

Brussels, 24 September 2021

A letter from survivors of online sexual abuse to EU policy-makers on the Digital Services Act

Dear Members of the European Parliament,

Dear Members of the Council of the EU,

Dear President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen,

Dear Executive Vice President of the European Commission, Margrethe Vestager,

Dear Vice President of the European Commission, Věra Jourová,

Dear Commissioner for Equality, Helena Dalli,

Dear Commissioner for Internal Market, Thierry Breton

We are women from **Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Portugal and other European countries**, whose private and intimate images have been leaked on the internet with the goal to discredit, intimidate and objectify women. We have been filmed secretly at saunas or at festivals, we had our cloud servers hacked by unknown perpetrators, or we were in a relationship with someone who stole our pictures. Now, we fear for our physical safety, suffer termination of employment and/or deal with severe mental health illnesses. Yet, the perpetrators face no consequences, as **none of our cases have ever been prosecuted.**

This is the reality for too many women and members of the LGBTQI+ community. In 2020, **140,000 illegally shared, intimate, and sexual pictures** of mostly Irish women were found on the internet.¹ **Every day (!) more than nine cases of image-based abuse** are reported to the **British** government-funded "Revenge Porn Hotline".² **12% of French men** either shared intimate images without consent or are considering it.³ And this month, it will be 5 years since the **Italian Tiziana Cantone**, a victim of "revenge porn", took her own life after the justice system had let her down. These are just the publicly reported cases, while many victims suffer in silence.

The problem is accelerated by the rise of men-dominated, online INCEL (involuntary celibate) and exposer networks, which **openly promote violence against women**. They re-upload images once deleted, create collages and memes of the pictures to distribute them further, and they research the identities of the people on the pictures to send them waves of hate messages. In essence, **they ensure the internet and our personal networks never forget** we have once been exposed on the internet.

And they have a willing helping hand, as **porn-platforms are making money** from sharing abuse material. In 2020, xHamster, one of the world's largest porn-platforms with more visitors than LinkedIn and TikTok, excitedly reported an **increase in demand**, in some cases of more than 100%, for categories such as **"Exposed", "Hidden Cam", and "Public"** – exactly the categories in which abuse material is shared.⁴

Why is this even possible? First, porn-platforms are barely regulated. Thus, they only have few incentives to take measures against abuse on their platforms and to support victims. Second, the police do not have the resources to identify and prosecute perpetrators of image-based abuse. And third, victims often do not have access to adequate support structures and therefore limited power in reporting and following up with their cases. While the latter two are largely out of your decision power, you do have the power to shape internet policies to better protect us, the citizens.

We therefore urgently **need you – our politicians and policy makers** – to make regulations more effective and protect women and members of the LGBTQI+ community from continued image-based abuse online.

The legislative proposal for the **Digital Services Act (DSA)** provides a once-in-a-generation opportunity to ensure this protection – quickly and effectively. After consultations with politicians, experts, and practitioners, we identified additional obligations for porn-platforms as a key lever in preventing the spread of abuse material online. An amendment to the DSA demanding for this change has been submitted in the European Parliament (see [Amendment 1521, Article 24b, to the Draft IMCO report on DSA](#)).⁵

We **urge you to support the amendment**. The online abuse of women and other disadvantaged groups on the internet is only increasing, and we need effective protection now. You can be the change that we all need so desperately.

Thank you.

Anna Nackt, Co-initiator of the Anna Nackt Project (Germany)

Alexandra Ryan, Founder & CEO of Goss.ie (Ireland)

Emma Holten, Gender Policy Advisor & Feminist (Denmark)

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NORDREF - Nordic Digital Rights and Equality
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Global Shapers Hub
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Am I In Porn
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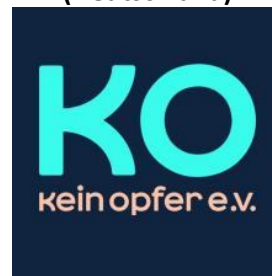
AWO-Ortsverein Gallus
AWO-Frankfurt am Main Gallus
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DATA NATIVES
Data Natives
(Germany)



My Body is Not Your Porn (MBINYP) / #HackSexism
(Germany)



Kein Opfer e.V.
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References:

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- [3] <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1098562/practice-revenge-porn-gender-france/>
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