



# How we address online violence

Photo: © UNICEF/Gilbertson VII

## Background

**Online violence against women and girls is on the rise.** It has been exacerbated during the global pandemic as women's lives shifted online for work, education, access to services and social activities. While there continue to be significant gaps in data, one global report suggests that prevalence of online violence against women and girls ranges from 16% to 58%.<sup>1</sup>

Similar to other forms of violence against women and girls, online violence is rooted in gender inequality, discrimination, and power imbalances. It occurs as part of a continuum that is often connected to offline violence and in turn, reinforces other forms of violence, such as domestic abuse, stalking, and physical aggression. Its impact can be as harmful with negative effects on the health and wellbeing of women and girls as well as serious economic, social, and political impacts.

The Spotlight Initiative is committed to addressing all forms of violence including online violence against women and girls. **The Initiative has focused on strengthening laws and policies and implementing school-based and data-driven interventions** to ensure a more effective response to addressing online violence against women and girls.

## Here's how

- In **Argentina**, the Initiative developed a Digital Gender Violence virtual course including on online violence against women and girls as part of the broader work on comprehensive sexuality education for educators.
- In **Belize**, the Spotlight Initiative provided recommendations in support of the amendment of the Cyber Crime Act
- **The Central Asia and Afghanistan Regional Programme** hosted the Spotlight Digital Challenge, educating youth on different ways in which technology may be leveraged to end violence as well as perpetuate online violence
- **The Latin America Regional Programme** in partnership with the Behavioral Insights Team explored the intrinsic link between COVID-19 and the increase in online violence and cyber-bullying and developed innovative analysis on the use of behavioral science to address online violence against women and girls
- In **Vanuatu**, the Initiative partnered with the Internet Governance Forum to generate data related to students' experiences with different forms of online violence and supported the development of the National Plan for Child Online Protection.
- In **Zimbabwe**, through the Initiative's advocacy, support in drafting and parliamentary consultations, the Data Protection Act was enacted in December 2021. It is the most comprehensive legal frameworks in the southern African region addressing online violence against women and girls. The Act criminalizes the use of information and digital technology to commit online violence, including non-consensual image-based abuse and online child sexual exploitation and abuse. Comprehensive amendments have been made to the criminal law that acknowledges the increased risk of online violence against women and children.

<sup>1</sup> Jacqueline Hicks (October 2021) Institute of Development Studies. Global evidence on the prevalence and impact of online gender-based violence (OGBV).