
GENDERED DISINFORMATION IN SLOVAKIA & CZECHIA

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This research was conducted as part of a project focusing on gendered disinformation in Slovakia and Czechia, examining its scope, scale, and the networks promoting gendered disinformation narratives. MEMO 98 and Women in Media assume no responsibility for facts or opinions expressed in this publication or their subsequent use. Sole responsibility lies with the authors of this publication.

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Executive Summary

MEMO 98 and Women in Media define gendered disinformation, also referred to as gender-based disinformation, as: “the intersection between disinformation and gender. It includes false or misleading narratives used against an individual or group due to their gender or sexuality”. This definition was originally developed by the Centre for Information Resilience (CIR), an independent organisation dedicated to exposing human rights violations and threats to democracy through open-source investigations, as part of their Gender Lens project. The purpose of gendered disinformation may be to sow or exacerbate societal division. It is also often aimed at preventing women from participating in public life, which aligns with the broader goal of disinformation: to suppress activism and discourage engagement in civic or political activities.

KEY FINDINGS ON GENDERED DISINFORMATION IN SLOVAKIA AND CZECHIA

The research revealed that gendered disinformation has wide-ranging impacts in both countries. The main findings include:

IMPACTS ON INDIVIDUALS

- Deterrence from participating in public life due to the fear of misogynist, homophobic, or transphobic attacks.
- Inability to focus on work, increased anxiety, and in some cases, the need for mental health support.
- Loss of funding or employment opportunities.
- Targeted harassment both offline and online, including by prominent political figures.
- Incidents of vandalism; for example, one interviewee’s car was smeared with faeces and sexualised insults.
- Lack of legal consequences for perpetrators, even when their identity is known and evidence is presented to authorities.

MAIN DISSEMINATORS OF GENDERED DISINFORMATION

While in Slovakia, mainstream parties—including conservative and left-wing populist groups with socially conservative, nationalist agendas—are key spreaders of gendered disinformation, Czech mainstream politicians do not disseminate such disinformation to the same extent as their Slovak counterparts. In Czechia, gendered disinformation is more commonly propagated by extremist and nationalist parties.

In both countries, political opponents are tar-

Research by MEMO 98 and Women in Media in Slovakia and Czechia explored the nature and origins of politicised gendered disinformation campaigns and identified practical strategies to strengthen resilience at both national and institutional levels. Across both countries, the analysis covered over 8,600 social media posts related to key political events between 2022 and 2025, which together reached more than 16 million views. These posts either featured or quoted known gendered disinformation actors or contained gendered disinformation keywords. The research was further enriched by interviews with 21 experts from academia, civil society, journalism, and politics—at least 11 of whom had been personally targeted. The combined findings offer valuable insights into the actors, narratives, and societal impacts of gendered disinformation in both countries and point to specific, context-sensitive approaches for countering these campaigns.

geted with disinformation that misrepresents policies aiming to improve gender parity and LGBTQ+ rights, portraying them as threats to national identity, tradition, and sovereignty.

POLITICAL AND GEOPOLITICAL AMPLIFICATION

Kremlin-aligned information sources (such as Telegram channels like Blog investigatívnej žurnalistiky, Casus Belli Live, Infokanáľ Klubu nekonvenčne mysliacich, and Ľuboš Blaha) are amplified by Slovak and Czech political figures.

Narratives include anti-Ukrainian and anti-woke messages, spreading societal division.

In Slovakia, some far-right US channels have also influenced the spread of extreme gendered disinformation. The analysis linked the Tepláreň shooter’s Telegram connections to U.S.-based far-right terrorism instigators who espouse homophobic, xenophobic, and occasionally anti-Russian views.

VICTIMS AND SYSTEMIC NATURE

While the evidence primarily documents women as targets, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and men facing emasculating or homophobic attacks are also frequent victims.

Researchers emphasize that gendered disinformation is systemic and non-partisan; affecting individuals across the political spectrum.

CHALLENGES IN COUNTERING GENDERED DISINFORMATION

Although there are actors challenging gendered disinformation online, these efforts often remain confined to echo chambers and fail to reach broader audiences.

Recommendations for Building Resilience Interviewees in both countries offered tangible suggestions, grouped under 'Reduction of Impact' and 'Prevention.'

REDUCTION OF IMPACT ON TARGETS

■ CONTENT MANAGEMENT

Clear escalation protocols: Knowing when to filter, ignore, or escalate hateful content to authorities, especially when threats are involved.

"Troll walls": Organizations should dedicate resources to manually filtering hateful comments to shield individuals from distress and monitor for threats.

Automated filtering: Adoption of machine learning and AI technologies to screen hateful content on social media platforms.

■ TRAINING AND SUPPORT

Psychological support: Access to counselling and peer support networks to help individuals deal with stress and anxiety from attacks.

