing today[44]". In France, since the 2015 jihadist attacks, there is a growing appeal to the far-right, where antifeminism is combined with islamophobia, racism, and lgbtiphobia – fuelling the terrorist objectives of many groups[45]. Masculinists in Europe are driven by an obsession over a supposedly "civilisational decline", that would be orchestrated by the feminist movement on the one hand, and immigration, on the other[46]. The Norwegian neofascist terrorist Anders Behring Breivik, who carried out the two attacks in Oslo and Utoya in 2011, was thus able to assert/put forward its explicitly masculinist position. He was also linked to the Conservative Party (*Høyre*), of which he was a prominent member[47]. Shortly before the attacks, Breivik was publishing a manifesto containing an unequivocal masculinist argument, criticising the European Union for being hijacked/corrupted by feminist movements and policies[48]. The motivations that drive men to commit attacks are, of course, difficult to isolate and objectify, but there is a kind of convergence between far-right movements' theories, particularly those carried out by white supremacist movements, and the theories of masculinist and racist movements.

2 • Discourses proliferating in the digital sphere

Masculinist discourses are rooted in the political field and are now moving into a new space, the digital sphere. The latter allows the manosphere to infiltrate mainstream websites, platforms, and social networks. The manosphere is particularly difficult to control because of the amount of content shared, pseudonymisation or the emergence of masculinist groups bringing together a growing number of individuals.

Notoriety allows some people, especially influencers, to spread such discourses on mainstream social networks, such as TikTok, Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. These online abuses and violence are also perpetrated within restricted circles, on websites or forums occupied by various communities, brought together under the aegis of one common opinion: hatred of women and LGBTI+ people. In order to combat the dangers of masculinist groups, it is necessary to know them, understand and study their expansion within the digital sphere.

The European Union's accession to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combatting Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, also known as the Istanbul Convention in 2023 should be a major step forward for the protection of women and girls within the European Union. The ratification of this convention, which was blocked since 2016, is an important way of exerting important pressure to push the last refractory EU States to also commit themselves against sexual and gender-based violence.

Rise of digital technology, rise of masculinists

The rise of the digital sphere has greatly increased the circulation of violent content online, notably pornographic content, accessible to an underage public and displaying scenes of sexual violence[49]. This digital context has also benefited the development of online masculinist discourses. The collective work *The Evolution of the Manosphere across the web*, published in 2021, studies the manosphere's evolution[50]. This study based on public data, published between 2015 and 2019, demonstrates the lightning expansion of the manosphere and the extent of masculinist and conservative discourses on certain specialised websites such as 4chan or Reddit. The census of 28.8 millions messages from various forums and sites, where masculinist dynamics are particularly popular, shows that certain communities gather a growing number of individuals.

The possibility of expressing an opinion without any genuine control is increasing and combining with the rise of masculinist discourses by members of masculinist communities and conservative political parties on social networks. Some high-profile public figures take advantage of this visibility to share hate speech, going against the integrity, dignity and safety of women and LGBTI+ people. The term 'figure' here designates the main sources of masculinist and conservative discourses which are becoming more visible and popular within the digital sphere. They can be influencers, politicians, content creators, artists, sportspersons... Yet, while the manosphere is invested by influential figures, most of its members are ordinary users. Although they are less visible, their activity allows at the same time to raise the profile of influential masculinists, and to take over the digital platforms.

"A lot of survey on the manosphere are talking about "disembodiment". That is to say, to be able to feel disembodied, with a clear lack of empathy, a possibility to say things we could not say offline. This also allows a high level of virulence[51]". This analysis of sociologist Mélissa Blais makes it possible to highlight a new issue, online behaviours. Even though hate speeches were

not born with social networks, the digital sphere is an opportune tool for the proliferation of these messages, which are sustained by the possibility of anonymity and/or pseudonymity[52]. Nowadays and since the 2000s, this manosphere has been spreading degrading, humiliating and violent discourses against women and LGBTI+ people.

"A LOT OF SURVEY ON THE MANOSPHERE ARE TALKING ABOUT " DISEMBODIMENT ". THAT IS TO SAY, TO BE ABLE TO FEEL DISEMBODIED, WITH A CLEAR LACK OF EMPATHY, A POSSIBILITY TO SAY THINGS WE COULD NOT SAY OFFLINE.

Mélissa Blais, sociologist

In France, the rapper Millésime K, close to the far-right, has gained a strong reputation on TikTok and Telegram through its sexist and racist content. His subscribers, who number more than 718 000[53] on TikTok, participate in the spread of his views by republishing his videos. Followed by many young people, his rhetoric is particularly influential on minors, or those without the necessary distance to criticise his discourse. He is a symbol of online sexism expressing ideas that are openly lgbtiphobic and misogynist: he propagates among his audience a rejection of feminism and acceptance of everyone based on their gender and sexual orientation.

Mainstream social networks, such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok or Snapchat, have become platforms for the promotion of masculinist ideas. A situation that is all the more worrying since most users are very young and social networks are an integral part of their social construction. The spreading of these sexist and lgbtphobic comments on social networks contributes to their assimilation and normalisation, as well as to the insecurity of women, young girls and LGBTI+ people, and allows verbal and physical violence against these people to become widespread and accepted[54]. Digital technology, which transcends geographical borders, maintains this climate of fear and intimidation towards women and LGBTI+ people through cyberviolence.

The case of Andrew Tate, recently accused of human trafficking and arrested in December 2023, is one of the most conclusive examples of this misogyny on social networks[55]. Although he was released on the 31st of March 2023, he is today placed under house arrest[56]. Originally, this influencer expressed anti-feminist views, by advocating a sexist division of women's position in society. According to him, a woman is the "possession" of the man. Particularly, he considers that women victims of rape would be responsible for it[57]. His YouTube videos

MAINSTREAM SOCIAL NETWORKS, SUCH AS TWITTER, FACEBOOK, INSTAGRAM, TIKTOK OR SNAPCHAT, HAVE BECOME PLATFORMS FOR THE PROMOTION OF MASCULINIST IDEAS. A SITUATION THAT IS ALL THE MORE WORRYING SINCE MOST USERS ARE VERY YOUNG.

depicting scenes of violence against women were eventually censored, and he was banned from his main social networks such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube and Facebook in 2022[58]. This social network's banishment is thus possible. Nevertheless, the question is how long such a sanction should take. Andrew Tate was able to express his masculinist views for many years before the multinationals' censorship. Beyond this spreading of hateful and violent content, disturbing consequences of the scope of his remarks have been observed in Great Britain. In an article for *Courrier International*[59], a woman teacher denounces the praise given by some pupils to Andrew Tate. For this English teacher, the influencer's discourses play a huge part in the persistence of misogyny in the school where she works. She also mentions the concerns she has for her pupils' girlfriends who advocate such discourses.

While some public figures deliberately take to the virtual public arena to promulgate their misogynistic and lgbtiphobic views, most of the masculinist discourses are now conducted anonymously or pseudonymously. The emergence of numerous troll accounts illustrates this

practice of "hiding behind one's screen". Present in the digital sphere, on mainstream social media or more community-based platforms and forums such as Reddit or 4chan, "trolls" have acquired real influence. The "troll" is an individual trying to create a problem, a negative point of view, or hate speech. Particularly visible on Twitter, trolls are one of the tips of the manosphere, since it is almost impossible to track down their identity. Within the European Union, it is difficult to provide figures and statistics on the scale and extent of this manosphere for this reason.

Since the democratisation of digital technology in the 2000s, a genuine manosphere has developed. The creation and exercise of a number of masculinist communities has led to the mass publication of hateful and degrading content directed at women, and then GBTQI+ people. According to sociologist Mélissa Blais, there is an evolution in masculinist behaviours through the use of digital technology, which has its part to play in the reconfiguration of sexual and gender-based violence online. According to her, "before, offline, we were extremely direct in the early 2000s, we saw fairly violent direct action tactics. [...] But online, all it takes is for one influencer to name a feminist to call "the pack". [...] There is no longer any need to argue, say that such person poses a problem [...] now we just name her, and that is enough [...][60]".

Several groups are particularly popular, and although their views are more or less similar, each group has its distinctive characteristics.

The *Pick-up artists* (*PUA*) are members of a movement that has existed since the 1980s in the United States and has been active on discussion forums and other platforms in Europe since 2003. They are fighting against what they call the feminisation of men. They support the idea that they would be "in the pay of women" and that women are the cause of this social transformation or transmutation. In order to combat women's emancipation that they criticise and reject, *PUA*s try to multiply their relationships with women and be as verbally violent as possible in order to lower women's self-esteem and discredit them. *PUA*s' values rest mostly on the objectification and harassment of women. One of their preferred methods is *negging*, which consists of devaluing the targeted person in order to make them more accessible to "seduction".

Another masculinist group popular on social networks has been exported from the United States to the European Union's countries in the last few years. It is *Men going their own way*, *MGTOW*, created in the 2000s. This movement is presented as "a way of life that refuses to rely on women to define the value of men. Instead, it focuses on the positive aspects of being a man, inviting him to follow his own path in life[61]". These men spread antifeminist ideas, but mostly conspiracy theorists, being convinced that women are the cause of their difficulty to socialise or get into a relationship. The members of this community claim the social system in which they exist is geared towards women and does not take their needs into account. As one of the best-known and active communities on social platforms and networks, this community fuels the persistence of misogynistic discourses and considerably impacts equality for all.

Another movement, just as important and influential, has been established in the various spaces of the digital sphere. Present on many platforms, the *Incels* (*Involuntary Celibates*)[62] constitute today the most toxic and violent masculinist community. Born in the United States, this movement is particularly known for its calls to hatred and violence against women. One of the most popular communities is IncelTear, created in April 2020, on Reddit. To understand the movement's functioning and defended ideas, several concepts need to be defined. Firstly, that of "*Bêta Male*", which characterises *Incels*, because of their "inability" to "seduce women". This inability is one of the first reasons why *Incels* hate women. This is particularly clear from their community's use of another term, "*AWALT*", "*All women are like that*"[63], which confirms the idea that masculinists are based on a certain form of essentialism for women. Lastly, a final notion accounts for their hatred of other men, those they consider to be "*Alpha Male*". These men would belong to a category of people who meet the physical, intellectual and social criteria needed to "please" women.

These masculinist groups are linked by common demands and values, as well as a sense of community, responding to the needs of people who feel rejected by the rest of society. For psychologist Simruy Ikiz, "these groups are composed of leaders who give speeches to which the subjects will adhere. Subjects already lack the internationalisation of certain values. The perpetrators of online and offline violence will therefore endorse the discourses of masculinist groups[64]". The values to which Simruy Ikiz refers are notably social justice, parity, equality, women's independence, and the recognition of their rights as well as the ones of LGBTI+ people. A phenomenon of self-sustaining support, and then violence against women and LGBTI+ people, is then put in place within these communities.

This self-sustaining is accompanied by a phenomenon of radicalisation within the most popular groups. Some of the more "moderate" antifeminist groups are fading into the background as other groups such as *Incels* and *MGTOW* escalate their violence. These groups now make up the bulk of the manosphere.

