



**Centre for
Information
Resilience**

Afghan Witness

Part III: Focus Group Recommendations

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) targeting politically engaged Afghan women.

September 2023

1 Recommendations

Afghan Witness carried out a focus group with the six politically active Afghan women interviewed for the qualitative report to facilitate the understanding and creation of useful recommendations. The following recommendations serve for both the qualitative and quantitative investigations:

- **Further research.** Afghan women's experiences and the abuse they face online remain hugely understudied. Thus, it is crucial to continue such studies and raise more awareness on the gendered hate speech and abuse Afghan women receive online. Some of the interviewees believe that the online presence of Afghan women will carry on increasing, but with it, so will the harassment and abuse from perpetrator accounts. Since the Taliban takeover, the interviewees noticed that far more pro-Taliban and extremist accounts are being created online. The interviewees fear that the online environment will become more and more toxic for Afghan women. One of the main difficulties with carrying out more research is the limitations that social media platforms have in place. As experienced during this investigation, X (formerly Twitter) has become increasingly hostile towards data scraping, regardless of whether the official API or a third part scraping tool is being used. In a similar way, Facebook has also made it difficult to collect data, requiring the use of an API.
- **Platform accountability.** Social media platforms should take more steps to protect women online, promote accountability and tackle the culture of impunity regarding gendered hate speech. Some of the interviewees mentioned that social media companies should update, increase, and revisit their hate speech policies, as well as make sure that they have monitoring policies in place to tackle hate speech efficiently. Social media platforms should also be more responsive in tackling hate speech as well as in deactivating accounts that put women's lives in danger. With the closure of the X (formerly Twitter) API, monitoring by third parties has become more complicated, making it more difficult to hold social media platforms to account.
- **Expand language capabilities for monitoring hate speech.** Both [Facebook](#) and [X \(formerly Twitter\)](#) have hate speech definitions and policies in place. One of the main issues that they are encountering, however, is monitoring and taking down hate speech in other languages. This is the [case](#), especially with minority languages and regional dialects that are harder to detect. For this reason, it would be beneficial for social media platforms to strengthen their understanding and expand their focus to include other languages that are used to target women. By learning more about local context and regional languages, social media platforms would be able to monitor hate speech targeting women more efficiently.
- **More education and awareness.** The interviewees suggested the need to strengthen and increase Afghan women's awareness, especially those who use social media, to make sure that they feel safe online. In this case, the interviewees suggested producing social media content (for example, reels and infographics) that could teach women online safety. Topics that could be relevant are in relation to safety and security online - namely, how to use social media safely, how to efficiently protect one's digital identity, and how to spot fake news. The interviewees believed that a more practical approach is needed and that training is not the best practice as it might be difficult due to logistical and

organisational reasons.

- **Network or alliance building.** The interviewees suggested the need to create an alliance of politically engaged Afghan women who have been targeted by the de facto authorities, and experienced gendered abuse online. It would be important to build a network or alliance of Afghan women to give a voice to those targeted by abuse, as well as creating a space where they can have a more proactive role in creating a healthier online environment.