Operational security: Training to protect against hacking, doxxing and other security threats targeting individuals and organizations.

Crisis communications: Preparing individuals and organisations to respond effectively to disinformation campaigns to limit their impact and spread.

PREVENTION MEASURES

■ SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTABILITY

Better regulation to address the algorithmic prioritisation of harmful content ("engagement at any cost"), ideally through national or EU legislation.

■ TRAINING FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT AND THE JUDICIARY

Improving understanding of gendered disinformation and timely enforcement to deter future harassment.

■ PUBLIC EDUCATION

Raising non-partisan awareness about gendered disinformation's effects on free speech, participation, and societal cohesion. Civil society should lead these efforts to maintain credibility.

■ HOLDING POLITICIANS AND MEDIA TO HIGHER STANDARDS

Avoid sensationalism around gender and LGBTQ+ issues for political gain or media clicks. Rational, respectful discussions should replace personal attacks.

Recognizing and neutrally discussing divisive "wedge issues" to prevent deepening societal polarisation.

■ BUILDING CROSS-SPECTRUM SOLIDARITY

Organisations across political leanings must support colleagues experiencing gendered disinformation attacks, as resilience requires broad societal commitment.

Introduction

Gendered disinformation has become a growing concern in Slovakia and Czechia, targeting women in politics, journalism, activism, and other public roles. Research by MEMO 98 and Women in Media highlights a sharp rise in these campaigns, which exploit gender stereotypes, cultural biases, and emotional falsehoods to discredit women and deter public engagement. Beyond harming individuals, such tactics weaken democratic institutions by undermining trust in leadership and discouraging civic participation.

In Slovakia, gendered disinformation is increasingly used as part of broader geopolitical strategies, with pro-Kremlin actors exploiting gendered narratives to divide society and weaken democratic institutions. Research by Infosecurity and Globsec shows these attacks are often embedded in wider disinformation campaigns targeting the EU, LGBTQ+ rights, and migration, portraying women's leadership and progressive values as threats to national identity. Prominent figures like former President Zuzana Čaputová and journalists Monika Tódová and Zuzana Kovačič Hanzelová have been vilified on social media through dehumanising language, doctored images, and conspiracy theories—such as claims that Čaputová is a foreign puppet. These tactics not only damage reputations but also legitimise misogyny and discourage women from public life, undermining trust in democratic reform and leadership.

In Czechia, gendered disinformation is increasingly deployed by groups opposing gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights, often as part of broader disinformation networks. A 2024 study by the Prague Security Studies Institute shows these actors use fear-initiated narratives and false claims to block initiatives like the Istanbul Convention, equality policies, and sex education. By framing such efforts as part of “gender ideology” and linking them to same-sex marriage or cultural decline, they present opposition as a defense of “traditional values,” deepening societal divisions. Female politicians and journalists are frequent targets of delegitimisation campaigns, which foster self-censorship and hinder professional participation.

A survey by Women in Media found that 70% of Czech journalists have faced threats, online or offline, with 40% experiencing online harassment or violence—affecting men and

women at similar rates. However, the impacts were significantly more severe for women: 71% of female journalists—compared to 38% of their male counterparts—reported a decline in self-esteem. More than a third of all journalists said they had withdrawn from the public sphere due to the attacks, and many began avoiding sensitive topics altogether. Common online abuses included disinformation attacks (25%), defamation (19%), and stalking or harassment (10%). The backlash against the Istanbul Convention highlights how gendered disinformation is used to distort public debate and obstruct progress on rights and protections.

In both Slovakia and Czechia, gendered disinformation is increasingly tied to broader geopolitical and ideological agendas, particularly those promoted by pro-Kremlin actors. These campaigns are often part of wider efforts to discredit EU values, LGBTQ+ rights, and gender equality by portraying them as threats to “traditional values” or national identity. A key target in both countries has been the Istanbul Convention, frequently misrepresented as promoting “gender ideology” and falsely linked to same-sex marriage or sex education, in order to fuel public backlash and deepen societal divisions.

At the heart of this trend is gendered disinformation, defined by MEMO 98 and Women in Media, drawing on CIR's Gender Lens project, as the deliberate spread of false or misleading narratives targeting people based on gender or sexual orientation. These campaigns aim both to polarise society and to discourage participation, especially by women and LGBTQ+ individuals.

This joint report draws on extensive research and interviews with policymakers and those targeted by such disinformation. It examines how gendered disinformation functions in each country and offers practical recommendations to strengthen societal resilience, support affected individuals, and protect democratic engagement from gender-based online manipulation. This is a short version of the report summarising the main findings. The full report contains all details, including a comprehensive description of the project's methodology, data sources, and in-depth analysis of the findings.

