

The Executive Office has been mandated to lead the development of the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy (EVAWG). This process has included a programme of research and engagement, the publication of Call for Views Summary Report in August 2022 and public consultation on draft Strategic Framework, draft Foundational Action Plan and related EQIA which closed on 3 October 2023. The views of stakeholders throughout that engagement are reflected in this response.

Research, Evidence and Evaluation

Outcome

By 2027, there will be better understanding and measurement of media literacy, due to stakeholders using our research evidence for their policy development and activities. By 2027, there will be a deeper understanding of 'what works' for the delivery of media literacy interventions in relevant sectors.

GOAL ONE: Continue to use our research to inform our policy development and media literacy interventions, and to encourage its use and further analysis by stakeholders.

GOAL TWO: Amplify the voices and testimony of a range of groups within society so that our research is useful to as many people and organisations as possible.

GOAL THREE: Share our knowledge on 'what works' in media literacy delivery.

GOAL FOUR: Support providers of media literacy initiatives to carry out evaluation, leading to a culture where best-practice approaches are developed, shared and used to develop more effective interventions.

Q1 - Do you agree with our proposals in this section? Please explain your reasons and provide any relevant supporting evidence.

- Under Goal One, our programme of engagement indicated that there is a need to explore why users engage in the perpetration of harmful activity which disproportionately affects women and girls.

The findings of the *2022 Northern Ireland Young Life and Times survey* (with over 1000 responses from 16-year-olds) explored young people's exposure to violent acts and behaviours, many of which were online. The findings demonstrate the disproportionate effect on women and girls:

- receiving an unwanted intimate photo/video (**females: 52%, males 20%**)
- of someone requesting or putting pressure on them to share an intimate photo or video (**females: 40%, males 15%**)
- of being sent unwanted sexually explicit pictures, photos of videos online (**females: 59%, males 29%**)
- of being shown sexually explicit pictures, photos of videos in person (**females: 52%, males 36%**).
- **28% of females (but only 6% of males)** reported receiving an intimate photo or video 'sometimes' or 'often'.

- **38% of females (but only 13% of males)** reported being sent unwanted sexually explicit pictures, photos or videos online.
- **8 times more females (24%) than males (3%)** reported that someone 'sometimes' or 'often' requested or put pressure on them to share an intimate photo or video.
- There is a need to understand how people get drawn into communities that propagate and promote discriminatory views against women and girls. Some of our stakeholders have highlighted the rise of the INCEL culture online, WhatsApp groups whose members who use misogynistic and disparaging about women and girls, and the disproportionate impact of online influencers who hold misogynistic and derogatory views about women and girls.
- Under Goal Two of research, evidence and evaluation there is a need to amplify the voices of women and girls as outlined to enable them to enjoy the benefits of being online through having skills and knowledge, whilst enjoying these safely and with confidence.
- The amplification of the voices of women and girls facilitates the promotion of the core components of media literacy - inclusion, participation, choice and resilience whilst recognising the disproportionate impact on women and girls of harmful content and activity. Victims of online abuse should not be encouraged to delete apps or remove themselves from social media, it should be the perpetrators behaviour that is challenged.
- In relation to Goals Three and Four it has been outlined that media literacy programmes, approaches and initiatives need to be delivered by experts in the field who can draw upon evaluated and proven resources and materials, and that these are refreshed to ensure up to date content.

Engaging platforms

Outcome

By 2027, online services will provide better media literacy support for their users, more evaluation of the impact of this support, and longer-term funding for initiatives that help provide this support.

GOAL ONE: Build on work prioritising users' media literacy on platform by promoting best practice.

GOAL TWO: Ensure that platforms embed evaluation to build understanding of what works to promote media literacy.

GOAL THREE: Work to ensure platforms' funding of media literacy programmes.

Q2: Do you agree with our proposals in this section for working with platforms? Please explain your reasons and provide any relevant supporting evidence.

- Within the inter-relationship between online safety and media literacy EVAWG would support Ofcom's consideration of including media literacy as part of the

Codes of Practice that are being developed as part of the implementation of the Online Safety Act.

- Improvements in platform's media literacy support can enhance safety by enabling inclusive access to an online environment that is safer through the provision of tools, resources and guidance that enhance the user's experience.
- In promoting best practice under Goal One EAWG welcome Ofcom's recognition of supporting the experience of specific users to enable a positive and safer environment.
- In the EAWG context this is harmful content and activity that disproportionately affects women and girls, which a research report by *SBNi – Growing Up Online in NI* has highlighted.
- Of those respondents aged 8-13 – 19.84% had something unpleasant or nasty happen to them online in the last couple of months (**for girls this was 22.61% for girls compared with 16.55% for boys**). Of those respondents aged 14-18 – 18.49% had something unpleasant or nasty happen to them online in the last couple of months (**for females this was 20.47% and for males 14.71%**).
- The *PSNI stats branch* have identified that of the 198 recorded sexual communication with a child offence in 2022/23, 68% (n=134) were known to be female.
- Under Goal Three there is a need for resources and funds to support existing media literacy programmes and to ensure that their content is up to date, accurate and addresses the disproportionate impact of harmful content on women and girls.
- Ofcom has outlined that they will achieve this by encouraging online services to promote, support and fund, either directly or indirectly, media literacy skills development for their users and others. This potential funding provision must seek to be accessible to those groups who are more adversely affected by online harms and content and need more protective measures to enable users to be safer online, including for women and girls.

