

Intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: gender stereotypes and negative social norms (A/RES/75/161 and A/RES/77/193).

Specifically, the following information should be provided:

Measures to address violence against women and girls, as per resolution A/RES/77/193.

- Austria is constantly taking measures to prevent all forms of violence against women and girls. In particular, the full implementation of the "*Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence*" (Istanbul Convention), which largely overlaps with the concerns of the respective resolution, is a priority for Austria.
- Further details on the recent measures taken by Austria to combat all forms of violence against women and girls can be found in the "*Thematic Evaluation Report on the Implementation of the Istanbul Convention*".¹

Impacts of technological change on all forms of violence against women and girls in online-offline spaces including gaps, trends, and challenges.

- In order to gain a better overview of the increasing aspect of cyber violence in Austria, Austria commissioned the following studies on cyber violence:
 - The study report on "**Cyber-Violence against Women and Girls in Austria**" (2018) provides information on the extent, the different forms and consequences of digital violence against women and girls as well as on support structures in cases of digital violence. Approximately 1.000 girls and women were interviewed about their experiences with cyber-violence. In addition, focus groups with people affected by online violence and an online survey with counselling centres and centres for the protection against violence were conducted throughout Austria.²

The study found that one out of three women and girls surveyed experienced online violence. Women and girls were particularly often affected by online insults and verbal abuse.
 - The study "**(No) Space: Cyber-violence against women in (ex) intimate relationships**" (2022) examines the role of technology in violence within intimate relations. The affected women often do not have a safe space, where they can protect themselves from the continuous threat and control. The scientific knowledge base shows a significant gap in this research field, resulting in an inability to satisfy the demand of counselling centers for women and the police to increase the safety of affected women.³

The study further identified the securing of evidence as a particular problem in cases of digital forms of violence against women, as it is laborious.

¹ <https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/dam/jcr:3bcf9045-c364-48d9-9ee9-971f7d758c2e/en-staatenbericht-final-v2.pdf>

² <https://gmr.lbg.ac.at/news/cyber-violence-against-women-and-girls-in-austria/?lang=en>

³ <https://www.fh-campuswien.ac.at/forschung/projekte-und-aktivitaeten/kein-raum-cyber-gewalt-gegen-frauen-in-ex-beziehungen.html>

- Even though Austria is constantly making effort to gain knowledge on cyber violence and to adapt the national measures to the new findings, it takes some time for these to have an effect. Accordingly, it is seen as a challenge that online risks change faster than the required national (legal) adjustments.
- At the same time, the technological change has brought about numerous improvements, e.g. with regard to victims' rights. Among others, counselling can be offered via video-supported tools and victims have the right to testify via video link.

Measures taken to address the impacts of technological change on VAWG, in the following areas:

Generating data and research

- Austria is undertaking efforts to increase knowledge about cyber violence. This includes the **public procurement of respective studies** (please see above).
- Also, the annual „Crime Statistics“ by the police include data on cyber-specific criminal offences of the Austrian Criminal Code. The police records data on individual characteristics of the suspect and the victim, such as gender and age as well as the relationship between the suspect and the victim.

Strengthening of laws, policies, regulatory frameworks, and accountability.

- Austria continuously reacts to external changes by **adapting national laws**.
- A milestone to combat online violence was the first statutory package on **“Hatred Online”**. It includes, inter alia, refined criminal law regulations (in particular on violation of the right to the personal image, hate speech postings and cyberbullying) and criminal procedural law regulations (for the effective prosecution of hate crimes and for victim protection) as well as adjustments relating to media law.

In particular, a new criminal offense increases the protection of the right to the personal image against unauthorized visual recordings (e.g. “upskirting”; Section 120a of the Criminal Code) and psychosocial and legal assistance was expanded to certain victim groups, such as victims of online hate speech and underage witnesses of violence in their social environment (Section 66b of the Code of Criminal Procedure).

Expanding services to support survivors and improving access to justice.