Research Questions

What do gendered disinformation attacks look like in Czechia and Slovakia? When do they happen, whom do they target, and what language and tactics are used?

1

How, if at all, are disseminators of gendered disinformation in both countries connected to actors disseminating other forms of disinformation, including foreign-linked actors?

2

What is the impact of these attacks?

3

How can Czechia and Slovakia build their resilience against gendered disinformation on a national, institutional and individual level?

4

Scope

This study evaluates online content that deters public participation based on gender or sexual orientation—ranging from politically driven gendered disinformation to gender - or sexualised abuse such as stereotyping and slurs. It starts from the premise that the normalisation of misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia creates a permissive environment where such disinformation spreads largely unchecked.

METHODS AND DATA

RESEARCH QUESTION 1 (TRIGGERS)

A spike-analysis of 8,600 public posts on Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, and Telegram (2022–2025) pinpointed events that drove surges in gendered disinformation, with in-country experts selecting the most consequential events. High-impact posts—ranked by views, engagement, and volume—were then qualitatively analysed to assess tone, themes, and authorship.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2 (ACTORS)

Researchers mapped links between these posts and wider disinformation networks, including anti-gender, anti-rights, and pro-Kremlin ecosystems active in Slovakia and Czechia.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3 & RESEARCH QUESTION 4 (IMPACT AND RESILIENCE)

Twenty-one interviews with politicians, journalists, activists, and academics—mostly women and progressive-leaning due to snowball sampling—explored personal effects and potential counter-measures. The authors note limited conservative representation and encourage all parties, media, and CSOs to run internal reviews of gendered disinformation's impact.

Gendered disinformation frequently overlaps with broader abusive content: women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and even men who defy dominant norms face campaigns that delegitimise, emasculate, or erase them—ultimately discouraging civic engagement across the board.

FINDINGS SLOVAKIA

WHAT DO GENDERED DISINFORMATION ATTACKS LOOK LIKE IN SLOVAKIA?

ANALYSIS OF PROMINENT EXAMPLES, 2022-2025

MEMO 98 examined Slovak-language posts tied to politicised gendered-disinformation campaigns. Using iteratively refined search terms validated in Gerulata social media monitoring tool, researchers identified the most-viewed, most-engaged posts and analysed their tone, themes, and tactics. Spike analyses around key political events revealed the leading disseminators, whose accounts formed a seed list for a network analysis of Slovakia's broader disinformation ecosystem.

Based on both quantitative and qualitative analysis by MEMO 98 of content from 2022-2025, and the analysis of interviewee responses, gendered disinformation in Slovakia usually targets:

- Women in politics, especially those advocating for gender rights. However, researchers note that conservative male politicians have also faced gendered disinformation and abuse due to their (perceived) sexuality, such as Peter Pellegrini.
- LGBTQ+ individuals and activists, portraying them as a threat to “traditional values.”
- Progressive political parties and EU institutions that are framed as imposing “gender ideology.”

Researchers note that while the majority of the most influential disseminators of gendered disinformation hold socially conservative views, conservative actors have also been the targets of gendered disinformation in Slovakia.

Based on qualitative analysis of posts gathered in the quantitative study and on interviewee responses, gendered disinformation attacks in Slovakia largely mirror broader conservative and nationalist narratives that seek to undermine gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, and progressive policies. These attacks often misrepresent the substance of the policy under attack and instead:

- Exploit societal fears around gender identity, women's roles, and the “erosion” of traditional values.
- Target politicians, activists, and public figures who advocate for gender inclusivity, portraying them as threats to national identity.
- Distort the meaning of policies, such as the Istanbul Convention, by falsely framing them as tools for enforcing “gender ideology”.
- Use religious, moral, and nationalist rhetoric to position gender equality as a foreign-imposed, anti-traditional agenda.
- Leverage emotional and polarising tactics, including fear-mongering, victimisation of men, and claims of censorship by liberal elites.

These attacks often intensify around key political events, such as elections or EU policy decisions, and serve to mobilise conservative and nationalist voters, deepening societal divides. The research focused on three such events between 2022 and 2025:

- Non-ratification of the Istanbul Convention
- The expulsion of MP Lucia Plaváková from a Parliamentary session
- The 2024 European Parliament (EP) elections

Qualitative analysis shows Slovak gender-disinformation campaigns lean on emotional fear-mongering: alarmist claims that the EU will “force Slovakia to recognise men as women,” warnings of eroding masculinity and family values, and false portrayals of the Istanbul Convention as “gender ideology.” Messages invoke religion and traditional morality, framing LGBTQ+ rights as attacks on Christianity and national identity, and promoting male-victim narratives around sport and gender laws. Memes, videos, and polarising posts set up a “conservatives vs. progressives” battlefield, while sexualised slurs and personal attacks—especially against female MPs such as Lucia Plaváková—aim to discredit advocates of gender equality.

