



**Submission for Call for Inputs – Protection of human rights defenders in the digital age
by Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights**

Submitted by **Global Action for Trans Equality**¹

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Introduction

Over time, trans HRDs have confronted an unprecedented convergence of challenges that threatens their ability to sustain their movements and the right to freedom of association in civic and digital spaces. This submission highlights how coordinated anti-gender (AG) movements use strategic digital campaigns to deploy sophisticated strategies aimed at delegitimizing trans existence and dismantling the work of trans-led organizations and trans HRDs. This also demonstrates that governments have created architectures of oppression that turn AG ideology into digital campaigns and legislative restrictions. Furthermore, AI technologies also serve as force multipliers, spreading disinformation on a large scale and making digital environments in which trans HRDs work systematically more hostile and dangerous.

1. Global Anti-Gender Movements and The Impact on Trans and Gender Diverse HRDs

1.1 Coordinated Online Spaces and the Weaponization of Narrative

- The most pervasive threat to trans and gender diverse HRDs is no longer isolated hostility but a coordinated, well-resourced transnational (AG) movement that operates primarily through digital infrastructure.
- GATE's 2023 global research documented that the biggest threat to trans and gender diverse human rights defenders comes from AG movements that have been using the same talking points on family values, sex education, abortion, child protection, and opposition to Western influence to stoke fear and mobilize public opposition. Across the seven regions studied, these movements are mostly right-wing but are increasingly attracting people and politicians from across the political spectrum (GATE, 2023).
- The social media platforms are the primary operational infrastructure through which coordinated attacks against trans HRDs are carried out. AG actors use these platforms to spread disinformation, coordinate pile-on harassment campaigns, and systematically report trans HRDs' and trans-led organizations' accounts for suspension (GATE, 2023).
- Respondents identified weak political will, insufficient legal protections, and a lack of accountability for perpetrators as the most significant barriers to countering this opposition (GATE, 2023).

¹ Founded in 2009, **Global Action for Trans Equality (GATE)** is an international advocacy and expert organization focused on gender identity and expression. GATE works towards justice and equality for trans and gender diverse communities at the global level. Rooted in our movements, we collaborate with international, regional and national strategic partners to ensure access to resources, knowledge, and decision-making spaces.
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- Even when platforms receive reports of violent threats and false information, our trans and gender diverse respondents report that social media platform providers rarely take action to remove content or sanction accounts (GATE, 2023).

1.2 Platform-Based Attacks and the Systematic Suppression of Trans-Led Advocacy

- The digital attacks compound the systematic defunding of trans and gender diverse HRDs' work. As a result, the top three impacts identified include:
 - 1) psycho-emotional stress among trans activists, which leads to widespread burnout;
 - 2) the advocacy opportunities become severely limited as trans and gender diverse activists lose access to decision-makers influenced by AG narratives, subsequently resulting in restricted funding for trans programs;
 - 3) These factors cause a temporary pause or closure of trans and gender diverse-led organizations, events, or vital services for trans and gender diverse individuals, such as healthcare, psychological support, and legal assistance (GATE, 2023).

Key instances include:

- **Uganda:** AG disinformation played a role in influencing parliamentary decisions and fueled criminalization under the Anti-Homosexuality Act 2023, which imposes penalties up to death. GATE member organization, Prism Uganda, documented that trans organizations face criminal accusations of "promoting homosexuality," resulting in office closures, forced shutdowns, and the collapse of essential services, including HIV prevention, hormone therapy access, legal aid, and emergency shelter (Prism Uganda, 2025).
- **Armenia:** Russian-style "LGBTQI propaganda" and "foreign agent" legislation, informed by the same transnational AG playbook in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA), have created an environment in which hate speech against trans people spreads across media and social networks without legal remedy (GATE, 2023). GATE member organizations, the National Trans Coalition and Right Side NGO, report that survey participants reported that hate speech proliferates across Armenian media and social networks without legal remedy, as Armenia lacks anti-discrimination legislation covering gender identity. In their report, 92% of participants identified societal stigma as a primary cause of daily discrimination, exposing trans HRDs to targeting online and offline. Cases of murder of trans women underscore the lethal consequences of digital hostility combined with legislative inaction. (NTC & Right Side, 2025).

2. State-Coordinated Digital Oppression

2.1 The Architecture of State-Engineered Hostility in the SWANA region

- Beyond online hostility by AG movements, GATE's 2025 research on the SWANA region identifies a "triangular alliance of power" through which state-engineered hostility is carried out across the region (GATE, 2025a):
 1. **Religious Institutions:** The first pillar provides the ideological doctrine: influential state-aligned bodies, such as Egypt's Al-Azhar, construct a fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) framework that condemns gender identity confirmation as a "delusional mental disorder" while permitting intersex "correction."