Reactionary and anti-rights profiles converging on the Internet

For sociologist Francis Dupuis-Déri, "the masculinist is not necessarily an 18-year-old young man, in a basement using his computer. He can be wearing a jacket and a tie in a Ministry[65]". This means that masculinist ideas are supported by men from a wide variety of backgrounds, including educated men and men in positions of political responsibility. Additionally masculinist movements are not marginal phenomena. They develop in societies where conservative ideas, sexism and lgbtiphobia are well-established and can rely on a direct or indirect support base that transcends generations. Traditionally, conservative ideas are predominantly supported by older men and seniors. But they also strongly resonate among the younger generations of men. Thus, in France, almost a quarter of men aged between 25 and 34 feel they sometimes have to be violent to be respected, and 40% of men of all ages think it is normal for women to take time off work to look after their children[66]. Conservatism is a brake on gender equality as it advocates a return to a society based on backward ideas, and masculism is based on anti-rights principles using violent strategies. Both ideologies coexist together, feeding off each other to roll back women's rights and LGBTI+ people, restrict their place in society and diminish their voice.

On top of their obvious followers, masculinists have direct or indirect links with a variety of movements and individuals sharing their discursive strategies. As pointed out above, these individuals can come from far-right movements or be close to conspiracy circles. Some of their supporters reclaim feminist language elements and misappropriate them. This is the case of the TradWife movement, led mainly by women. Through a phenomenon of "internalised misogyny", its followers sing the praises of the housewife and promote a backsliding to traditional family values and an ultra-gendered division within the heterosexual couple. However, this kind of movement, neither calls for hatred, nor violence, and its impact remains marginal despite an over-mediatisation.

"THE MASCULINIST IS NOT NECESSARILY AN 18-YEAR-OLD YOUNG MAN, IN A BASEMENT USING HIS COMPUTER. HE CAN BE WEARING A JACKET AND A TIE IN A MINISTRY."

Francis Dupuis-Déri, sociologist

There are also bridges between masculinists and women activists, even though they sometimes refer to themselves as "feminists". In England, activist Kellie-Jay Keen-Minshull, better known as Posie Parker, is fiercely opposed to trans people's rights, who would, according to her, endanger cisgender women. She has close links with far-right figures[67], such as the Scottish activists Alistair McConnachie, founder of two nationalist, anti-Islam and anti-immigration parties and promoter of a Holocaust denial ideology[68]. He and a former colleague attended a rally organised by Kellly-Jay Keen Minshull in early 2023, carrying a placard "Defy

the gaystapo". Many of the United Kingdom's far-right political parties, such as the *National Housing Party United Kingdom*, the *Scottish Family Party*, or the *British Democrats*, regularly support her rallies, which aim to deny trans people their rights and visibility. An article even points out that "Keen's rallies are now notorious for the far-right presence they attract. Keen herself was once an outcast within the "*gender critical*"[69] movement for her willingness to work with the far-right.[70]". They also create online networks dedicated to fostering a transphobic ideology and harassing trans people[71] – networks similar to those of masculinists. This convergence between masculinist, transphobic and far-right movements and public figures must be taking into account as an integral part of the development of anti-rights movements.[72]

Therefore, anti-rights activists, opposed to the recognition and emancipation of women and LGBTI+ people are active all over the world, and their numbers are steadily growing, even within the countries of the European Union. While masculinist groups are numerous and expanding, their operating modes are varied. Their expansion within the digital sphere is a serious challenge to the safety and freedom of women and LGBTI+ people online and offline.

3 • How are masculinists using digital tools against women and LGBTI+ people?

The Istanbul Convention defines "violence against women" as any act of "gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life"[73]. In different contexts, these acts of violence may be called "gender-based violence" (GBV), "sexual and gender-based violence" (SGBV), but also "digital gender-based violence" (DGVB). Violence against LGBTI+ people answer to similar mechanisms and motivation to violence against women. They are part of a continuum of violence, from ordinary sexism to sexual violence, and take place both offline and online.

The perpetrators of cyberviolence are using different tools and means to intimidate, silence, threaten or avenge from their victims. The digital *raid*, harassment led by several people against a single target, the pornodisclosure, the cyber-harassment[74], posting photos without consent are ways of establishing male supremacy on social networks and platforms. Such violence can have serious consequences for the mental health, and social, private and intimate life of victims. It can also drive victims to suicide.

Online masculinist violence: what strategies and what consequences for the victims?

Sexual and gender-based violence not only violates "fundamental human rights, in particular dignity, but also psychological integrity and physical integrity in the case of assault[75]". The last few decades have permitted the development of a new space, in which these acts of violence can go viral and exponential: the digital sphere.

For Sven Franck, co-president of the *Volt France* party, the issue of the manosphere's expansion should be seen as a global one. For him, "the digital field act as an amplifier[76]".

While cyberviolence is diverse and varied, it is important to understand that it is primarily directed against young girls, women and LGBTI+ people. The victims of cyberviolence are users who are not necessarily well-known or recognised on social networks. Considered inferior to men by the latter, these people appeared as easy "prey" for men with misogynistic and lgbtiphobic views. Masculinists are the perpetrators of various violence to different degrees, but all of them harmful and reprehensible.

In 2015, the report issued by the United Nations Broadband Commission for Digital Development shows that "In the European Union, the percentage of women over 15 who were subjected to serious episode of violence on the Internet is 18%, or almost 9 millions of girls. Furthermore, women aged between 18 and 24 are at great risk of persecutions or sexual harassment, as well as physical threats[77]". In 2020, a survey led by *The Economist* reported on the scale of cyberviolence in Europe, where 74% of femmes have once been victims of online violence[78].

In what ways these discriminations are introduced in the digital space? What forms do masculinist discourses take in the virtual space? First of all, masculinist figures use degrading terms, such as "*feminazis*" and "gaystapo". The mere of these words highlights the violence directed at them. These insults aim to silence and discredit the voices of women, particularly LGBTI+ rights activists or feminist activists, but also women who have managed to enter spheres close to power, such as journalists or women politicians. In Finland, Prime Minister Sanna Marin's government has been especially exposed to sexism on social networks, especially on Twitter. Insults such as "Tampax team" or "The red lipstick brigade" have been used by numerous opponents of Sanna Marins' government[79]. In February 2021 NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (Startcom) published a report on the subject, entitled *Abuse of power: coordinated online harassment of Finnish government ministers*[80]. The study shows the number of discriminatory tweets directed at the government's top twenty women politicians. It found that "human user activity contributed to 35% of abusive content. As for anonymous users, there were the most prolific in terms of abusive tweets, accounting for 59% of abusive messages[81]". This raises two major issues: how to counter the abusive activities of anonymous users? Anonymous users are the most virulent against Sanna Marin's government. How to differentiate political criticism from misogynistic insults? There is a need to distinguish between criticism of women politicians' ideas and purely sexist criticisms. Besides, there is genuine discrimination against women in politics compared to men in politics. These disparities must be taken into account in the analysis and reception of political opinions expressed by politicians. Anyone can have an opinion on politics, but women see their private lives and their gender used by masculinists to discredit what they say.

These online attacks against women in politics are part of a continuum of violence against women and LGBTI+ people, leading to alarming phenomena. Self-censorship is one of the behaviours that victims of virtual attacks often adopt, even leading to the withdrawal of women and LGBTI+ people from platforms and social networks in order to protect their mental health and safety. This participates in the lessening of their voice in the digital world when it is already under-represented in the public sphere. For the LGBTI+ community, and especially for young people, it is a two-sided phenomenon because "social networks enable them to feel supported by a community and to come out of isolation. It fosters a sense of security and recognition, while at the same time exposing them more to hate speech[82]". This perpetual intimidation also has the effect of discouraging women and LGBTI+ people from becoming politically active.

Simruy Ikiz confirms that "because social networks can be places where it is easier to attack people, there is indeed a greater chance of being affected in the digital sphere than in the street[83]". On the other hand, she specifies that "the consequences of cyberviolence are just as traumatic as those in real life[84]". Indeed, cyberviolence remains particularly violent attacks. The psychological consequences are of the same order and it seems necessary to encompass all online and offline violence directed against women and LGBTI+ people in a common field of study to combat them effectively.

This violence is easily exploited by digital functions. The practices employed by masculinists to fuel an atmosphere of insecurity within the virtual space are numerous. There are the *trolls* and digital raids, these "pack" attacks illustrating the unleashing of an entire group on a single person.

Many women and LGBTI+ people, including influencers, journalists or politicians, have been victims of cyber-harassment and threats on mainstream platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, even within the European Union. This proves the urgency of the implementation of protection towards them. Myriam Leroy and Florence Hainaut, Belgian women co-directors of the documentary *#Salepute*, discuss the subject. Their report is based on an ensemble of testimonies of women from all over Europe and the world, who have been victims of cyber-sexism. The documentary analyses the discourses and harassment strategies of masculinists and their consequences on women and LGBTI+ people. The testimonies are different but illustrate the same flaws: the durability of attacks within the digital sphere and the weaknesses of legislation to protect victims.

CYBERVIOLENCE CAN ALSO TAKE OTHER FORMS, SUCH AS THE DISCLOSURE OF PHOTOS OR VIDEOS OF A PERSON WITHOUT THEIR CONSENT.

Cyberviolence can also take other forms, such as the disclosure of photos or videos of a person without their consent. It can be sextortion or revenge porn, the latter including a desire for vengeance against the victim. They are particularly viral et have disastrous consequences for the lives of targeted people. These methods are used both by asserted masculinists and by "ordinary" men, demonstrating the rise of online sexism and its consequences within the European Union's Member states. This violence is part of a trend towards the banalisation of porncriminal content, displaying scenes of violence against women and children[85].

In 2015, a 29-year-old Italian woman, Taziana Cantone, took her own life after being the victim of the broadcasting of intimate images of her body. Posted online on social networks by her boyfriend, then reposted on Italian porn sites, these pictures go viral. In addition to the brutality of the situation, Taziana Cantone[86] loses her job and leaves her native region. She takes legal action against the platforms for defamation and dissemination of images without consent. After losing her case, she is ordered to pay 18,000 in legal fees. She will take her own life a few months after the images were broadcast. Disclosure of intimate content reserved for private use – used by masculinists as pornographic content – is not the only way to expose women to such violence. Online spying, or snooping, is now one of the forms of cyberviolence most exploited by masculinists, but also by any other types of online harassers. The report published in April 2023 by IFOP highlights the increase in this practice in France within couples. Indeed, "52% of people who have been physically abused by their partner have been spied on by the latter, compared with 27% of those who have never been abused[87]". Therefore, these various methods reinforce each other, highlighting the continuum of online and offline violence.

Online-offline, offline-online: a continual back-and-forth of masculinist violence

The very existence of the manosphere on social networks or other platforms is detrimental to the safety of women and LGBTI+ people. Convinced of the legitimacy of their position, the perpetrators of cyberviolence can become perpetrators of offline violence against women and LGBTI+ people. This is reflected in the organisation of these attacks, particularly by masculinist communities. The *Incels* are nowadays recognised as the most dangerous group, particularly in light of the massacres that have already taken place in Montreal in 1898, California in 2014, and Toronto in 2018. For Pauline Ferrari, if for a long time "masculinists were perceived as a group of frustrated and misogynistic people, who stayed on their computer, it turns out their existence is not limited to the digital sphere. [...] There was particular media coverage of masculinist movements through the Incels sub-community, in 2014 and 2018, at the time of the

attacks in California and Toronto. These acts of violence served as a model for many members of these masculinist communities[88]".