To understand how disseminators of gendered disinformation in Slovakia are connected to other disinformation actors, including those linked to foreign interests, researchers used a combination of spike analysis, connections data from Gerulata, and network analysis in Gephi. They first identified key gender disinformation actors through spikes in content volume and mapped their online interactions—mentions and reshares—with other accounts to build a Connections Network Graph in Gerulata. This graph included not only gender-related posts but all types of interactions, helping reveal broader disinformation ecosystems.

The data were then exported to Gephi, where the OpenOrd layout algorithm was used to visualise patterns within a network of 480 nodes (accounts). Researchers adjusted the size of each node based on how often the account was reshared or mentioned (Weighted Out-Degree), and used arrows (edges) to show the direction and strength of these interactions. This allowed the team to identify influential actors and clusters where gender disinformation intersected with other disinformation narratives, including those propagated by foreign-aligned accounts (for more detailed information on the network mapping, see also the long form report - Annex 4.3 Network Graphs Methods – In-Depth).

Non-ratification of the Istanbul Convention

The Istanbul Convention—a Council of Europe treaty to combat violence against women—has been a central target of gendered disinformation in Slovakia. Though submitted for ratification in 2011, it faced intense backlash in 2019–2020, with far-right and conservative politicians misrepresenting it as an EU tool to promote “gender ideology,” same-sex marriage, and sex education. These false claims, amplified by religious and nationalist groups, led Parliament to reject the Convention amid a surge in disinformation-fuelled EU scepticism.

A major spike in gendered disinformation tied to the Convention occurred in 2024, coinciding with the European Parliament elections. Far-right and conservative parties framed the treaty—and broader gender equality efforts—as threats to national sovereignty, family, and Christian values. This was triggered in part by the EU’s decision to accede to the Convention, prompting renewed opposition. Politicians revived misleading narratives to mobilise voters, using fear-based rhetoric while ignoring the treaty’s core aim: protecting women from violence.

Among the top six accounts generating the most engagement on this topic, five are known disinformation spreaders linked to pro-Kremlin narratives. Eduard Chmelár, a commentator and former advisor to Robert Fico, routinely promotes anti-Western views aligned with Russian propaganda. Similarly, the “Rozhovory s Mimi Šramovou” YouTube channel, which features figures like Štefan Harabin—an ex-justice minister and presidential candidate—serves as a platform for pro-Russian, anti-Western conspiracy content. Far-right leader Milan Uhrík of Republika also echoed Kremlin talking points, using the Convention to stir anti-EU and anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment. His Facebook post falsely claimed it would force Slovakia to recognise men as women, reinforcing disinformation about gender rights and Western “decay.”

The Instagram account of Lucia Plaváková, a Member of Parliament for Progresívne Slovensko and a human rights lawyer, appeared in the analysis due to the presence of keywords related to the Istanbul Convention—specifically in posts aiming to debunk widespread falsehoods. Her inclusion is an outlier in a dataset otherwise dominated by accounts propagating gendered disinformation. While her content challenged such narratives, most of the high-engagement posts on this topic came from pro-Kremlin actors spreading disinformation related to the Convention.

Lucia Plaváková’s expulsion from a Parliamentary session

In September 2024, PS MP Lucia Plaváková was ejected from a Parliamentary session after refusing Vice-Speaker Andrej Danko’s order to remove LGBTQ-support stickers from her laptop. The incident escalated when ruling-party MP Rudolf Huliak hurled a vulgar slur at her, triggering a spike in misogynistic and anti-LGBTQ+ content. Plaváková sued Huliak and appealed her expulsion to the Constitutional Court, casting the affair as emblematic of Slovakia’s intolerance toward LGBTQ+ rights.

Independent outlets Denník N and Startitup framed the expulsion as a political attack and “state-sponsored discrimination,” while Progresívne Slovensko (PS) used it to rally supporters. Conversely, disinformation channels—including Ľuboš Hrica, Informácie pravdy, and Ranné správy-Marek—portrayed Plaváková as a provocateur, spun conspiracies that the episode was staged, and employed misogynistic language to vilify her. Their high-engagement posts illustrate how polarising, nationalist, and anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric flourishes on Slovak social media.



Figure 1: An image of Milan Uhrík, the Republic Movement party leader, with text saying he voted against the EU decision to make the Istanbul Convention binding for all member states. (Source: Facebook).