People and Partnerships

Outcome:

By 2027, more people will have access to the skills and support they require to navigate content and safely flourish online, and educators and other priority workforces will be better enabled to deliver media literacy skills. By 2027, media literacy will be a greater priority for a broader range of organisations and sectors.

GOAL ONE: Commission targeted interventions in the cohorts where the need is greatest and share best practice with the sector.

GOAL TWO: Expand our training offer through partner organisations delivering continuing professional development (CPD) courses.

GOAL THREE: Continue to build on the digital inclusion infrastructure, so that those new to technology can start and continue well.

GOAL FOUR: Forge new relationships and expand our network to make media literacy a priority for a wider range of organisations.

GOAL FIVE: Build on our role as a convenor of media literacy experts to co-create policy and practical recommendations.

Q3: Do you agree with our proposals in this section? Please explain your reasons and provide any supporting evidence. We are particularly interested in any views and evidence about whether a Media Literacy Week would be impactful.

- In the context of Goal One, there is a need to provide targeted interventions for those who feel less safe online and who are disproportionately affected by online abuse and content, and would support Ofcom's identification of commissioning interventions that seek to mitigate misogynistic and sexist behaviours online.

Stakeholders have reflected the information below during EVAWG engagement meetings, in their written responses to the EVAWG Call for Views and in their responses to the public consultation:

- There has been rise in online abuse which includes online threats, coercion, cyber stalking, revenge porn and cyber flashing, leading to threats, uninvited messages, receipt of unsolicited images and harassment.
 - That the nature of comments online in both posts and comments are discriminatory, misogynistic, and threatening.
 - Online abuse can happen anywhere that allows online communication, including social networks, text messages and messaging apps, email and private messaging, online chats, comments on livestreaming sites and voice or video chat in games. Perpetrators may also share abusive images, live streams and recordings with others online.
 - Strengthening of safeguarding controls for children and young people to protect them from viewing online explicit material and engaging in harmful sexual behaviour using social media platforms.
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- When these views are considered alongside the disproportionate affect on girls, as outlined in the statistics from the findings of the *2022 Northern Ireland Young Life and Times survey* above, it highlights the need for targeted interventions. Our engagement has demonstrated that the delivery of interventions must be by experts who have experience of working with that group or groups.
 - Goal Two of the consultation document highlights the importance of media literacy education and the proposal to work with Teacher Training Providers to equip new teachers with media literacy knowledge, and to work with the Education departments to for example establish a media literacy lead in schools.

- Engagement with women and girls has highlighted that there can be a lack of expertise and knowledge in the sector, and this is added to by the unavailability of time in the school week for programmes like media literacy.
- *SBNI's – Growing Up Online in NI* research report found that 66% of children surveyed, aged between 8 and 13, felt schools were responsible for improving the safety of young people online.
- Goal Four seeks to expand networks to make media literacy a priority and provides the example of communities created by and for women and girls. This goal could act to roll out initiatives and support to organisations to provide media literacy programmes to the women and girls they support.
- This could provide an opportunity for organisations to work together to develop specific interventions to keep women and girls safer online and to promote existing programmes that could be joined into networks.
- The potential to partner with expert groups and organisations could be utilised to promote media literacy programmes through community and voluntary organisations, whose remit may extend into community, educational and health spaces.
- In correlation with the findings of *SBNI Growing Up Online in NI* report, there is a role for parents and organisations working with parents. The research found that 75% of children surveyed, aged between 8 and 13, felt parents were responsible for improving the safety of young people online. Given the pre-eminent role that children surveyed think parents should have involving parents and organisations which support parents could provide an avenue into improving media literacy for them and children.
- Stakeholders have reflected that better media literacy is required to benefit women and girls, professionals, educators and parents. This should be delivered through accessible, relevant and up to date content. The development of a media literacy week could be one part of a package of measures and initiatives to improve media literacy.

Q4: Do you agree with our assessment of the potential impact on specific groups of persons?

Our engagement would indicate that groups, including women and girls, require support with their media literacy. Women and girls are further impacted online based on intersectionality including those from LGBTQIA+ communities, those who are deaf and disabled, those from rural areas and those from minority ethnic communities. They face additional barriers which impact on two of the key components of media literacy - inclusion and participation. This can include accessibility in both communication accessibility for deaf and disabled women and girls and technological accessibility for rural women for example.