The European Union is not immune to these killings. In 2021, Jake Davidson kills five women in the United Kingdom[89], among whom his mother and a little 3-year-old girl. He commits this massive femicide in the name of the *Incels* community, before taking his own life. Jake Davidson had been particularly active on several discussion forums of the *incels* group. Therefore, this murderer's actions show how contempt and hatred of women online incite such offline massacres. For Pauline Ferrari, "it turns out that the manosphere is not limited to the digital sphere. It is also an arena for mass murder[90]".

"THERE WAS PARTICULAR MEDIA COVERAGE OF MASCULINIST MOVEMENTS THROUGH THE *INCELS* SUB-COMMUNITY, IN 2014 AND 2018, AT THE TIME OF THE ATTACKS IN CALIFORNIA AND TORONTO. THESE ACTS OF VIOLENCE SERVED AS A MODEL FOR MANY MEMBERS OF THESE MASCULINIST COMMUNITIES."

Pauline Ferrari, journalist

We observe a certain radicalisation of members of masculinist communities, who maintain this verbal and physical brutality towards women and LGBTI+ people. For journalist Pauline Ferrari, there has been a shift in the exploitation and manipulation of the digital sphere by masculinists. According to her, the masculinist discourses' radicalisation, going hand in hand with mainstreamisation, is illustrated by their appearance on mainstream platforms, such as TikTok or Instagram. She explains that masculinist figures "have moved to those platforms, mastering them and their rules[91]". Furthermore, masculinists have started to create their own websites, such as the *Incels* sites, but also forums on already existing sites, such as Discord or Telegram. They seem to be out of reach of any regulations. Reporting or deleting their discourses thus becomes a complex task.

The migration of masculinist groups from one site to another is a strategy that allows them to promote their views and share their experiences with total impunity. In those last years, *Pick-Up artists* have become particularly active on the Quora website, an IT forum specialising in the creation of debate. There, they notably share their experiences. By explaining that all they have to do is to "destabilise women" with their body language to "seduce" them, they consider women as targets, and their methods "of seduction" are genuine attacks. Once they have succeeded to implement their strategy online, they denigrate women in their offline interactions. This is extremely brutal verbal violence for the women facing those kinds of abusers.

The following example reveals the omnipotence of the manosphere. Since June 2021, the young French TikTok artist Lucille has been suffering from cyber-harassment[92]: messages, voice mails, rape and death threats, and threatening messages against her family. The perpetrator of this wave of hatred is Florien Telle who contacts her daily on Instagram. In August 2021, she files a complaint, without being taken seriously by the police. The perpetrator of Lucille's cyber-harassment also tried to break into her home and managed to get into her parents' house. This demonstrates the very thin line between online and offline life and reveals the continuum of online attacks within offline life. Establishing the link between online and offline violence is becoming crucial.

"The intersectionality of hatred"

It also appears that ultra-conservative parties and masculinist groups are reasserting each other. The "intersectionality of hatred" is a concept that confirms this notion of increasing violence against certain people. A study carried out by the United Kingdom in 2016 demonstrates that the main forms of discrimination would be racism, misogyny, homophobia and transphobia. According to the 2016 United Nations report on cyber-harassment, "Harassment uses societal phenomena such as prejudices and discrimination and often affects people because of protected characteristics, most often ethnic origin, religion, sexuality,

gender identity and disability[93]". In this sense, trans women, who are at the intersection of several factors of discrimination, run a particularly high risk of being exposed to cyberviolence within the European Union.

An initial survey conducted in 2012 by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and published in 2013 had highlighted the increase and longevity of discrimination towards LGBTI+ people within the Union. Based on the testimonies of 93,079 respondents (only lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people), the survey demonstrates that "over the last five years, a quarter (26%) of the respondents have been abused or threatened with violence in or outside their homes. This figure rises to 35% for all transgender respondents[94]". The report also points out that "among the most serious acts committed over the last five years against respondents because they were LGBT* people, one case of violence out of five (22%) were reported to the police. Only 6% of cases of equivalent harassment were reported to the police[95]". This survey was relaunched and continued from 2019 onwards. The European Agency for Fundamental Rights noted that little had changed. This time, more than 140,000 respondents were questioned, making it the largest survey on the subject. According to the survey report published in 2020, "one transgender or intersex respondent out of five were physically or sexually assaulted; this proportion represents twice that of other LGBTI+ groups[96]".

THIS REPORT REVEALS THE LINK BETWEEN THE EVOLUTION OF HATE SPEECHES AGAINST TRANS PEOPLE ONLINE, PARTICULARLY FROM MASCULINISTS AND POLITICIANS, AND THE INCREASE IN PHYSICAL VIOLENCE.

In 2023, the report of the ILGA-Europe association highlights the urgency "to pay particular attention to the high number of murders of trans people, especially trans women, which is due to the extreme increase in transphobic hatred observed in recent years in many countries, especially in countries working on transgender rights reforms[97]". This report reveals the link between the evolution of hate speeches against trans people online, particularly from masculinists and politicians, and the increase in physical violence. Indeed, there is an urgent need to open our eyes to the links between these different spheres if we are to be able to combat the attacks against trans people's rights, who have paid the price of the visibility they have gained in recent years.

These acts of violence are various. The political instrumentalization of lgbtiphobia is one of the main tools used by several political figures, such as Andrzej Duda, President of the Republic of Poland. Transphobic rhetoric is especially exploited by ultra-conservative political parties that promote rejection of the LGBTI+ community[98]. As reported by Dunja Mijatovic, the 2018 representative to the Commissioner for Human Rights, "the President of the Czech Republic [Miloš Zeman] did not hesitate to declare recently that he finds trans people "disgusting"[99]". The Bosniac expert on Human Rights also reminds that "hardly a week goes by without news of serious homophobic or transphobic physical attacks[100]". In 2021, the attack against an LGBTI+ centre carried out by Boyan Rassate, a far-right Bulgarian politician and candidate for the Bulgarian national presidential elections, is one of the many examples of the unleashing of this systemic violence against LGBTI+ people[101]. Similar attacks against LGBTI+ centres are perpetrated in mainland and overseas France[102].
These attacks and insults in the digital sphere and offline impact the mental health of women and LGBTI+ people. According to *The Economist*, in 2020, a study conducted in 51 countries around the world, including Belgium, Germany, Spain or the Netherlands, states that "92% of women respondents declared that this online violence harms their sense of well-being[103]". The same study points out that "35% of women reported their mental health problem and 1 out of 10 has suffered physical mistreatments as a result of online threats[104]".

Masculinists hence succeed in creating and fuelling a climate of fear and hatred against women and LGBTI+ people on the networks and in offline life, contributing to the persistence of ongoing sexism and lgbtiphobia within the European Union.

The role of Big tech companies:

the urgent need for the European Union to regulate digital spaces

1 • Digital companies facilitate the development of masculinist discourses

In an increasingly digital world, it is crucial to acknowledge that the Big Tech field is building and participating fully in the production of discrimination, including on social networks. These networks have many biases in the design, development, and management, mostly carried out by men. Numerous studies in social sciences and journalism demonstrate this state of affairs. This is hardly surprising given that around 80% of programmers in Europe are men – so parity is far from being achieved in the digital.

In addition, if masculinists are finding room to grow online, this is partly due to the lucrative market they represent for social networking companies, especially via masculinist influencers. Hatred is a source of profit online.

The companies owning the social networks are also often run by men who, without necessarily being sexist, tend not to prioritise the fight against cyberviolence towards women and LGBTI+ people. There is today, and for several years now, a clear lack of regulation on the platforms; making this virtual space an unwelcoming, unsafe, and even hostile place for many users. It is thus necessary for the European Union to acknowledge the urgent need for regulation and take strong measures to ensure the protection of its citizens.

New technologies and the reproduction of discrimination

Technology is not neutral[105]. Any scientific production stems from the particular social position of the people behind its creation, influencing their biases and beliefs[106]. If we consider the field of technique and technology, it is not only the tool itself that needs to be considered but above all the use made of it by users.

In designing new technologies, a number of biases come into play and reflect the frame of thought and situations in which individuals find themselves. New technologies function through mathematical algorithms – a set of operations ordered and translated into computer language, permitting digital objects to perform the tasks required of them. Computing algorithms are, thus, the basis of the internet, and of social networks in particular. Produced by programmers, the majority of whom are men (around 80% in Europe[107]), computing algorithms can be subject to "algorithmic biases": like cognitive bias distorting an individual's judgement, algorithmic bias is a phenomenon that alters the result of an algorithm by making it biased, non-neutral, or even prejudicial to users, also known as "technological discrimination"[108]. As digital scientist Aurélie Jean explains, "Understanding the origin of biases in our social behaviours, means understanding some of the mechanisms of algorithmic biases: how they are introduced, and then spread in the digital simulations we produce and the technologies we use. [...] [*Which is*] essential to have a critical look at the technologies that surround us today[109]".

It is therefore possible to assert that digital tools have sexist biases while reproducing other forms of domination that intersect. For example, in 2016, the chatbot created by Microsoft, Tay, was suspended just one day after its launch, for generating misogynistic, racist and anti-Semite tweets[110]. Based on online learning, the artificial intelligence reproduced the behaviour of Twitter users, including those who spread hate message against certain population groups[111].

Besides, some recruitment platforms over-represent technical positions for men, and, conversely, care-related positions for women. In particular, Facebook has been accused by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of having set up an advertising targeting system which would permit not to show some job offers to certain categories of people, such as women and racialised person[112].

More generally, moderation on social networks is partly carried out by computing algorithms, which may not moderate illegal content, as the masculinists' one, but may invisibilize content created by women and minorities[113]. According to Diane Semerdjian[114], a specialist in digital mobilisation and activism, masculinists are taking on bypass strategies on social networks, misleading the artificial intelligence, based on learning algorithms. As a consequence, moderation of content is becoming more difficult: using acronyms, linguistic and cultural codes, replacing certain letters with special characters, and turning the reporting tool against women and minorities speaking out on social networks. Also, the lack of transparency from of social networks regarding the functioning of their moderation and data processing of users[115], means it is not possible to understand the phenomenon in its entirety, nor to draw up regulations. The confidentiality imposed on workers in social network companies is also a principle that prevents any understanding of the phenomenon.

MODERATION ON SOCIAL NETWORKS IS PARTLY CARRIED OUT BY COMPUTING ALGORITHMS, WHICH MAY NOT MODERATE ILLEGAL CONTENT, AS THE MASCULINISTS' ONE, BUT MAY INVISIBILIZE CONTENT CREATED BY WOMEN AND MINORITIES.

An economic model making money from online hatred...

In 2023, 59% of the global population use social networks, namely 4.76 billions of people[116].

The social networking companies rest on a neoliberal capitalist economic model[117]: the digital revolution and financialization of the economy have led to a logic of capital accumulation, in which the principle of individualisation is a sovereign value[118]. The financial incomes of those companies represent several billion of dollars in the world, ever-expanding figures[119].

The operating principle of their economy rests on a capitalist logic, where virality is a tool for making profits[120]. Actions that are creating a buzz on social networks, i.e. that spread information widely, generate a massive influx of people, which is reflected in a range of phenomena. The more users there are, and the more they interact, the greater the commodification of content and date and the more this logic is sustained. The system of algorithms thus reinforces a lucrative market in which online interactions represent a product for companies owning social networks such as Meta (comprising Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp). In this process, it is important to understand that hate speech is one of the most viral forms of content: it is more successful in terms of size and longevity than non-hate content[121]. These have the characteristics of targeting population groups marginalised because of their ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity. These hate speeches bring people together and so generate revenue for the platforms, which in turn boosts their own visibility. Some studies have also shown that they are all the more visible if they are shared by "certified" account – i.e. whose authenticity is guaranteed[122], or at least according to the criteria of the platform in question, which generates an even larger audience on the social network in question.

