



# DeStalk

detect and stop stalkerware and  
cyberviolence against women

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### D4.1 Protocol for a territorial campaign strategy addressing the topic of cyber violence and stalkerware

#### *GIVEN THAT*

Male violence against women is a widespread and structured phenomenon which finds its roots in the deep inequality - still persistent - in the relationships between man and women. The UN “Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women” (1993) defines male violence as follows: “*Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life*”;<sup>1</sup>

Through time this definition has become a reference and it has been used in other recommendations, such as the international legislation for preventing and combating the phenomenon and the body of literature issued in this regard. Especially, the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul, 2011) states the following:

*The expression “violence against women” is understood as a **violation of human rights** and a form of discrimination against women and shall mean all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, **physical, sexual, psychological, or economic harm** or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. The expression “gender-based violence against woman” shall mean **violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman** or that affects women disproportionately*

#### OBSERVED THAT

The growth and the spread of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) at a global level, of Internet and social media, is a relevant factor for the practice of violence against women. Facing this

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<sup>1</sup> CEDAW (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women) General Recommendation no. 19 of 1992 recognized the gender factor on violence against women.

new scenario, the CEDAW - Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women adopted the Recommendation no. 35/2017<sup>2</sup>, stating that “gender-based violence against women occurs in all spaces and spheres of human interaction, whether public or private. These include the family, the community, the public spaces, the workplace, leisure, politics, sport, health services, educational settings and their redefinition through technology-mediated environments, such as contemporary forms of violence occurring in the Internet and digital spaces.” (CEDAW, 2017:6) This explicit reference fully acknowledges the cyberspace as one of the dimensions where violence against women occurs.

Research<sup>3</sup> published by EIGE - European Institute for Gender Equality - counted different forms of virtual violence against woman and girls, such as cyberstalking, non-consensual pornography (or revenge porn), gender-based insults and harassment, sexual stigmatization, unwanted pornography, sextortion, rape and death threats, research, and publication online of personal and private information (doxing) and the trafficking in human beings virtually perpetrated.

Forms of violence perpetrated in the cyberspace include cyberstalking, referring to the practice of spying on someone through IT devices to have control over their daily life, also by installing a software (stalkerware) on their devices to intercept messages, chats, calls, movements, and activities in the social networks. Online violence represents a continuum of offline violence, as most often forms of violence perpetrated in the “real” world continue and get exacerbated in the cyber space or through ICT.

In October 2021<sup>4</sup> GREVIO - Group of Experts on Action against Violence towards Women and Domestic Violence - defined cyberviolence as follows:

**DIGITAL DIMENSION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN:** *it encompasses a wide range of acts online or through technology that are part of the continuum of violence that women and girls experience for reasons related to their gender, including in the domestic sphere, in that it is a legitimate and equally harmful manifestation of the gender-based violence experienced by women and girls offline.* (GREVIO, 2021:13)

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<sup>2</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women General recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19, CEDAW/C/GC/35, July 14, 2017, available at: [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/1\\_Global/CEDAW\\_C\\_GC\\_35\\_8267\\_E.pdf](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/1_Global/CEDAW_C_GC_35_8267_E.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Virtual violence against women and girls, 2017, available at: [https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/ti\\_pubpdf\\_mh0417543itn\\_pdfweb\\_20171026164002.pdf](https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/ti_pubpdf_mh0417543itn_pdfweb_20171026164002.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> GREVIO General Recommendation No. 1 on the digital dimension of violence against women – available at: <https://rm.coe.int/grevio-rec-no-on-digital-violence-against-women/1680a49147>

According to this definition, the digital dimension of violence against woman includes **both violent acts perpetrated through webpages, through the collection or publication of data online, and violent behaviors carried out by means of technological devices, hardware, or software.**

The “Proposal for a Directive of the European parliament and of the Council on combating violence against women and domestic violence” (Strasbourg, 8<sup>th</sup> March 2022)<sup>5</sup>, recalling all the previous ones, gives further analyses in this regard. It underlines the responsibilities of Member States to provide support for victims and to adopt specific measures, in terms of laws too, for combating the phenomenon. It defines the crimes related to this field and the corresponding sentences, giving the possibility for national legal authorities to intervene - even against providers of intermediary services - by ordering the removal of the material in question.

