



OUR **SECURE** FUTURE

Women Make the Difference

WPS MESSAGE GUIDE

Women, Peace and Security and Technology

WHAT ARE THE POLICY GAPS?

While the digital sphere is becoming increasingly ingrained in everyday life, a gender lens is not being systemically integrated in many facets of the technological landscape.

WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

Research shows that gender dynamics and the mistreatment of women online serve as an early warning sign of larger, systemic problems within the digital ecosystem and beyond. The full inclusion of women, in addition to the application of a gender lens, is therefore needed in the design of online tools to create a more secure digital future.¹

Building on Our Secure Future's (OSF) previous work on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and Technology, this guide outlines the key gender blindspots within the technology space and the opportunities to create a safer and more equal digital ecosystem.

For more detailed information and publications on WPS, the digital ecosystem and emerging technologies, check out Our Secure Future's [Project Delphi](#) initiative.



**MEANINGFUL
PARTICIPATION**



**MORE
RESOURCES**



**BROADER
POLITICAL WILL**



**BETTER
OUTCOMES**

Gender Blindspots in the Digital Space

TECHNOLOGY INFRASTRUCTURE



In the U.S., the technology industry is **70% white** and **75% male**



Half of technology startups do not have a **single woman** on their leadership teams



Women make up less than **27%** of the global technology workforce

POLICY GAP:

Technology and AI systems reflect the people who create them. In the U.S., the technology industry is 75% male and 70% white resulting in technology and AI systems designed by and for white men.² Globally, women make up less than 27% of technology jobs.³ This underrepresentation creates inherent systemic biases and facilitates the erasure of diverse perspectives in emerging technologies. Biases in AI systems have real world implications.

For example, an automated resume screening process used by [Amazon](#) in 2015 showed that women were underrepresented in the dataset of job applicants used to train the model.⁴ As a result, the recruitment model associated successful employment with men, thus discarding resumes submitted by female candidates and effectively discriminating against women in the hiring process.

SOLUTION:

OSF's 2021 report on [Women, Peace and Security and the Digital Ecosystem](#) found that biases in these systems can be remedied not only by having a more diverse technology sector, but by also including "other types of expertise and experiences, such as gender experts, when designing and creating new technologies, and technology policies."⁵

ONLINE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

POLICY GAP:

Women face an array of dangers online and are the main victims of online gender-based violence (GBV), as illustrated by [statistics gathered by the World Wide Web Foundation](#).⁶ Technology is being used by malign actors to discourage the participation of certain groups online, specifically women, through means like intimate image abuse, trolling, doxing and threats of offline abuse. GBV has also been shown to be an early warning sign or a harbinger of broader security challenges, and the uptick in GBV cases online should be heeded as such.

SOLUTION:

Technology policy needs to address the range of threats faced by women online. When approaching solutions to online gender-based violence, policymakers should engage with women and acknowledge their agency and right to participate in the digital ecosystem.



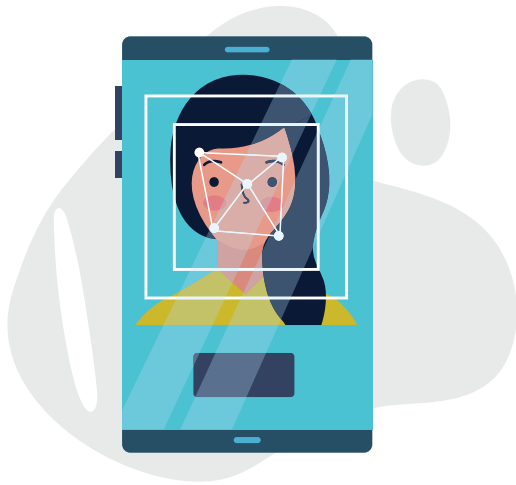
52% of young women globally have experienced some form of digital harm

68% of online abuse has taken place on social media platforms

87% believe the problem is getting worse

- World Wide Web Foundation, "Survey - Young people's experience of online harassment"

DISINFORMATION



Deepfakes – AI generated or manipulated media – almost exclusively target women and overwhelmingly feature non-consensual sexual imagery.