THESE HATE SPEECHES BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER AND SO GENERATE REVENUE FOR THE PLATFORMS, WHICH IN TURN BOOSTS THEIR OWN VISIBILITY.

The manosphere is thus shaping according to these functional and economic dynamics, resulting in a continuous supply of spaces for the development of their violent discourses and actions. Therefore, the algorithms work by reproducing and suggesting the same content, creating a closed system that masculinists use to maintain their ideologies, without the possibility of confrontation with other analyses. Masculinist content is notably proposed by algorithms without users even looking for it, and depending on reactions to the content, others will be proposed automatically. They are also perpetuated by monetisation, which takes place either explicitly or implicitly: the sponsorship of masculinist influencers by brands, the resale of data on users consuming this content to tailor advertising, but also via direct remuneration from their online communities. These are phenomena that operate in a continuum: for example, the American masculinist Andrew Tate has turned his community into a lucrative clientele by setting up a club called *The War Room*, where, by paying around 5,000 dollars, men from all over the world can access activities among themselves, at secret locations in Romania[123].

Furthermore, the competitiveness of social network companies, inherent in a neoliberal capitalist system and replaying international geopolitical issues, serves the masculinists. Facing the dissolution of their groups or forums, masculinist communities can migrate to social networks according to the regulations of each, and hence establish themselves on less regulated social networks, such as those created in Russia or China. Signal, Telegram and WhatsApp, which encrypt data[124], are the preferred applications for masculinists and other hate groups[125] wishing to secure their exchanges.

In this respect, the neoliberal capitalist operation of social networking companies allows online masculinist networks to develop and thrive, following a system of competitiveness, monetisation and visibility, which complicates and reduces the means of action at all levels.

… and whose monopoly is in the hands of a few men, a symbol of hegemonic masculinity

An analysis of the social networks' governance reveals a large male predominance of these companies, and beyond.

The Tech world remains a domain run by men and intended for them.

Of the five most popular social networks in the world, all have a male CEO: Mark Zuckerberg (Meta), Evan Spiegel (Snapchat), Shou Zi Chew (TikTok), Elon Musk (Twitter), Bill Ready (Pinterest). Their respective assets represent millions of dollars. In the digital field, women are largely under-represented: 24% of women are employed in the Big Tech[126] companies, and they represent 28% in all STEM (*Sciences, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics*) sectors worldwide[127]. The pyramidal hierarchy and large masculinisation of these occupations sustain a system dominated by the "bro culture" in the world of Bigh Tech. This concept can be defined as a social environment dominated by men, marked by a mixture of camaraderie and competition: "[*it is*] an inherent element of the tech world, of new technology and digital start-ups. [...] these were born in Silicon Valley, a world of white, heterosexual, overeducated and well-off men[128]". The under-representation of women and minorities in these environments leads to latent sexism and lgbtiphobia, condemned by many former employees[129]. This social intermingling[130] leads to sexist, racist and lgbtiphobic biases in the management and operation of digital companies, which has an impact on social networks themselves[131].

The takeover of Twitter by the ultra-conservative man Elon Musk in October 2022 is an example of how social networks can influence the development of masculinist discourses, and more broadly of all hate speeches. Stating he wants to make this social network a place of free speech, it must be said this led to dangerous consequences: the platform's moderation resources have been drastically reduced[132], allowing the manosphere to act freely and without being bothered[133]. He thus enabled the reactivation of the accounts of masculinists banned

OF THE FIVE MOST POPULAR SOCIAL NETWORKS IN THE WORLD, ALL HAVE A MALE CEO:
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from Twitter for hate speech, such as Andrew Tate, Donald Trump or Jordan Peterson[134]. A "free speech" which seems nonreciprocal yet, since a study has demonstrated that since Elon Musk's takeover, Twitter was approving 83% of the censorship requests made by certain authoritarian governments (such as Turkey or India)[135].

The slim attempt at regulation by social networks

Under pressure from civil society organisations and the European authorities, social networks are in turn attempting to counter the rise in hate speeches. Partnerships are emerging to make the voices of women and LGBTI+ people in the digital space. TikTok now features #WomenOfTikTok to promote the initiatives of "inspiring" women, as well as #WomenIn Gaming proposing a filter highlighting professions in the video game industry to make them more attractive to women. The social network YouTube, on the other hand, proposes a demonetisation of content deemed problematic, leading to an absence of remuneration for its creator. However, the use of this censorship has been heavily criticised. In 2018, the platform was accused of demonetising certain videos dealing with topics related to LGBTI+ people. Furthermore, according to the list of terms compiled by Nerd City[136], the word #MeToo would also be censored, alongside the words "abortion" or "racism". It appears that the mention of these terms is judged "sensitive" by the platform, while numerous masculinist contents continue to be spread, for lack of greater moderation by the platforms.

The social network Twitter has been the epicentre of a number of claims such as #MeToo at the international level or #NotInMyParliament at the European level, which exposed the existence of sexual harassment within the European Parliament. Nevertheless, the mere formation of these groups has more to do with civil society than with deliberate action from social networks. Using methods proposed by Amnesty International and Element AIInitiatives such as Troll Patrol, bringing together more than 6,500 volunteers in 150 countries exposed that 1,1 millions violent, abusive or problematic tweets have been sent to 778 black women, politicians, or journalists over the study period (2017) in the United States and the United Kingdom on the social network Twitter. In addition, this study highlights the intersectionality of violence: black women appear to be disproportionately targeted by this violence (84% more than white women)[137].

In 2016, Twitter took the initiative of launching the "hide" feature, allowing users to hide selected words that could potentially offend certain people on their News Feed, or to prevent users from being added to insulting lists. Indeed, one form of harassment on Twitter consisted of repeatedly adding people to thematic lists to impose content on them and confront them with this verbal violence. However, this initiative from Twitter was, once again, judged basic as it was merely hiding notifications, and did not prevent people from being added to those lists. Many users wished to be informed when added to such a list, even though it consisted of insults.

Other technological advances are also being elaborated by Google to regulate these abuses and the persistence of this hatred on social networks. The new Perspective application, developped by Google, has recently provided an insight into the violent and toxic aspects of masculinist communities. This application identifies so-called toxic comments. Equipped with artificial intelligence, this tool represents a step forward in terms of regulating and managing hateful content and comments on social networks or other platforms in the digital sphere. Nevertheless, it still needs to be improved before it is fully usable, as it only serves to support the moderators, who then have to apply the provided regulations depending on social networks concerned. Besides, some people bypass the algorithms by changing some words or the spelling of words, which allows them to avoid the suppression of their hateful content.

Finally, the applications in the Meta group (Facebook, Messenger, Instagram, Whatsapp, Oculus and Portal) are the most concerned by cyberviolence, particularly as they are the most widely used in the world and accessible to all without any real age control. This group of applications is now displaying the willingness to combat cyber-harassment. An initiative has been set put in order to protect society through an information page offering pieces of advice on online harassment on the different platforms of the group. This information page indicates to victims of cyber-harassment how to act in the face of this violence. Nevertheless, this page is purely informative, and its impact is largely limited. Users may be unaware of the existence of this page, thereby severely limiting its impact.

The efforts made by social networks do not seem to be adapted to the real threat posed by content spreading hatred against women and LGBTI+ people in the digital sphere.

The possibility of "anonymity" on social networks is often pointed out, as it could lead to a form of disinhibition on the part of aggressors and a lack of empathy, and reinforce a feeling of impunity, as underlined by the 2018 HCE report[138]. However, online anonymity is relative and often does not mean anonymity per se, but rather the use of pseudonyms. Additionally, many assaults are perpetrated via digital platforms that have access to their subscribers' personal data. The challenge, therefore, lies more in the extent to which these platforms cooperate with the relevant police and judicial services. Last but not least, it is very important for many human rights defenders, whistleblowers and feminist activists to be able to preserve their online identity, in one way or another. This is a question of survival in many contexts, particularly authoritarian governments.

All these protective measures cannot be undertaken individually by the social networks, and their free will in moderating and choosing which content does not guarantee satisfactory regulation. The lack of transparency and the arbitrariness of these *web* giants only imperfectly limit access to hateful content. The promotion of content in favour of women's rights and LGBTI+ people remains partial and does not always succeed in establishing itself. There are a number of limitations, and it is clear that there is a real sense of urgency. The European Union needs to tackle this issue in order to limit or even eradicate this phenomenon, which is hampering the safety and protection of users. Based on already existing initiatives and giving greater visibility to the expertise of certain organisations and associations, the entire European Union must act to protect and promote women and LGBTI+ people in the digital space.

2 • For greater involvement of the European Union in the regulation and protection of digital users

The economic model of the major social networks and digital companies is based on mechanisms that encourage the virality of hateful content and jeopardise the protection of personal data. The European Union, particularly influenced by the French digital legislation, must establish a strict, harmonised framework for new technologies, that consider the right of women and LGBTI+ people to freedom of speech and safety.

Data protection, market regulation, transparency, combatting hate speech... Examples of frameworks within the European Union

The digital revolution is having an impact on the law as a chole. The latter has undergone several essential reforms in order to incorporate considerations relating to new technologies. Indeed, Big Tech transcend borders, and regulatory efforts must therefore be considered at the supranational level. The economic model of these digital players rests on free access in exchange for information about personal life. A contract between individuals and these players, therefore, emerges outside the legislation of the Member States. A balance between freedom and security needs to be struck, even though the initial relationship is disproportionate. This balance must be struck within the political and/or legal limits set by the Member States and the European Union for digital players.

The European Union initiated its legislation by adopting the Directive of 24 October 1995, establishing a legal framework for the protection of natural persons with regard to their personal data. The Commission nationale de l'informatique et des libertés (CNIL) defined personal data as "any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person. However, because it concerns individuals, they must retain control over it[139]". Supplemented by a second directive of 15 December 1997, on the same subject, its redaction established a basic common legal framework between the Member States of the European Union. However, limits to these directives have emerged as a result of the differing implementation of data protection rules at a national level. This situation creates difficulties in terms of the possible sanctions applicable to countries that do not guarantee sufficient protection. Besides, drafted in 1995 and 1997, these directives did not take into account the current issues posed by social networks, artificial intelligence and algorithms.

A growing breach of confidentiality and data protection has been noted by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in all the countries of the European Union since the massive advent of digital technology. From 1989 onwards, in the Gaskin v. United-Kingdom judgement, the Court was mentioning a transgression by social services in personal data processing, on the basis of article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, protecting the right to private life[140]. To provide the best possible framework for new technologies, General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016, on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and free movements of these data, revoke the former 1995 directive. This regulation sets out eight principles to provide the best framework possible for users' fundamental rights. Among these

principles, there are: the right to internet access (art. 1), digital privacy (art. 2), digital dignity (art. 3), digital property (art. 4), digital transparency (art. 5), and digital anonymity (art.6), the right to be forgotten (art. 7), and to digital identity (art. 8). It establishes rules and limits as for the collection and storage of personal data within the European Union by both public and private entities. This ambitious and comprehensive project includes severe penalties for breaches of its provisions. Regarding the protection mechanism, Morgane Horreard, a legal expert on the GDPR, reveals it enables a "synchronicity and construction of a strict framework[141]" between the member countries of the European Union.