- Austria has a dense net of violence specific support services for women and girls affected.
- The **violence protection centres** in each federal province provide comprehensive counselling and support to women, men and children directly affected by domestic violence and stalking. The services are fully funded by the state.⁴
Due to the higher amount of counselling work resulting from the growing aspect of cyber violence in (ex-)relationships, the **contracts with the violence protection centres were expanded**. The additional funds of EUR 5 million per year will be used, inter alia, for counselling in cases of cyber violence.
- Furthermore, in 2017, the first Austrian wide contact point for those affected by cyber violence has been set up by the organization **ZARA**. ZARA offers specific support for people affected by cyber violence.⁵

⁴ <https://www.gewaltschutzzentrum.at/>

⁵ cyber violence

- Moreover, many counselling services have started to offer **online counselling**. Apart from the „HelpChat“ and the „Women's Helpline“, adequate online advice tools have been set up in some provinces, such as Styria and Upper Austria.
For example, the “online platform for women's counselling” which was established in Upper Austria, offers help and information for all women and girls from the age of 14 as well as relatives or friends. A team of psychosocial counsellors and legal practitioners is available. Online counselling is free of charge, anonymous and is provided via a web-based application ensuring secure exchange of data. The service can be used via computer, tablet or smartphone.
- In order to guarantee that counselors are trained regarding the various impacts of cyber violence on victims, continuing **education trainings** on the topic of cyber violence in (ex-)relationships were organized. From March 2021 to March 2023, approx. 150 employees of counselling centres in Austria were trained.
- Furthermore, **specialized cybercrime officers** are being trained by the police. They are sensitized on digital forms of violence against women. The Austrian authorities' long-term goal is to have at least one cybercrime officer at every police station across the country.
- Moreover, in 2023, a pilot project was started at several public prosecutors' offices across the country, where **competence centres for cybercrime** were established. This trend in specialization of law enforcement personnel on cybercrime shall contribute to a more efficient investigation of digital forms of violence against women.
- Besides, in order to improve the access to justice, **psychosocial and legal assistance** was expanded to certain victim groups, such as victims of online hate speech (Section 66b of the Code of Criminal Procedure).

Investing in long term prevention to transform social norms and behaviours.

- As gender-based violence is rooted in inequality and unbalanced power relations, Austria introduced various measures to fight inequality and to transform social norms and behaviours. This fight is a cross-sectional matter and thus concerns all ministries in Austria.
- It is e.g. believed that children must be taught how to use digital media and technology at an early age. Thus, the **compulsory school subject** of “Digitale Grundbildung [digital literacy]” was introduced at schools across Austria in 2022. Pupils and students must learn the necessary skills for using digital media responsibly and reflectively at a young age, avoiding harming themselves or others.
- Further, several **projects** are funded to empower women and girls in the digital sphere. For instance, in 2022, several projects focusing on “measures for more empowerment of girls and women in the digital world and diversification of their training path and career choices with a focus on mathematics, information technology, natural sciences and technology” were funded.
- In addition, Austria funds **victim-focused work with offenders and offender-related interventions with men** in the area of domestic violence. The goal is to improve the situation of women and children or other family members that may be affected by domestic violence by helping men to reduce their violent behaviour.
- As of September 2021 **“Anti-violence Counselling Centres”** were established throughout Austria. Ever since, persons against whom a **protection and mobile restraining order** was issued **are required** to contact an anti-violence counselling

centre within five days and make an appointment for anti-violence counselling within 14 days. At least six hours of anti-violence counselling must be attended.

Investing in innovation and technology to create safe online spaces, prevention, reporting and protection mechanisms.

- *Please refer to the previous comments.*
- In order to provide an up-to-date overview of general and specific counseling services Austria has established the website <https://www.hilfsangebote-bei-gewalt-gegen-frauen.at/hilfe-gegen-gewalt.html>.
- Furthermore, digital outreach services are offered, e.g., through the project "Shirin spricht!" [**Shirin talks**]. The project carries out digital prevention and educational work via social media in the context of forced marriage and domestic violence.⁶

Establishing global initiatives and partnerships, including with the private sector, technology providers, women's rights organizations, and feminist technology experts.

- In Austria, the collaboration with NGOs has a long-standing history. Women's rights organizations are represented in all major **working groups**, such as the "No Hate Speech Committee".
- Due to the specific need for counselling of women affected by cyber violence, the "**Competence Centre Against Cyber Violence**" was established in Vienna in 2020. IT security specialists of the City of Vienna support the 24/7 women's emergency helpline of the City of Vienna (+43 1/71719) and the "Association Vienna Shelters" (helpline: +43 1 5123839) in cases, where psychosocial counsellors reach the limits of their technological expertise in cases of cyber violence.
- Also, in order to address the topic of cyber violence in public, the third annual **Anti-Violence Summit** (held jointly by the Ministry for Women, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry for Social Affairs) focused on "**cyber violence against women in (ex-)relationships**". The summit was held as an in-person networking event on 6 December 2022. The general objective of the annual Anti-Violence Summits is to take "joint action" against violence, to raise awareness among the population and to **further and strengthen networking among all organizations and public authorities** dealing with the issue.

⁶ <https://www.orientexpress-wien.com/shirinspricht>