In these recent years, the Italian national legislation responded to international and European recommendations with the introduction of new specific crimes in the criminal code to combat some forms of cyberviolence (see art. 10 of Law 69/2019 that introduced the crime for illicit sharing of sexually explicit images or videos – *Revenge Porn*). In other cases, the Italian legislator introduced the use of ICT as an aggravating circumstance of other crimes (see art 612 bis of Italian criminal code, modified by law 119/2013)

#### CONSIDERED THAT

**Online violence and stalkerware are hidden but increasing acts of gender violence<sup>6</sup>.** In Europe, one in ten women have been survivors of online violence since age 15, 20% of young women suffer from online harassment and the risk of online violence seems to be particularly high among young woman aged between 18 and 24 years old. 70% of victims of cyberstalking has also suffered physical and/or sexual abuse by their partner or ex-partner. Likewise, 71% of domestic violence perpetrators control over their partner’s PC and 54% track their mobile phone through specific software for stalking. Stalkerware used

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<sup>5</sup> Commissione europea, “Proposta di Direttiva del Parlamento Europeo e del Consiglio sulla lotta alla violenza contro le donne e alla violenza domestica” (Strasburgo, 8 marzo 2022),

<sup>6</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality. (2017, June 19) Cyber violence is a growing threat, especially for women and girls; Coalition against Stalkerware. (2019). The State of Stalkerware in 2019; European Union Agency for the Fundamental Rights. (2014). Violence against women: an EU-wide survey. Main results.; European Union (2018). Cyber violence and hate speech online against women. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/604979/IPOL\\_STU\(2018\)604979\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/604979/IPOL_STU(2018)604979_EN.pdf).

to track mobile devices is increasingly growing, thanks to the fast technological evolution and the easy access to the tools to practice it.

Online violence is a global problem with growing dimensions and with relevant economic and social consequences<sup>7</sup>. It is part of the **continuum** of “traditional” violence practices happening in the “real world” because it works as the offline violence. It is often related to the social and psychological negative consequences of violence against woman, to a worsening in the quality of life and to physical, psychological, and sexual abuse.

### CONSIDERED THAT

There is a strong need for a strict supervision on prevention and fight against cyberviolence and this is one of the essential activities for achieving a safe virtual space, not only for women and girls, but for all people, no matter their identity or social affiliation. The growth of the internet entails the need for regulative interventions, not only from a social point of view, in order to repress criminal manners and behaviors online, instead of not fostering them, without limiting the freedom of speech and expression.

In order to fight against online violence, it is of utmost importance not only the definition of the forms of this kind of violence, but also knowing the tools used to practice it, especially to raise women’s awareness about the existing instruments which may be used to control or to offend them. For this reason, it is important to know from a technical point of view all those mechanisms that allow online violence, in such a way as to get a better understanding of online violence attitudes and behaviors.

Today more than ever, it is necessary to open a discussion among the stakeholders engaged in the prevention and fight against violence towards women in order to improve the understanding of online violence dynamics and the related interventions.

These are the main goals and reasons that led to the design of ***DeStalk - a crosscutting strategy for detecting and removing stalkerware in intimate relationships***<sup>8</sup>, a project that started in January 2021 funded by the European Union and coordinated by Fundación Blanquerna, a research and educational

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<sup>7</sup> UN Broadband Commission for Digital Development (2015). Cyber Violence Against Women and Girls: A Worldwide Wake-Up Call. Available at: [http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2015/cyber\\_violence\\_gender%20report.pdf?vs=4259](http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2015/cyber_violence_gender%20report.pdf?vs=4259)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.work-with-perpetrators.eu/destalk>

center of Ramon Lull University (Spain), together with international and interdisciplinary partnership made up of:

- Kaspersky, an industry-leading cybersecurity company
- Regione del Veneto (Italy)
- “Una Casa per l’Uomo” - NGO (Veneto, Italy)
- WWP European Network, the umbrella association for programs working with perpetrators.

*DeStalk* project’s **general objective** is to develop a capacity-building strategy aimed at training professionals working in survivors support centers and in perpetrators programs, but also to officials working in local and public institutions, among other stakeholders, by providing them with the tools and the knowledge to identify and face cyber violence and stalkerware.

During Work Package 4 (WP4) “Capacity building for relevant stakeholders - private and public - for addressing cyber violence and stalkerware through defining a territorial strategy” **a pilot communication campaign about online violence and stalkerware is expected to be developed and launched**, designed, and experimented in the Veneto Region (Italy).