A GROWING BREACH OF CONFIDENTIALITY AND DATA PROTECTION HAS BEEN NOTED BY THE EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS (ECHR) IN ALL THE COUNTRIES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION SINCE THE MASSIVE ADVENT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY.

Furthermore, how to ensure satisfactory data protection when most of these data are stored across the Atlantic and governed by American or Chinese laws?

Doubts have been expressed regarding the disqualification of small companies due to the organisational cost of complying with the GDPR. While these measures are having less of an impact on Big Tech, due to their substantial economic resources which enable them to finance compliance without difficulty, small and medium-sized digital companies are struggling to adjust and are spending a large part of their resources on these reforms. Finally, the planned fines are described as "disproportionate in comparison to the influence of GAFAM[142]" according to Morgane Horreard, turning this mechanism into an effective sanctioning tool only for small and medium-sized companies. Eventually, this GDPR specialist explains that "the most formidable sanction of the GDPR lies in the public nature of the sanctions imposed[143]".

The Digital Services Act (DSA) of 19 October 2022 is a European project to create a legal framework for digital services in the European Union. DSA, presented by the European Commission at the end of 2020, was approved by the EU Council on 4 October 2022. The text was then published on 27 October 2022, succeeding to the Directive of 8 June 2000, which regulated e-commerce. The project aims at digital service suppliers, such as social networks, search engines or online marketplaces. It aims to strengthen the responsibility of digital services suppliers in the fight against "illegal content" and reinforce the users' rights. These harmful contents are various, ranging from racist "raids" to (paedo)criminal pornography. Combatting disinformation and strengthening the fundamental rights of users, this text will be implemented from 2024 onwards, and from 2023 for Big Tech companies, considered to be key players in the digital sphere. This text will provide a framework for emerging technologies, by imposing greater transparency on the algorithms used by platforms. In addition, audits will be carried out under the supervision of the European Commission, in order to reduce the risks associated with illegal online content and impose emergency measures where necessary.

A joint project is emerging, the Digital Markets Act of 14 September 2022. This project is seeking to re-establish a balance that is beneficial to the European digital players, who are largely dominated by the American giants. It will be applicable from 2 May 2023 and will attempt to put an end to the monopolistic domination of Big Tech. In this way, the European Union is trying to encourage the development of European digital companies and provide them with a better framework.

However, the application of these texts relies on national supervisory bodies such as the CNIL in France, the Agencia Española de Protección de Datos (AEPD) in Spain, and the Bundesbeauftragter für den Datenschutz und die Informationsfreiheit (BfDI) in Germany.

The existence of the European Data Protection Board, created by the GDPR, does not guarantee perfect harmonisation of legislation at the national level, as the board is made up of various national data protection authorities. It forms a body for cooperation and coherence

rather than a real European supervisory body, most likely for budgetary reasons as indicated by Morgane Horreard[144]. She denounces the problem of "[the] saturation of control bodies at the national level[145]", due to massive complaints from citizens. This saturation leads to partial control by these bodies, which show themselves to be pedagogical towards companies that do not comply with GDPR by trying to resolve conflicts through support rather than by imposing financial sanctions[146].

At the international level, making the digital space safe and respectful of human rights is a priority issue. A Declaration for the Future of the Internet[147] was ratified by the European Union, the United States, Chile and many countries around the world on 28 April 2022[148]. This Declaration is only of political and symbolic value, but it puts the issue of protecting individuals in the digital world on centre stage.

"THE EXISTENCE OF THE EUROPEAN DATA PROTECTION BOARD, CREATED BY THE GDPR, DOES NOT GUARANTEE PERFECT HARMONISATION OF LEGISLATION AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL, AS THE BOARD IS MADE UP OF VARIOUS NATIONAL DATA PROTECTION AUTHORITIES. IT FORMS A BODY FOR COOPERATION AND COHERENCE RATHER THAN A REAL EUROPEAN SUPERVISORY BODY, MOST LIKELY FOR BUDGETARY REASONS."

Morgane Horreard, legal expert specialising in GDPR

At the national level, many of the Member States' domestic laws have inspired the European Union in drafting the GDPR. France is one of the most telling examples of such borrowing. It began its regulation of the digital sphere with the Law of 6 January 1978[150] on Information

European Legislation on Digital Technology

Oct. 24th 1995

Directive 95/46/CE of the European Parliament and of the Council
- Harmonise the protection of rights and fundamental freedoms of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data.
- Guarantee the free circulation of personal data between EU Member States

Dec. 15th 1997

Directive 97/66/CE of the European Parliament and of the Council
- Complete the 1995 directive

2016

Regulation (UE) 2016/679 and directive (UE) 2016/680
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) governing the processing of personal data within the EU.

Sept. 14th 2022

Regulation Digital Markets Act
- Favour European digital companies over American giants.

Oct. 19th 2022

Regulation Digital Service Act (update of the e-commerce directive of 8 June 2000)
- Protect the users (combatting illegal content, acting to promote transparency...).
- Favour EU digitalcompanies.
- Combat disinformation.

Source[149]

Technology, Data Files and Individual Liberties[151], establishing the principles of personal data protection. To ensure compliance with these principles, the CNIL was jointly created. Drafted before the massive presence of digital technology in our everyday life, this law now seems out of step faced with the multiplicity of digital platforms and their uses. Neither the sanctions provided for, due to the low level of fines compared with the profits generated by Big Tech, nor the data protection control mechanisms proposed, due to their limited effectiveness in terms of data protection, have been effective in regulating the French digital sphere since the massive advent of digital technology.

Disparate application of European frameworks in the Member States

However, these initial borrowings by the European Union have now led to the opposite phenomenon of compliance with the European GDPR by certain member countries. A disparate integration of the GDPR within the Union's Member States can be seen. While some countries, such as France, Germany or Spain, are attempting to adapt their domestic legislation by drawing inspiration from this tool; others, such as Poland, Hungary or Romania are a long way from effective compliance with the European mechanism. This disparity between the European Union's countries leads to differentiated situations, particularly in terms of combatting hateful content and protecting individuals who are victims of online violence. Most of the Union's countries are gradually strengthening their legislation to comply with the GDPR, in line with their institutional and financial resources. While the good and bad performers in terms of GDPR application stand out among the 27 Union's Member States, the ongoing integration of the GDPR is too recent to provide a precise and comprehensive overview of the situation in all European countries.

France, the initial inspiration for those European tools, has managed to adapt its national legislation to the European GDPR and to the Directive of 27 April 2016 of the European Parliament and of the Council, harmonising the rules governing processing for criminal purposes, such as the national DNA fingerprint database. The first step forward in personal data protection came with the Law of 7 October 2016[152] for a Digital Republic. It recognises a number of rights for all citizens including: the right to be forgotten digitally for minors and respect for private correspondence for all, regardless of the medium used. However, a number of critics have been levelled at the law. It would not go further enough in the proposed sanctions for companies that do not respect the rules in terms of personal data protection. Furthermore, Bigh Tech would still have too much leeway when it comes to drawing up rules internally, resulting in a lack of transparency and harmonisation.

In order to strengthen this protection, a law of 20 June 2018[153] allows for a more direct transposition of the European GDPR to the French national level. The missions of the Commission nationale de l'informatique et des libertés (CNIL) are thus reinforced, turning it into an essential consultative body which has a significant weight in the making of public policies. The commission also acquires greater sanction power, in particular through the imposition of fines in the event of non-compliance with the rules on personal data. In addition, the scope of so-called sensitive data is expanded, considering new elements such as an individual's sexual orientation and gender identity.

Alongside legislation regulating the digital domain, the law against sexual and gender-based violence, adopted on 3 August 2018, also recognises the importance of cracking down on acts committed online. This law sets out measures to combat online violence, that can take the form of cyber-harassment or the non-consensual propagation of pornographic content. It states the term "sexist contempt[154]" (now "sexist and sexual contempt") found in article R625-8-3 of the Penal Code (in force since 1 April 2023), which refers to the fact of "imposing to a person any sexual or sexist comment or behaviour that either violates their dignity by being

degrading or humiliating or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive situation for them[155]". Aggravated sexist and sexual contempt, considered as a criminal offence since 1 April 2013[156], punishes any "intimidating, hostile or offensive situation" committed in the circumstances provided for by law. However, this offence is aimed more at street harassment and does not encompass all the specifics of digital technology. When it comes to digital technology, it seems more appropriate to establish facts under the yoke of cyber-harassment. This concept implies a repetition of acts and makes it impossible to punish isolated hate speech. This choice of term is limited in that it does not allow for full punishment of these online acts.

This process of bringing French law into line with European Union law has been completed, for now, with the drafting of a decree implementing the law[157] which came into force on 1 June

THIS DISPARITY BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION'S COUNTRIES LEADS TO DIFFERENTIATED SITUATIONS, PARTICULARLY IN TERMS OF COMBATTING HATEFUL CONTENT AND PROTECTING INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE VICTIMS OF ONLINE VIOLENCE.

2019. This decree clarifies the CNIL's condition of cooperation and intervention, and grants unprecedented rights to users, such as the right to digital death, under which anyone can decide whether or not personal data should be kept after their death.

Germany, the second country praised for its legislation on digital rights, has a comprehensive protection law that is regularly updated to keep pace with developments in new technologies. Germany was the first country to adopt a general text on personal data protection in 1977. This regulation, contained in the 1977 federal law, established protection for the use of personal identification data. Going beyond mere compliance with GDPR, a law on data protection in the telecommunications and telemedia sector was adopted on 10 February 2021 by the German Federal Cabinet, in order to strengthen the mechanisms proposed by the European tool.

A number of European Union countries are attempting to step up their fight against hateful content online. The Autorité de régulation de la communication audiovisuelle et numérique (ARCOM), has been given an extensive role in regulating and monitoring French digital services. In Belgium, this role is assigned to specialist bodies in many European countries, such as the Autorité de Régulation des Communications Électroniques et des Postes (ARCEP). In addition, many laws attempt to clarify the outlines of the concept of "hateful content". In France, for example, the Avia Law[158], proposed to step up the fight against hateful content with a strong repressive component. Adopted on first reading by the National Assembly and then the Senate on 18 December 2019, it was deemed largely unconstitutional by the Constitutional Council in June 2020, notably for reasons of "freedom of speech and communication" and the legal uncertainty on the definitions, which were left to the discretion of the authorities[159]. In fact, this bill had aroused a certain number of criticisms, particularly from associations[160]. Germany has also taken up the issue of the definition of "hateful content" through the Network Enforcement Law (NetzDG) which requires online platforms to delete reported content quickly or be subject to a fine. However, there is considerable variation in delimiting this "hateful content" which appears at the national level of the Member States and is detrimental to its clear characterisation. The question of creating a Digital Charter is emerging in several European countries, given the absence of any direct reference to digital rights and freedoms in the Member States' Constitution.