2. **Political Elites:** This pillar weaponizes these religious doctrines to create populist moral panics, using AG rhetoric to deflect from crippling economic crises while simultaneously performing an anti-imperialist posture by framing trans and gender diverse identities as a "Western idea" imposed to dismantle local family values.
3. **State Security & Media:** This group translates political rhetoric into enforcement. State-controlled media systematically conflate trans and gender diverse identities with "sexual deviance." At the same time, police use "public morality" laws to criminalize individuals by proxy.
 - Given the unique tactics of State-engineered hostility in SWANA, trans and gender diverse HRDs face a dual threat, including the absence of adequate legal protections against physical and technology-facilitated gender-based violence and direct targeting by laws that criminalize their identity and expression (GATE, 2025a).
 - **Egypt:** "Debauchery" laws are enforced alongside digital entrapment tactics, in which police create fictitious profiles on dating apps to lure, identify, and arrest LGBTQI individuals (ARTICLE 19, 2024; Noralla, 2023e; Human Rights Watch, 2023; GATE, 2025a).
 - **Egypt:** The Fetrah campaign marks a key turning point in this digital mobilization: a highly organized counter-campaign that spread regionally, promoting a binary gender flag as a "unified banner" for rejecting LGBTQI identities framed as a Western cultural invasion (GATE, 2025a).
 - These cases demonstrate that State-engineered digital hostility transforms online narratives into systems of surveillance, criminalization, and enforcement.

3. AI-Generated Disinformation and Compounding Threats to Trans HRDs

- Beyond human-driven campaigns and State repression, artificial intelligence (AI) represents a rapidly escalating force for scaling anti-trans disinformation and discrimination against trans and gender diverse HRDs. The fundamental problem is that AI systems inherit human prejudices' binary gender assumptions. When gender classification systems collapse gender into simplistic male-female categories, they eliminate any potential for AI to reflect gender fluidity and self-held gender identity (SSIR, 2021).
- When these technical failures are used in national identification systems, they can become tools of state-enabled exclusion, making it impossible for trans people to get basic civil recognition or protection. This impact is particularly compounded for trans and gender diverse persons, as the technology often fails to match their current appearance with older identification photos, leading to misidentification, exclusion, and further stigmatization (The Swaddle, 2021). For example:
 - **Brazil:** The deployment of facial recognition in countries with high rates of anti-trans violence creates a particularly severe concern. The deployment of the SERPRO facial recognition system, which manages 76 million driver's licenses nationwide, is supported by survey data showing that 90.5% of trans activists believe facial recognition operates transphobically, 95.2% believe it creates vulnerability to embarrassment, and 76.2% believe it threatens privacy (Privacy International, 2024).
 - **United States:** Beyond State surveillance, the digital footprints of LGBTQIA+ individuals can also be utilized for surveillance and profiling, which increases the

likelihood of sensitive information being leaked or misused. Clearview AI scrapes billions of images from social media to build its facial recognition search engine (The New York Times, 2021).

- The weaponization of AI to spread disinformation about trans people operates through multiple interconnected mechanisms, each reinforcing harmful narratives that endanger trans lives and rights.
- **Ukraine:** LGBTI Consortium Ukraine (2024) warned that while AI systems already demonstrate bias against marginalized groups without Russian interference, the "Pravda" network uses the technique of "LLM grooming," injecting 3.6 million anti-LGBTI articles into training datasets. Content designed for AI, not humans, resulted in 33% of chatbot responses containing Russian disinformation narratives about 'traditional values' against LGBTI communities.
- **United States:** The Kaiser Family Foundation (2024) identified numerous false claims about gender-affirming care spreading through AI-enhanced distribution networks, including fabricated statistics about regret rates and invented risks of medical interventions.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

For Member States:

- Repeal laws that criminalize or restrict trans and gender diverse individuals and their activities in digital and civic spaces.
- Establish regulatory frameworks that hold technology companies accountable for disinformation and hate speech while safeguarding freedom of expression.
- Invest in digital literacy and security initiatives developed in consultation with trans and gender diverse organizations and HRDs.

For Technology Cooperates:

- Strengthen and enforce content moderation policies that address AG disinformation.
- Provide accessible complaint and remedy mechanisms for trans and gender diverse HRDs facing digital attacks.
- Ensure that identification and verification systems include self-determined gender options and avoid reinforcing binary assumptions.

For the International Stakeholders:

- Recognize the coordinated transnational nature of AG movements as a structural threat to digital safety.
- Promote international standards for social media, AI, biometric surveillance, and facial recognition that safeguard trans and gender diverse people.
- Support direct, flexible, and long-term funding for trans-led organizations to strengthen digital security, counter disinformation capacity, and organizational resilience.

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