- Center for International Governance Innovation, "Women, Not Politicians, Are Targeted Most Often by Deepfake Videos"

POLICY GAP:

According to the Wilson Center's *Malign Creativity: How Gender, Sex, and Lies are Weaponized Against Women Online*, "[g]endered and sexualized disinformation is a phenomenon distinct from broad-based gendered abuse ... it is a subset of online gendered abuse that uses false or misleading gender and sex-based narratives against women, often with some degree of coordination, aimed at deterring women from participating in the public sphere."⁷

Gendered disinformation campaigns against women politicians worldwide lead to harassment and violence and threaten democracy, silencing diversity of opinions and chilling women's civic participation. As examined in OSF's guide, *A Gender Perspective on AI Risks to National Security*, deepfakes, an example of AI deception, predominantly target women.⁸

SOLUTION:

It is the responsibility of technology companies and state actors to address disinformation online, but the gendered aspects of disinformation are rarely recognized. It is imperative that a gender lens be integrated into such efforts to better understand disinformation trends and their varied consequences.

BUSINESS

POLICY GAP:

It is time for companies to recognize the economic power that women hold. According to *The Urgent Case for Gender Equality in the Digital Age* by OSF and Foreign Policy, women control an increasing share of wealth globally with 32 percent of the world's wealth, or around \$72 trillion.⁹ Protecting their participation in the digital economy should therefore be a business priority, as growing instances of online harassment push women off digital platforms and impact businesses' real earnings.

SOLUTION:

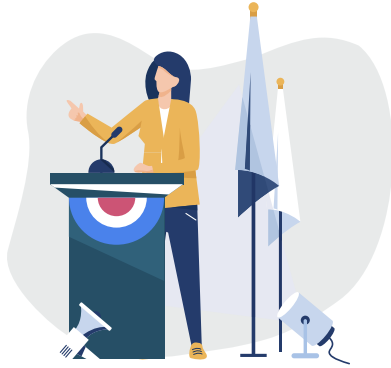
As global economic activity becomes increasingly driven by the digital sphere and expansion of e-commerce, the full inclusion of women in the digital economy will lead to better economic opportunities for everyone.

"Systems that intentionally or unintentionally exclude women and other marginalized groups and fail to account for how they participate online is a significant blind spot for businesses."



"Approximately one billion women remain unable to access financial services because of limited access to mobile phones, underdeveloped digital skills, and inappropriate products, among other barriers."

- Foreign Policy and Our Secure Future, "The Urgent Case for Gender Equality in the Digital Age"



“Online violence against women in politics creates a hostile environment which causes women to self-censor, be silent, or otherwise withdraw from online political discourse.”

- National Democratic Institute, “Tweets that Chill: Analyzing Online Violence Against Women in Politics”

POLICY GAP:







Online platforms have become a tool for political and civic engagement. But when half of the population is left out of the digital ecosystem, democracy suffers. As stated in [The Urgent Case for Gender Equality in the Digital Age](#), “half of women believe the internet is a dangerous place to share their thoughts, a viewpoint that undermines security and social stability by discouraging women’s political and civic engagement.”¹⁰ This is the result of a digital ecosystem that has enabled online gender-based biases and abuses.

SOLUTION:

In alignment with the WPS agenda, policymakers and technology sector actors must consult with women leaders and women-led civil society organizations to ensure women’s meaningful online participation in democratic processes and discourse.

Call to Action

Despite these obstacles, there are many opportunities to create a safer and more equal digital ecosystem. There are advancements currently being made in the policy space, including the [White House Task Force to address online harassment and abuse](#) and its disproportionate effect on women, girls, and LGBTQI+ individuals.¹¹ These measures are moving towards the much-needed integration of a gender lens in technology policy-making. But additional steps are needed:

-  **SUPPORT WOMEN ONLINE**
Women are more likely to face harassment online and in the media than men. Vocal support will increase participation and help create a safe space for women to participate.
-  **CREATE ACCOUNTABILITY**
Every organization has the opportunity to improve their approach to gender. Set public standards and metrics to hold your organization accountable.
-  **PRIORITIZE DIVERSITY OF ALL KINDS**
Women make up 50 percent of the world, and gender-based data is often the easiest to research. Gathering gender-based data uplifts all societal groups, and champions diversity of all kinds and experiences to foster inclusivity and progress.
-  **ALWAYS CONDUCT GENDER ANALYSIS**
Any project or program design and analysis must consider the socially constructed roles of men and women, as most roles are related to class, age, or ethnicity. Gender analysis has helped address everything from the pay gap to emergency food assistance.
-  **LIFT UP THE STORIES OF WOMEN**
Individual stories resonate and are relatable. When possible, include individual stories in research, panel discussions, and news reporting.
-  **EMBRACE A PARTICIPATORY PROCESS**
Women want to be heard and they will speak if given the opportunity, but often women are placed in male-dominated environments. Look for ways for women to participate fully and on equal footing.



OUR SECURE FUTURE

Women Make the Difference

Gender perspectives improve security outcomes

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oursecurefuture.org | [@OurSecureFuture](https://twitter.com/OurSecureFuture)

Endnotes

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