Nevertheless, the EU is far from unified on the matter, and countries such as Poland, Hungary, and Romania, which have been criticised for their numerous restrictions on fundamental rights, are only just begging to comply with GDPR. Polish conservative policy leads to a lack of

awareness concerning women's rights and LGBTI+ people. Serious restrictions on human rights are seen particularly with measures such as the 2021 law "forcing 90% of legally performed abortions to turn into clandestine procedures[161]". These "freedom-destroying[162]" measures are also taking place in the digital sphere. Most online protection measures are inefficient. The Polish law on hateful content online is poorly applied and misused to limit freedom of speech and restrict the voice of people fighting for minority rights. The issue of combatting online violence does not appear to be a guiding principle of Polish policy. In 2021, Poland announced a bill to limit the moderation of online platforms by social networks themselves. *Le Figaro* reported in 2021 that "according to this bill, the websites could only be able to take this kind of initiative if the publications violate Polish law[163]". These measures, taken in the context of a limitation of fundamental rights, could lead to total control of online content in the country. Freedom of speech in its entirety must now be restored.

THE POLISH LAW ON HATEFUL CONTENT ONLINE IS POORLY APPLIED AND MISUSED TO LIMIT FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND RESTRICT THE VOICE OF PEOPLE FIGHTING FOR MINORITY RIGHTS.

Regarding Hungary, moderation of comments on the Internet does not apply to hateful content but focuses on content that disagrees with the government in power. Victims of online violence are not in any way assisted and the data regulatory bodies are corrupted by the government. The power in place has created a Council of Media, appointed by the government and in charge of supervising the public and private media. This Council has the power to suspend programmes deemed contrary to "public moral" or "national interest", a major threat to freedom of speech[164].

Finally, Romania is facing the same problem of corruption and inaction in the face of the growing presence of masculinist movements online. The country was described by Amnesty International as largely discriminatory towards the Roma and LGBTI+ people[165]. Overall, these countries, with their conservative policies, share some of the ideas highlighted by online masculinist movements and do not comply with the European GDPR. This absence of European harmonisation is a major threat to the protection of fundamental rights in the digital sphere.

Summary of data presented

Poland
- Restriction of the rights of LGBTI+ people
- Legislation not in line with international standards on freedom of expression and protection of privacy
- No sanctions against perpetrators of online violence

Hungary
- Legislation hindering press freedom and independant media
- Closure of websites and media that disagree with the government
- Censorship used to keep the government in power and not to limit hate speech

Romania
- Lack of independence of digital regulator
- Lack of moderation of hateful content
- Insufficient support for victims of online violence

Sources[166]

The European Union is an area that can be exploited to guarantee the digital fundamental rights of individuals. All the European Institutions are trying to contribute to the fight against gender inequalities and discrimination against LGBTI+ people. The European Commission is setting up action plans with objectives for a "fair and inclusive recovery and for the ecological and digital transition[167]" published in December 2021. The Parliament acts through resolutions and recommendations calling on the Member States to respect these objectives. Finally, bodies such as the FRA (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights) provide the data needed to measure the phenomenon of hateful content on the Internet. Nevertheless, none of these initiatives is entirely satisfactory. One is focused on economic recovery, the other has yet to take hold, and the last merely acknowledges a problem that is already well established.

Understanding the digital domain and the issue of personal data is a subject for reflection and reform that is unevenly rooted within the European Union. The rise of masculinist movements on the platforms does not seem to be a subject that is addressed or fully integrated into the fight against gender inequality and the rights of LGBTI+ people. This same fight is mainly focused on cyber-harassment, with a repressive approach downstream from the offences. It is important to identify who are the perpetrators of violence on digital platforms in order to prevent their proliferation in all the European Union's countries. It is clear that some Member states are more protective than others when it comes to supporting women and LGBTI+ people in the digital sphere. Only European intervention and state cooperation seem capable of bridging these disparities and enabling a supranational fight against attacks on the integrity of individuals in the digital sphere.

Recommendations and proposals

for the protection of women's rights and LGBTI+ people in the digital sector within the European Union

Cyberviolence and their understanding in digital spaces are complex issues that raise questions about freedom of speech, the fight against violence, content regulation and support for victims. There are currently positions on what should be done to curb hate speeches, particularly by masculinists. Consequently, it is important to develop measures jointly with feminist activists, legal experts, researchers and digital workers as much as with politicians. The logic of "do not harm" must be taken into account.

The continuum of sexual and gender-based violence is rooted in our patriarchal society. This violence has structural causes and calls for systemic measures. When looking at online violence, it is essential to place it this broader context and not to think of cyberviolence as *ad hoc* or purely technological violence. That is why the first step for the European Union and its Member States must be to strengthen the combat against underlying causes of sexual and gender-based violence, namely the relationships of domination between men and women and the persistence of gender stereotypes. This includes ratifying and implementing the Istanbul Convention.

In the digital sphere, such cyberviolence takes on particular forms and calls for specific measures. In the interests of the safety and freedom of women and LGBTI+ people, as wells as protecting their rights in the digital space, it is necessary that the European Union and its Member State take actions. Technological advances must be accompanied by regulatory policies and legislation by the various EU bodies. There are a number of initiatives that have led to advances and progress in the protection of rights and safety of women and LGBTI+ people within the member countries of the European Union. Nevertheless, these are not enough, and new provisions need to be put in place. The European Union must encourage cooperation between Member States, on the matter of defending women's and LGBTI+ people's rights in the digital world.

These recommendations are addressed to the various bodies of the European Union and its Member states, each of which can act at its own level. They are structured around five main areas for action:

1 • Strengthening and completing the legal, political, and financial arsenal for combatting the continuum of sexual and gender-based violence and hate speeches (based on gender identity and sexual orientation)

2 • Strengthening the integration of the fight against sexual and gender-based violence and the fight against masculinist discourses into public digital policies

3 • Regulating the digital and technology multinationals

4 • Supporting and protecting the feminist and LGBTI+ associations and activists

5 • Raising awareness among citizens of masculinist discourses and giving them the means to defend themselves

1 • Recommendations to the institutions of the European Union

Article One of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, announced in 2000 by the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council states that "Human dignity is inviolable. It must be respected and protected[168]". In accordance with this article, the European Union's bodies must ensure the protection of its citizens, both online and offline, because the digital sphere is now a continuum of offline life. Several areas and guidelines are essential to guarantee a safe digital space for all European Union citizens. European law, therefore, has a key role to play in regulating virtual space and protecting its users. The next European elections, scheduled for 2024, must include these issues and the consequences suffered by women and LGBTI+ people who are victims of the cyberviolence generated by the rise of masculinist discourses. Prioritising the fight against masculinist movements in the digital sphere is essential to legislate and establish genuine changes. Recognition of sexist and lgbtiphobic contempt online, as well as funding for community legal acts[169] to control and regulate hateful content, are the main priorities.

Ensuring the security, protection, freedom and integrity of EU citizens in cyberspace requires European cooperation. The following recommendations are intended for the European Union's bodies and identify priority areas for action. These recommendations are avenues for improvement and present new tools that would make it possible to fight more effectively against the rise of masculinist discourses in the digital sphere and its consequences for women and LGBTI+ people within the Union.

On 1 June 2023, the Council of the European Union approved the EU's accession to Istanbul Convention. Although the limitation of this accession, it is a historic breakthrough and an important lever for improving the current provisions at the European level and in the Member States to combat sexual and gender-based violence and for encouraging the remaining EU Member States that have not yet ratified the convention to do so. In particular, this would make it possible to recognise the violence perpetrated by men in the majority against women in the countries of the European Union and the establishment of concrete measures to put an end to it.

The European Council must:

- **Enshrine the combat against the rise of masculinist discourses (online and offline) in the EU's political guidelines.** By recognising the necessary efforts for a joint fight by the Member States, the European Union could then instil the main guidelines to be implemented in all the organisation's institutions.

- **Organise an extraordinary meeting on the subject of masculinist discourses and violence and its growing evolution in the manosphere,** including a discussion of the key safety issues this raises.

The European Commission must:

- **Reinforce the offline and online protection of feminist activists and human rights defenders**, drawing on the work of feminist networks and the United Nations special rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders: documenting violence against them online, building their capacity for digital self-defence, strengthening their overall security (physical and digital security, freedom of speech, etc.)
- **Recognise the urgency of fighting against masculinist movements (and DGBV[170] in general) in the digital sphere and consider their views as a violation of the rights and**

safety of women and LGBTI+ people. To this end, it is possible to draw inspiration from the study published in 2022 by the European Commission on violent far-right digital content and manifestations of online hate speech[171].

- **Allocate greater funding to the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications,** which enables cooperation between national regulators, such as ARCOM in France, and the European Commission. Funding for this body is essential because it needs to be given the resources to carry out investigations at the national level in the Member States in order to encourage best practices and harmonise regulation on digital platforms (for example: creating within these bodies a committee specifically dedicated to combatting online violence.)

- **Continue Big Tech regulation project[172] by ensuring transparency regarding the use of personal data and the algorithms used for moderation purposes:**
  - **Reinforcing the presence of European digital companies on the European market, in compliance with the Digital Services Act**, with the aim of protecting personal data and creating a genuine European market.
  - **Making moderation tools public:** civil society must know the criteria for content visibility and be informed about how algorithms work. What content is objectionable and how do moderators act to protect fundamental rights?

- **Require Big Tech to make public their reporting and data use mechanisms and levels of violence against women and LGBTI+ people on their digital space.** Big Tech companies operating in the European Union have a duty of transparency towards their citizens and should therefore be held responsible for publishing these pieces of information. In the same way, they must educate their users to ensure compliance with the rules against hate speeches on their digital space.

- **Strengthen funding mechanisms for associations working for women's rights and LGBTI+ people in the digital sphere.** Associations are now the main players in raising awareness among the general public. They also play an essential role in defending women's rights and LGBTI+ people and supporting victims. However, their capacity to act is limited by a lack of resources. Transformative actions under the digital action[173] plan must therefore be taken by 2030[174].
  - **Combat hate speech** against women and LGBTI+ people in the digital sphere and the dangers arising from it.
  - **Train professionals** capable of intervening in schools to make citizens aware of the dangers of these discourses and their consequences.
  - **Create multi-national projects** capable of working for the safety and freedom of women and LGBTI+ people within the European digital sphere.

- **Reinforce actions of the European Data Protection Committee, particularly in the area of personal data protection.** Indeed, the Committee is currently opting for a harmonisation approach rather than a sanctioning role, which is currently ineffective in the face of certain reluctant countries in this area.
  - **Implement real and enforceable financial sanctions, in particular in the form of penalties for reluctant Member States.** Harmonisation in the digital field is hampered when the countries concerned do not define the protection of personal data as a national priority.
  - **Reinforce the fines provided by the Digital Services Act.** The financial sanctions provided for in the Digital Services Act, which increased to 6% of the worldwide turnover of the major online platforms and search engines, are not enough to stop the infringements of Big Tech companies. This amount seems negligible in relation to the financial resources of the social networks concerned and must be increased or made up of additional penalty payments in the event of non-compliance.

- **Define serious and repeated violations.** The Digital Services Act states "[that] in the event of serious and repeated violations of the regulation, platforms may be banned from operating on the European market[175]". It is essential to define what are these serious and repeated violations to avoid a lack of effective sanctions. How many violations are required to constitute an infringement? What are the most serious grounds?