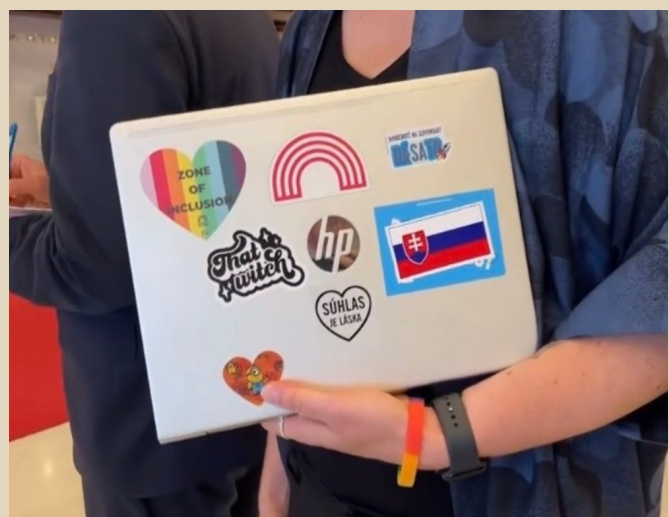


Figure 2: Sticker supporting LGBTQ+ inclusiveness on the laptop of MP Lucia Plaváková (Source: Martin Průčka)

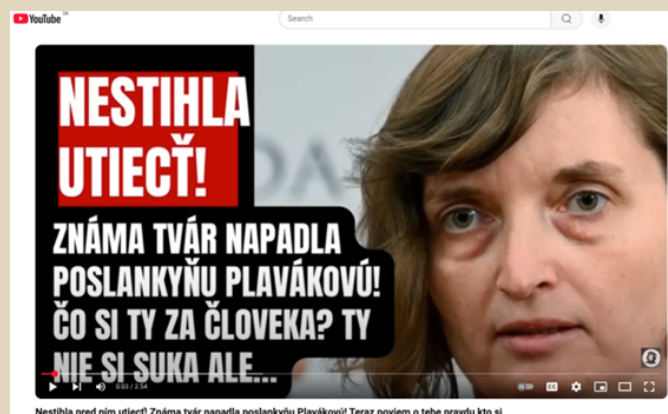


Figure 3: Screenshot from a YouTube video titled “She did not manage to run away! A known person attacked MP Plaváková - what kind of person are you? You are not a bitch, you are....” (Source: Informácie pravdy, YouTube, 27 September 2024).

European Parliament elections in 2024

The 2024 European Parliament elections in Slovakia were defined by sharp polarisation, especially on social media. Nationalist-populist parties—SMER-SSD, Hnutie Republika, and SNS—dominated the online discourse, framing the vote as a fight against liberal, pro-European forces. Ľuboš Blaha (SMER-SSD) and Milan Uhrík (Hnutie Republika) accused PS of undermining national sovereignty with a “globalist” agenda. Blaha slammed the media for “silencing” inconvenient truths, while Uhrík warned voters against PS’s support for EU policies like the Green Deal, Covid passports, and aid to Ukraine. SMER-SSD celebrated its electoral gains as a rejection of progressivism and a defence of Slovak sovereignty against EU overreach. Hnutie Republika echoed this stance, focusing on fears of EU-imposed migration and defence measures. In contrast, PS leaders like Michal Šimečka and Veronika Cifrová Ostrihoňová presented the election as a choice between democratic values and authoritarian drift, with Šimečka warning of Slovakia’s slide toward “Orbán and Putin.”

Quantitative analysis identified six Slovak social media and video channels—SMER-SSD, Rozhovory s Mimi Šramovou, Ľuboš Blaha, Diskusia na palete, Milan Uhrík - Republika, and Politika Dnes—as among the most active and influential based on the presence of keywords linked to gendered disinformation and negative gender stereotypes in the context of the 2024 EP election. These channels were not only prominent due to keyword frequency but also played a central role in spreading such disinformation. They promoted nationalist, anti-EU, and anti-liberal narratives through emotionally charged language, conspiracy-driven content, and direct audience engagement via Telegram and YouTube. Their messaging echoed SMER-SSD’s agenda and closely aligned with pro-Kremlin disinformation, especially in portraying the Ukraine war, Western institutions, and progressive values as threats to Slovak identity. Though banned by Meta in 2022 for repeated policy violations, Blaha remains highly influential via SMER-SSD’s official Facebook page. In a 12 June 2024 post, he mocked progressives, promoted Kremlin-aligned narratives, criticised arms to Ukraine, and portrayed Slovak nationalists as victims of Western interference. With nearly 12,000 interactions, the post illustrates how banned figures continue to spread disinformation by co-opting party channels, fuelling division and entrenching anti-Western sentiment.

TIES BETWEEN GENDERED AND FOREIGN-INFLUENCED DISINFORMATION

MEMO 98’s analysis confirms strong links between gendered disinformation in Slovakia and foreign-influenced, especially pro-Kremlin, information operations. Several top gendered disinformation amplifiers are either directly connected to or actively promote narratives aligned with Russian state propaganda, often with the support of mainstream Slovak political figures.