One of the goals of the above-mentioned work package is also the writing of a **Protocol defining a common territorial strategy** to be adopted for the implementation of communication campaign.

#### UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES

This protocol takes into consideration the outcomes of the other actions of the *DeStalk* project and the input of relevant stakeholders involved by partners.

The protocol is aimed at defining the most suitable and efficient methodologies to deploy the communication campaign envisioned by the *DeStalk* project, through the development of a territorial strategy for the implementation of the action.

The communication campaign, with its targets, messages, and tools, is the direct outcome of the work carried out during the project and takes into consideration the feedback from the activities already implemented and the inputs from local stakeholders and professionals that work to prevent and combat gender-based violence

Messages, tools, and models of the campaign are developed with **the ultimate goal of increasing the safety** of women and children who are victims/survivors of gender-based violence in its digital dimensions. The campaign shall consider and foresee any possible “boomerang effect”, that is, its content shall avoid giving unintentional hints to perpetrators on how to use technology to perpetrate violence.

Specific goals of the campaign include:

- a) **Provide proper and effective information** on the digital dimension of gender-based violence in all its forms
- b) **Provide** victims/survivors **of** cyberviolence with information to contact local support centers trained and prepared to work on this specific field

As already mentioned, the campaign will be designed and implemented in the Veneto Region and spread to the whole Italian territory. Nevertheless, considering the supranational worth of *DeStalk* project, models and tools will be conceived in order to be adaptable and usable by other actors (i.e., Public European Institutions or NGOs) who might be willing to propose similar campaigns to their territories.

The contents of the campaign will be first defined by partners in charge of the corresponding WP, and the results will be discussed and approved by all project partners. The implementation of the campaign and the related tools will be entrusted to a third actor, a qualified communication company with specific expertise and previous experience in the designing of awareness campaigns related to social and sanitary issues, with a specific focus on gender-based violence.

The communication campaign on the digital dimension of GBV will take place during the UN’s “**16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence**” which is an annual international campaign that kicks off on 25 November, *the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women*, and runs until 10 December, *Human Rights Day*.

The details of the strategy for the communication campaign (targets, tools, messages, media) will be shared with the participants to an interinstitutional roundtable scheduled by Veneto Region.

The campaign will include, among others, the following activities:

1) Press office

- drafting of the launch press release, based on materials provided by partners, that will describe the concept and contents of the project. the press release will be prepared in different formats to suit different communication channels
- organization of interviews on the topic of cyberviolence, that will involve both project partners and participants to the Institutional Roundtable
- collection of quotes by participants to the campaign, underlying the involvement of their organization to the campaign

2) Design of communication materials

- definition of contents and messages for the campaign
- design of graphics for the campaign

3) Launch event

organized in Venice on November 25th (International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women) with the participation of the participants to the Roundtables, the Italian Antiviolence Network D.i.Re, relevant stakeholders, Survivors Support Services and Perpetrators Programs

The actions of the communication campaign will be differentiated for the different target groups:

- women victims/survivors of cyberviolence
- men perpetrators of cyberviolence
- professionals working with the abovementioned groups
- IT professionals
- Bystanders
- general public

The campaign will be implemented in the regional area in order to be tested, with the involvement of services working for the prevention and the fight against male violence and of formal and informal anti-violence networks.

All tasks carried out in the framework of the communication campaign will last as foreseen in the project schedule. However, the supranational worth of the project and the designing of replicable models and



tools - available for those who will be willing to use them - is the guarantee for the replicability and the sustainability of the initiative.

#### GIVEN THE ABOVE

The participants to the *Regional coordination table for the prevention and contrast of violence against women* recognize the relevance of the topic of cyberviolence and the importance of a joint effort in the capillary diffusion of information regarding cyberviolence and stalkerware.

Participants commit to:

- participating to the launch event for the campaign, that will be organized in collaboration with Regione del Veneto on November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2022
- collaborating in the drafting of the press release for the launch of the campaign by releasing quotes or interviews on the role of their Entity in the campaign
- promote the campaign within their respective entities
- collaborating in the diffusion of the campaign materials

Project partners commit to:

- sharing all materials on the assessment and prevention of cyberviolence developed during the DeStalk project
- sharing materials related to the communication campaign
- organizing a webinar on practical and theoretical aspects of cyberviolence and stalkerware, dedicated to the participants to the Table and the staff of the entities they represent
- keeping the Table informed on the development of the campaign

Venice, 6<sup>th</sup> June 2022