- **Ensure that the terminologies used for offline violence are applicable to the digital domain** and, where necessary, complete them to take into account online violence. Several avenues could be considered:
  - **Think up a new clear categorisation, specific to the digital sphere.** The term "cyberviolence" is sometimes too broad and "cyber-harassment" is not fully satisfactory to qualify for describing isolated acts of online hatred. In the hypothesis of a report or inspiration on the subject of the French legislation, a "sexist and sexual contempt" specifically applicable to the digital environment could be devised in order to characterise an online offence as soon as it first occurs in a more precise way than the tools currently available.
  - **In consultation with feminist and LGBTI+ associations**, continue the work underway to establish minimum criminal standards for online violence, especially in the context of the proposed directive on combatting violence against women and domestic violence. Respect for human rights, and consent, just as the principle of "doing no harm" to the people concerned, must be at the heart of these discussions.

The Council of the European Union must:

- **Acknowledge the urgency to combat these masculinist movements within the digital sphere and consider their discourses as a violation of the rights and safety of women and LGBTI+ people.** The defence of the most fundamental digital rights has not been established as Sweden's priority for its six-month presidency. This has not been a priority in the work of the French digital presidency. The Czech Republic has not considered these issues as a priority either. The defence of women and LGBTI+ people must be the subject of joint action. Guaranteeing the values of the European union and the integrity and security of its citizens requires action by the Council of the European Union.

The European Parliament must:

- **As part of the proposal for a directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence, taking into account the comments and observations made by civil society stakeholders.**
  - Ensure the consistency of the directive with the rules and procedures introduced by the Digital Services Act.
  - Ensure that the minimal criminal standards recognised by the directive (in terms of cyber-harassment, non-consensual sharing of intimate material, cyber-incitement to violence or hatred) are rigorous so that they protect women and LGBTI+ people without undermining their rights.
  - Make effective the involvement and collaboration of Big Tech in the protection, safety, and freedom of victims online effective and strengthening their accountability to users[176].
  - Guarantee the participation of civil society throughout the process of drawing up, implementing, and monitoring the directive.

- **Reinforce the representation and participation of women and LGBTI+ people in all political processes and decision-making within EU bodies**; in particular in accordance with several Community acts: the European Parliament resolution of 13 March 2003 on an integrated approach to gender equality[177], the European Commission's 2020-2025 Strategy

for LGBTI+ equality[178] and the 2019/2164 (INI) procedure aiming to "promote gender equality in education and the professional work in the fields of sciences, technologies, engineering and mathematics[179]". It is necessary for feminist and LGBTI+ associations to be included in all decision-making, including those concerning the fight against masculinist discourses and in the implementation of Community texts and legal acts.

European Parliament Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) must:

- Draw up one or more reports on the mechanisms of cyberviolence and offline violence generated by masculinists and their consequences, taking into account all the member countries, and identifying courses of action for the EU. This report could serve as a basis for harmonising the definition of "hateful content" between the various Member States, with a view to promoting and protecting the women's rights and LGBTI+ people in the digital sphere. It may be interesting to combine the study of violence against women and LGBTI+ people online and offline because both types of violence have consequences on the psychological and physical health of the victims. These reports should be drawn up by recorders within a committee specialising in the study of the manosphere and the consequences of cyberviolence against women and LGBTI+ people in the European Union.

- Undertake experts' hearings on women's rights and LGBTI+ people to reinforce the citizens' education on equal rights. This was done in May 2022, jointly with the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE): a public hearing on the subject of combatting gender-based violence online was organised. The aim would be to create a real awareness campaign among users in order to strengthen the safety of women and LGBTI+ people within the digital sphere and enable them to fully exercise their rights online.

The European Data Protection Board (EDPB) must:

- **Establish the combat against cyberviolence and for the protection of personal data one of the main guidelines of the European Union's digital policy.** To this end, the European Data Protection Committee should:
  - **Ensure control of content moderation by social networks:** the moderation of hate speeches, offensive content and incitement to violence against women and LGBTI+ people on social networks by masculinist groups and ultra-conservative parties reveals itself to be insufficient. Faced with this ineffectiveness, the European Union's institutions must issue warning and carry out checks on the multinationals, companies and owners of social networks and other digital platforms.
  - **Supervise algorithms:** the management of algorithms and their transparency should also be included at the heart of this reflection, especially because of the persistence of discriminatory algorithms.

- **Introduce real proportional sanctions for each companies according to its economic weight when a breach is detected in order to establish fairness in the unitive scope of the GDPR.** The financial sanction imposed on a company must be proportional to its profits. These sanctions must be fair so as not to penalise the smallest companies, nor to favour the largest.

The Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) must:

- **Document the rise of masculinist discourses, which are an extension of misogyny and lgbtiphobia, and an integral part of the continuum of sexual and gender-based violence**. These data can be collected through studies within each Member States and would make it possible to complete the corpus of documents on the subjects of cyberviolence against women and LGBTI+ people.

- **Propose a code of conduct to major European and international companies to guarantee the rights of every user on the basis of the new data collected and poll carried out.** Thanks to its extensive network and expertise, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights is raising awareness on the inclusion of women and LGBTI+ people in all EU bodies, as well as increasing data protection of the latter in cyberspace.

- **Produce a user manual to inform users on their digital rights.** On the basis of the data collected and the resulting analyses, this user manual would enable every user to recognise offences and violence within the digital sphere and to be able to contact the national bodies responsible for responding to such cyberviolence and acting to protect the rights and freedoms of citizens within the virtual space.

2 • Recommendations to the governments of the European Union's Member States

European initiatives are essential to establish guidelines for combatting masculinist discourses in the digital sphere, as well as regulating discriminatory content and abuses, and controlling cyberviolence. They must go hand in hand with actions at the EU Member States level, particularly to support associations and bodies in the different countries, to raise awareness among populations in their national context and, on the long run, to create the conditions for a change in mentalities. This last point would enable citizens to be protected and their freedoms to be asserted more effectively over the long term.

Therefore, the member countries of the European Union must:

- **Strengthen the legal, political and financial arsenal in the fight against sexual and gender-based violence,** in particular by ratifying and implementing the Istanbul Convention and by following up the GREVIO recommendations[180].

- **Ensure that legislative frameworks in the fight against gender-based violence refer to and apply to all forms of online violence**, in line with the GREVIO recommendations[181].

- **Allocate 0.1% of national GDP to the fight against sexual and gender-based violence** and increase overall funding dedicated to gender equality public policies.

- **Strengthen the training and expertise of members of the national justice system (courts, police services, etc.) to receive complaints, deal with offences, support victims and ensure the protection of all in the digital field. These players must be specialised in cyberviolence and discrimination on digital platforms.** National courts must be able to treat issues of cyberviolence against women and LGBTI+ people in the same way as any other obstacles to fundamental rights.

- **Increase the funding allocated to feminist and LGBTI+ associations combatting sexual and gender-based violence. This funding must be flexible and sustainable** so that associations can carry out their activities, strengthen their structure and act in networks. More generally, reinforcing within associations (for example the protection and education of young) the training of the staff on cyberviolence.

- **Support the feminist and LGBTI activists online.** The foothold of cyberfeminism needs to be consolidated on all social networks; that would help to combat the takeover of these spaces by masculinists and ultra-conservatives. It is important to encourage the feminist and LGBTI+ friendly initiatives that are flourishing online, since they have an essential role to play in popular education, awareness-raising but also as whistle-blower. Their impact and visibility in digital spaces can therefore be further increased.

- **Create spaces for interdisciplinary reflection and dialogue** to strengthen the integration between public policies fighting sexual and gender-based violence and digital public policies, paying particular attention to the rise of online masculinist discourses and their specific features. These spaces should bring together experts from the world of research (particularly the social sciences), feminist activists and programmers, and representatives from ministries as well as digital companies.

- **Promote the inclusion of women and LGBTI+ people** in key positions in the digital and technology fields.

- **Accelerate the establishment and ensure the independence of a digital services coordinator** in each Member State, as agreed by the Digital Services Act. Besides, from 2024, all Member States must authorise their digital services coordinator, in line with the general entry date of the Digital Services Act[182].

- **Strengthen measures at the national level combating hateful speeches and discriminatory comments against women and LGBTI+ people on the Internet.** On the basis of Community legal acts in particular, the Member States must consolidate their legislation on the control and regulation of contents, the protection of women and LGBTI+ people and the punishment of those involved in cyberviolence and cyber-attacks.

- **Ensure compliance with the GDPR for the protection of personal data.**
  - **Require publication and compliance with each company's privacy rules**, in accordance with those required in the GDPR.
  - **Enforce the GDPR** by each national data protection body.
  - **Prohibit the activities of companies responsible for serious and repeated violations of the GDPR.**

- **Guarantee access to digital education for all. Educational programmes must include content on the prevention of gender-based, sexual and lgbtiphobic violence, as well as the notion of consent, and provide better support for victims.** They should also contribute to a better understanding of the limits and dangers of digital technology and help young people develop a critical approach to online content.

- **Support the development of alternative platforms and applications** that are independent of Big Tech and strengthen the support to feminist digital platforms and support for victims of sexual and gender-based violence (for example: initiatives led by feminist programmers groups or aimed at increasing the visibility of women and LGBTI+ people online[183]).

- **Promote the digital and technology fields at the national level.** In order to maintain independence and control over digital technology at the local level, it may be worth building a genuine state digital sphere in each countries.
  - **Promote and fund national technology fields** in order to control and regulate online abuses and violence.
  - **Develop anti-discriminatory algorithms,** using experts.
  - **Contribute to the funding of the Body of European regulators for Electronic Communications,** so that accurate national investigations could be carried out within Member States.

- **Invest in awareness campaign aimed at the general public** on the subject of cyberviolence, and at the same time promote gender equality against persistent stereotypes.
  - **Invest in education for all,** not just within schools, and by specialist bodies in the field.
  - **Promote awareness campaigns** on the rights and recognition of women and LGBTI+ people.

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Notes

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11 Interview on 5 May 2023 with Mélissa Blais and Francis Dupuis-Déri, sociologists specialising in antifeminisms and masculinisms.

12 « Les antiféministes en général ne disent pas qu'ils sont antiféministes. [...] Ils se dissimulent, se cachent. [...] Le meilleur exemple est le mouvement pro-vie aux États-Unis, qui est contre le droit à l'avortement, avec un terme tout à fait positif, "pro". Donc généralement les masculinistes eux-mêmes ne se disent pas "masculinistes", c'est plutôt un terme qui a été développé par les féministes dans leurs analyses critiques ». *Ibid.*

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23 « #MeToo est un exemple incroyable du côté des mouvements des femmes, de ce qui a été réalisé par les médias sociaux. ». Interview on 5 May 2023 with Mélissa Blais and Francis Dupuis-Déri, *ibid.*

24 *Ibid.*

25 Horta Ribeiro, M., Blackburn, J., Bradlyn, B., De Cristofaro, E., Stringhini, G., Long, S., Greenberg, S., & Zannettou, S. (2021). The Evolution of the Manosphere across the Web. *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media*, 15(1), 196-207.
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43 Bard, C. (2020). Le masculinisme en Europe. Encyclopédie d'histoire numérique de l'Europe. https://ehne.fr/fr/node/12390

44 « Le sentiment de haine et de frustration que peuvent ressentir les masculinistes - particulièrement les jeunes, les *Incels*, ceux qui sont célibataires, ceux qui ont de la haine envers les femmes - est un terreau très fertile pour l'extrême droite en termes de recrutement et c'est ce qu'on observe aujourd'hui ». Interview on 18 April 2023 with Pauline Ferrari, journalist and expert on the manosphere.