Russian Influence on Slovak Gendered Disinformation

11 Of the 50 most influential accounts (by shares and men-

tions), several are known for spreading both pro-Russian and gendered disinformation. For instance, the Russian Foreign Ministry’s official Facebook page ranked 33rd out of 480 in the network analysis. It, along with the Russian Embassy in Slovakia, was repeatedly amplified by figures like Eduard Chmelár and Ľuboš Blaha—both central to Slovakia’s disinformation landscape.

- Ľuboš Blaha (SMER-SSD) ranked 26th overall and directly referenced the Russian Embassy in a 2 February 2023 Telegram post promoting anti-Western narratives. In October 2024, he also travelled to Moscow and gave an interview to state-run Russia Today.
- Eduard Chmelár, previously mentioned in connection with anti-EU and gendered narratives, ranked 34th in the same network and consistently echoes Kremlin positions.

These examples show how gendered disinformation is often embedded in broader geopolitical campaigns, positioning gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights as part of a foreign threat to Slovak identity.

Amplifiers of Pro-Russian Influence

Various publications and media, including Aktuality.sk, NEST Institute, Infosecurity, TA3, SME, and the Investigative Centre for Ján Kuciak (ICJK) have researched the connections between Slovak political actors and sources of Russian influence in Slovakia’s information space. The connections identified in this research echo existing findings and are explored in more detail in the long-form report.

Pro-Russian Czech Influences

The analysis also shows strong Czech-Slovak crossover in disinformation networks.

- Úschovna >>CZ<<, a Czech Telegram channel, ranked first among accounts linked to Slovak gendered disinformation. It regularly spreads pro-Russian content, including calling the Ukrainian slogan “Glory to Ukraine!” a Nazi phrase, and shares videos from Russia’s Sputnik news agency.
- Radim Fiala - SPD, a Czech MP, ranked sixth overall. Fiala has backed Russia’s annexation of Crimea and echoed Kremlin narratives since at least 2017.
- The Telegram channel Války, vlády a vakcíny (Wars, Governments, and Vaccines), ranked third, spreads anti-vaccine lies (e.g., that 80% of vaccinated women miscarried) and anti-LGBTQ+ disinformation—calling “gender ideology” an extremist plague. It publishes content in Czech, Slovak, and Russian, showing how regional and linguistic overlaps boost disinformation reach.

US ‘Terrorgram’ Connections

A March 2025 report by ProPublica, FRONTLINE, and ICJK revealed links between US-based extremist Telegram channels and the Tepláreň nightclub shooter, Juraj Krajčík. US national Dallas Humber, later arrested for inciting hate crimes, was among those encouraging violence. This case highlights the globalised nature of radicalisation and the need to consider English-language extremist content in future investigations of Slovakia’s information space.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF GENDERED DISINFORMATION ATTACKS?

MEMO 98 interviewed 11 individuals on gendered disinformation in Slovakia. A majority of interviewees have been the targets of gendered disinformation. All interviewees were women; one identified as LGBTQ+. This research recommends that future research interviews men, in addition to interviewing more women, people identifying as LGBTQ+ and people from all political and religious backgrounds to ensure a fuller understanding of the differentiated impacts of gendered disinformation.

The interviews identified retreat from public life, fears for personal safety, psychological distress and societal polarisation as major impacts of gendered disinformation. The interviewees' names in the text of the report are anonymised, and they are referred to by their profession.

THE INTERVIEWEES WERE:

- Alexandra Bitušíková (academic, Matej Bel University)
- Andrea Simančíková (journalist, TA3)
- Lucia Yar (politician, MEP/Progressive Slovakia Party)
- Laura Kellö Kalinská (journalist, Aktuality.sk)
- Mária Benedikovičová (journalist, Denník N)
- Diana Javorčíková (politician, local/Banská Bystrica)
- Jana Krescanko Dibáková (journalist, SME.sk)
- Lucia Plaváková (politician, MP/Progressive Slovakia)
- Zuzana Maďarová (academic, Comenius University)
- Anonymous (journalist) - preferred to stay unnamed
- Zuzana Petková (civil society, director of Stop Corruption Foundation)

Retreat from public life

"... it can lead to a kind of apathy or less courage to participate ... you lose your determination, you don't want to speak out. There's a silencing of women or LGBTQ+ people" – Academic

"... it's a message that you're not our equal, you're not a full member [of society], and that you have to try harder to be accepted somehow. Even if you try harder, we're still going to find something that bothers us about you." – Journalist

"It's not just about individual attacks, but about creating an environment where women and minorities feel they should not even try to engage publicly." – NGO Director

"It is exhausting to always have to prove that you belong. No matter how competent you are, there will always be people trying to discredit you based on gender alone." – Politician

Interviewees emphasized that political leaders have normalized misogynistic rhetoric, which then translates

into public discourse and social networks. This emboldens individuals to participate in gendered attacks, believing they have political legitimacy, and makes them more susceptible to gendered disinformation campaigns.