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51 « Il y a beaucoup d'enquêtes sur la manosphère qui parlent de "*disembodiment*". C'est-à-dire pouvoir se sentir désincarné, avec un manque flagrant d'empathie, une possibilité de dire des choses qu'on ne dirait pas hors ligne. Cela permet également un niveau élevé de virulence ». Interview on 5 May 2023 with Mélissa Blais and Francis Dupuis-Déri, sociologists specialising on antifeminisms and masculinisms.

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56 L'influenceur masculiniste Andrew Tate, arrêté pour trafic d'êtres humains, libéré et assigné à résidence. (31 mars 2023). Le Monde

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59 Andrew Tate, un misogyne dans la cour de récré. (15 janvier 2023). Courrier International. https://www.courrierinternational.com/article/reportage-andrew-tate-un-misogyne-dans-la-cour-de-recre

60 « avant, hors-ligne, on était extrêmement frontal, au début des années 2000 on a vu des tactiques d'action directe, assez violentes. [...] Mais en ligne il suffit à un seul influenceur de nommer une féministe pour appeler "la meute". [...] Il n'y a plus besoin d'argumenter, de dire que telle personne pose problème [...] maintenant on la nomme, et ça suffit ». Interview on 5 May 2023 with Mélissa Blais and Francis Dupuis-Déri, sociologists specialising on antifeminisms and masculinisms.

61 « un mode de vie qui refuse de s'en remettre aux femmes pour définir la valeur des hommes. Au contraire, il se concentre sur les aspects positifs de l'homme, l'invitant à suivre son propre chemin dans la vie ». À propos. @MenGoingTheirOwnWay · Communauté. https://www.facebook.com/MenGoingTheirOwnWay/

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63 Incel Language Dictionary, Incel Terminology. IncelTear. Plateforme Reddit. https://www.reddit.com/r/IncelTear/

64 « ces groupes sont constitués de leaders qui tiennent des discours auxquels les sujets vont adhérer. Chez les sujets, il y a déjà un manque d'intériorisation de certaines valeurs. Les auteurs de violences en ligne et hors-ligne vont donc cautionner les discours des groupes masculinistes ». Interview on 11 April 2023 with Simry Ikiz, psychologist and author of "Les violences à l'encontre des femmes sur les réseaux sociaux".

65 « le masculiniste n'est pas nécessairement un jeune homme de 18 ans dans son sous-sol avec son ordinateur. Il peut être en veston cravate dans un ministère ». Interview on 5 May 2023 with Mélissa Blais and Francis Dupuis-Déri, sociologists specialising on antifeminisms and masculinisms.

66 Rapport 2023 sur l'état du sexisme en France : le sexisme perdure et ses manifestations les plus violentes s'aggravent. (23 janvier 2023). Haut Conseil à l'égalité entre les hommes et les femmes. https://www.haut-conseil-egalite.gouv.fr/stereotypes-et-roles-sociaux/travaux-du-hce/article/rapport-2023-sur-l-etat-du-sexisme-en-france-le-sexisme-perdure-et-ses

67 Pink News. (2023). Anti-drag protests and Posie Parker singled out in new report on far-right extremism. https://www.thepinknews.com/2023/02/28/state-of-hate-2023-trans-drag-posie-parker/

68 Trans Safety Network. (2023). Far right turn out in force supporting gender critical feminist rally in Glasgow. https://transsafety.network/posts/glasgow-far-right-standing-for-women/

69 The expression "*gender critical*" refers to the lgbtqiphobic ideology of these activists – literally meaning "*gender critics*", to be understood as a questioning of the notion of gender equality, through the idea that "*sex*" would be a fixed, unchangeable, binary and fundamental biological fact.

70 « les rassemblements de Keen sont désormais connus pour la présence de l'extrême droite qu'ils attirent. Keen elle-même était autrefois une paria au sein du mouvement "*gender critical*" par sa volonté de travailler avec l'extrême droite. » Trans Safety Network. (2023). Far right turn out in force supporting gender critical feminist rally in Glasgow. https://transsafety.network/posts/glasgow-far-right-standing-for-women/

71 « les rassemblements de Keen sont désormais connus pour la présence de l'extrême droite qu'ils attirent. Keen elle-même était autrefois une paria au sein du mouvement "gender critical" par sa volonté de travailler avec l'extrême droite. » Trans Safety Network. (2023). Far right turn out in force supporting gender critical feminist rally in Glasgow. https://transsafety.network/posts/glasgow-far-right-standing-for-women/

72 Vox. (2019). The rise of anti-trans "radical" feminists, explained. https://www.vox.com/identities/2019/9/5/20840101/terfs-radical-feminists-gender-critical ; Mediapart. (2022). Face à la transphobie en Europe, le féminisme « a tout à perdre à se diviser ». https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/international/161122/face-la-transphobie-en-europe-le-feminisme-tout-perdre-se-diviser

73 « violence à l'égard des femmes » comme tout acte « de violence fondé sur le genre qui entraîne, ou est susceptible d'entraîner pour les femmes, des dommages ou souffrances de nature physique, sexuelle, psychologique ou économique, y compris la menace de se livrer à de tels actes, la contrainte ou la privation arbitraire de liberté, que ce soit dans la vie publique ou privée ». See article 3 of the Istanbul Convention : Conseil de l'Europe. (2011). Convention du Conseil de l'Europe sur la prévention et la lutte contre la violence à l'égard des femmes et la violence domestique. https://rm.coe.int/1680084840

74 Cyber-harassment is a form of online violence, defined in particular by the persistence and longevity of the perpetrator's threats to the victim.

75 « droits fondamentaux de la personne, notamment à sa dignité, mais aussi à son intégrité psychologique et à son intégrité physique dans le cas d'une agression ». Article 222-22 du Code pénal français. https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/article_lc/LEGIARTI000043409030

76 « le domaine du digital agit comme un amplificateur ». Interview on 3 May 2023 with Sven Franck, co-president of the Volt France Party.

77 « Dans l'Union européenne, le pourcentage de femmes de plus de 15 ans qui ont subi des épisodes graves de violence sur Internet est de 18 %, soit près de 9 millions de filles. En outre, les femmes âgées de 18 à 24 ans courent un grand risque de persécution et de harcèlement sexuel, ainsi que de menaces physiques ». Cyberviolence à l'égard des femmes et des filles : un signal d'alarme mondial.. (2015). Commission du haut débit pour le développement numérique, ONU.

78 The Economist. (2020). *Measuring the prevalence of online violence against women.* https://onlineviolencewomen.eiu.com/

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80 Van Sant, K., Fredheim, R., & Bergmanis-Korats, G. (2021). Abuse of power: coordinated online harassment of Finnish government ministers. [Abus de pouvoir : harcèlement en ligne coordonné des ministres du gouvernement finlandais]. Riga: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence. https://stratcomcoe.org/pdfjs/?file=/publications/download/abuse_of_power_online_harassment_of_fin_ministers_16-03-2021.pdf?zoom=page-fit

81 « l'activité des utilisateurs humains a contribué à 35 % du contenu abusif. Les utilisateurs anonymes, quant à eux, ont été les plus prolifiques en matière de tweets abusifs et ont été à l'origine de 59 % des messages abusifs ». *Ibid.* Study based on a census of 24,885 tweets between 16 March and 27 July 2020.

82 Interview on 11 April 2023 with Simruy Ikiz, psychologist and author of "Les violences à l'encontre des femmes sur les réseaux sociaux".

83 « comme les réseaux peuvent être des endroits où il est plus facile d'attaquer des gens, effectivement il y a plus de chances d'être touché dans la sphère du numérique que dans la rue ». *Ibid.*

84 « les conséquences des violences en ligne sont autant traumatisantes que celles dans la vie réelle ». *Ibid.*

85 Haut Conseil à l'Egalité entre les femmes et les hommes. (2023). Vigilance Égalité. https://www.haut-conseil-egalite.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/vigilance_du_haut_conseil_a_legalite_-_ppl_numerique_juin_2023.pdf

86 Gautheret, J. (17 septembre 2016). Tiziana Cantone, martyre italienne du respect de la vie privée. https://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2016/09/17/tiziana-cantone-martyre-italienne-du-respect-de-la-vie-privee_4999289_3214.html

87 « 52 % des personnes ayant subi des violences physiques de leur partenaire ont été espionnés par ce dernier contre 27 % de celles qui n'en ont jamais subi ». L'espionnage au sein du couple à l'heure des réseaux sociaux. (avril 2023). IFOP. Journal du Geek. https://www.ifop.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/119895_Rapport_Snooping_2023.05.09-1.pdf

88 « les masculinistes étaient vus comme un groupe de personnes frustrées et misogynes, qui restaient sur leur ordinateur, il s'avère rapidement que leur existence n'est pas limitée à la sphère numérique. [...] Il y a eu une médiatisation particulière des mouvements masculinistes, à travers la sous-communauté des *Incels*, en 2014 et 2018, au moment des attentats en Californie et à Toronto. Ces actes de violences ont servi de modèle pour énormément de membres de ces communautés masculinistes ». Interview on 18 April 2023 with Pauline Ferrari, journalist and expert on the manosphere.

89 Plymouth gunman ranted online that 'women are arrogant' days before rampage. (n.d.), The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/aug/14/plymouth-gunman-ranted-online-that-women-are-arrogant-days-before-rampage

90 « il s'avère que la manosphère n'est pas limitée à la sphère numérique. C'est aussi une possibilité de tueries de masse ». Interview on 18 April 2023 with Pauline Ferrari, journalist and expert on the manosphere.

91 « se sont déplacées dans ces plateformes-là, en connaissant bien ces plates-formes et leurs règles ». *Ibid.*

92 Interview de Lucile, @toomuchlucile2 (3 avril 2023), Konbini. Instagram.

93 « Le harcèlement utilise des phénomènes sociétaux comme les préjugés et la discrimination et affecte souvent les personnes en raison de particularités protégées, le plus souvent l'origine ethnique, la religion, la sexualité, l'identité de genre et le handicap ». Nations Unies, Chroniques ONU. (n.d.). *Le cyberharcèlement et ses conséquences pour le droit de l'homme.* https://www.un.org/fr/chronicle/article/le-cyberharcelement-et-ses-consequences-pour-les-droits-de-lhomme

94 « qu'au cours des cinq dernières années, un quart (26 %) de tous les répondants ont été agressés ou menacés de violence chez eux ou en-dehors de leur domicile. Ce chiffre passe à 35 % pour tous les répondants transgenres ». Enquête LGBT dans l'UE Enquête sur les personnes lesbiennes, gays, bisexuelles et transgenres dans l'Union européenne.Les résultats en bref. (2013). *FRA. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights*. https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eu-lgbt-survey-results-at-a-glance_fr.pdf

95 « parmi les actes les plus graves qui ont été commis au cours des cinq dernières années à l'encontre des personnes interrogées parce qu'elles étaient des personnes LGBT, un cas de violence sur cinq (22 %) a été signalé à la police. Seulement 6 % des cas de harcèlement équivalents ont été signalés à la police". *Ibid.*

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Equipop is a feminist association for international solidarity that blends social and political action, project design, and technical and financial assistance to improve the health and rights of women and girls worldwide. Our priorities lie in contributing to translocal collective action and providing flexible, longterm support to campaigners and organisations. Equipop champions feminist values and places the gender approach at the heart of its work.

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Created in 2020, the Gender in Geopolitics Institute is a think tank advocating for a greater visibility of gender issues in the field of international relationships.

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