One respondent highlighted the role of foreign actors, particularly Russia, in exacerbating these narratives by amplifying traditionalist and anti-feminist sentiments through coordinated disinformation efforts.

Interviewees spoke of how gendered disinformation creates a hostile environment in which women and LGBTQ+ individuals feel unsafe expressing their opinions or engaging in leadership roles. Interviewees further noted the nature of the attacks often questions their professional ability, often in a sexualised way, implying that the target 'slept their way to the top', belittling the target, calling them 'little girl' if they appear young and attacking aspects of their personal life, such as childlessness or the ethnicity of the target's spouse.

One interviewee recalled how her husband was targeted with online abuse because of his ethnicity - and relationship with her - illustrating the intersectionality of gendered disinformation with racial prejudices.

A politician interviewed expressed concern that gendered disinformation attacks are shaping how political parties recruit and promote women, noting that if parties perceive that women face too much hostility, they may be less willing to support women candidates.

Several interviewees noted that women journalists and politicians face particularly high levels of harassment, often intensifying during election periods or in response to specific policy debates.

"In election periods, the attacks become even worse. Women candidates are systematically discredited, and false claims about their competence spread like wildfire." – Politician

All interviewees spoke of how gendered disinformation serves to, and often succeeds in, discouraging women and LGBTQ+ individuals from holding positions of power or having a prominent voice in society, particularly if they advocate for progressive values. Some interviewees expressed concern that women's retreat from public life is being encouraged and presented as normal to men in society.

"[those who spread gendered disinformation] discourage their targets from participating in social and political life, they make those individuals' lives uncomfortable ... discouraging women or convincing men that this is the way it's supposed to be." – Politician

"We see cases where women simply stop speaking out. The cost of participation becomes too high, and that is exactly what these attacks are designed to do." – Academic

Polarisation

“There’s this effort to bring back some of that narrative that we need to go back to normal, where men were the strong, powerful ones, the woman is supposed to belong in that kitchen and obey.” - Academic

“The more divisive rhetoric is used, the more it is normalized. It stops being shocking and starts becoming the default way to talk about women in politics.” - Journalist

Interviewees commented on how gendered disinformation is increasing the divide between men and women in society. The academic interviewed for the research highlighted how the growing presence of misogynistic influencers, such as Andrew Tate, and mainstream political figures promoting traditionalist gender norms are contributing to greater gender division in Slovak society.

“Women in politics face a double standard. If they are strong, they are called aggressive; if they are empathetic, they are called weak. It is a way to delegitimize their voices.” - Politician

“We see that even highly competent women are treated differently. Instead of debating policies, they are questioned about their appearance, their families, or their personalities.” - Politician

Safety implications

While not all gendered attacks contain threats, two interviewees reported encountering threats and harassment against themselves and/or their families. One interviewee described how gendered disinformation against her began to target a member of her family, who is of a different ethnicity. These threats led the interviewee to report the cases to the police.

Several respondents expressed frustration that law enforcement does not proactively investigate gendered disinformation cases unless the target initiates legal proceedings. MEMO 98 analysts note that the trust in the police is low in Slovakia, as many people do not believe authorities will take action against perpetrators.

“Here I very much miss the initiative of the police force to defend those attacked” - Journalist

“People think online harassment isn’t real, but the psychological and professional consequences are serious. Some women leave their jobs because of it.” - Journalist

Psychological impact

Interviewees who have experienced disinformation spoke of the psychological toll of online gendered attacks. Some describe feelings of increased anxiety, fears for personal safety and losing the ability to concentrate on work and needing to pay for psychological support.

“It’s not easy to deal with that, and yet, even after six years, I’m still facing basically comments on social media that

are derived from these disinformation campaigns.” - Journalist

“It becomes exhausting, like a background noise that never stops. Even when I don’t look, I know it’s there.” - Journalist

One journalist described how a coordinated disinformation campaign against her continued to affect her mental well-being even years later, demonstrating the long-lasting impact of these attacks.

“The long-term effect of this harassment is self-censorship. Women start avoiding topics that could make them a target.” - Academic

Additional vulnerabilities

All interviewees mentioned that gendered attacks appear to be more severe if the target is from an ethnic minority, particularly Roma, or of a religious minority, particularly Muslim.

“It is not just about gender; it is about reinforcing who is ‘acceptable’ in public life and who is not.” - Politician

“Many of my male colleagues write about similar topics or cover similar issues, but they don’t experience this kind of public hate or disinformation as often. I notice it especially among the haters — they completely ignore the actual topic and go straight to commenting on me as a woman. How I look, who I sleep with, or that I should be raped — that I deserve it...” - Journalist

Interviewees further emphasised that, while individuals with progressive views appear to be attacked more often than those with more conservative values, conservative actors are also subject to gendered attacks.

Several respondents pointed out that LGBTQ+ individuals face compounded risks, facing particularly vitriolic and alarmist rhetoric, including conflating homosexuality and paedophilia, and promoting the idea that trans people, especially trans women, are an inherent danger to society.

HOW CAN SLOVAKIA IMPROVE ITS RESILIENCE AGAINST GENDERED DISINFORMATION ON A NATIONAL, INSTITUTIONAL, AND INDIVIDUAL LEVEL?

This section examines preventive and mitigating measures to curb the spread of gendered disinformation and minimise its impact on its targets.

All interviewees emphasised the challenge of combating gendered disinformation in Slovakia’s current political climate, in which several prominent politicians are among the biggest spreaders of gendered disinformation.

“The problem in our country is the fact that the biggest government party is the biggest propagator, creator, and disseminator [of gendered disinformation].” – Politician

One respondent noted that the government’s lack of action and, in some cases, explicit endorsement of gendered disinformation, makes it difficult to implement countermeasures.

Short-to-medium-term resilience must therefore focus on equipping the targets of gendered disinformation with the tools they need to continue participating in public life; from training on operational security and crisis communications to ongoing organisational support, which may include the establishment of ‘troll walls’, clear thresholding for when to report threats or harassment to police, and the option of psychological support.

“We need to have a strong Ministry of Culture with a strong, embedded sense of quality journalistic performance anchored by well-written laws.” – Journalist

Respondents emphasised that educational initiatives targeting young men are essential to counteract the rise of misogynistic influencers who propagate harmful gender narratives to younger audiences.

PREVENTION

Education, social media policy reform and government accountability were repeatedly highlighted by the interviewees as essential in curbing the spread of gendered disinformation. Several respondents recommended mandatory digital literacy and critical thinking education as a long-term solution to countering gendered disinformation. There was also strong consensus that independent media and civil society should take the lead in raising awareness, as government-led initiatives may be politically compromised.

Awareness

Many interviewees noted that overall public awareness of the issue of gendered disinformation and its impacts is limited across Slovak society. Interviewees stated that education is key to raising public awareness.

“Education is critical. We need to start teaching digital literacy at an early age so that people understand how disinformation works.” – Academic

However, interviewees also noted that it is unlikely that the Slovak government will allow teaching on such topics while the top spreaders of gendered disinformation are in power. One journalist interviewed by MEMO 98 commented on the potential for media outlets and civil society organisations to organise events designed to improve political literacy, starting in schools, continuing through higher education, and extending to university elections and the general public during national elections.

Two interviewees noted that their organisations’ awareness of gendered disinformation and its impact on staff was lacking. Educating organisations on the risks to their

staff and how their staff can be supported is essential in ensuring talented professionals are not discouraged from their work by targeted gendered disinformation campaigns. These interviewees suggested that a media campaign could help raise public and organisational awareness of gendered disinformation, its impacts and how to support its targets.

“Public awareness of gendered disinformation in Slovakia remains limited. Right-wing populism and Catholic conservatism reinforce traditional gender norms, making it harder to address these problems.” – Academic

Social media company policies

*“Social networks are designed to amplify engagement, not truth. That is the fundamental problem.”
– NGO Director*

“Not only could social media companies be doing more, but they have stopped doing what they should be doing altogether. ... A lot can be done through social media... But I don’t see that social media companies are doing enough, quite the opposite.” – Academic

Departure from engagement at any cost: One interviewee noted that social media “algorithms are set up so that the emotion of hate will attract followers, interaction, more money, advertising. I don’t know if we can change that. ... If politicians didn’t see the hatred bringing them an audience, they wouldn’t do it”. Legislation that would ensure algorithmic de-prioritisation of hateful content - not just in terms of what can and cannot be monetised, but also in terms of content exposure - would serve to reduce the spread of hateful content, including gendered attacks.

Moderation: Several interviewees emphasised that the retreat of social media companies from content moderation has directly led to a more hostile online environment for women and LGBTQ+ individuals. They also highlighted that social media companies - notably X and Meta - appear less willing to take down hateful and/or disinformation content than before. Recent moves by large tech firms such as Meta to shy away from anti-hate policies further enable hateful content to spread online, with fewer protections for women and LGBTQ+ individuals, compared with Meta policies predating 7 January 2025. National or EU legislation that would require social media companies to be held to a high standard of hate filtering or moderation would therefore make a difference in preventing at least some gendered disinformation campaigns online. Respondents noted that Slovakia lacks national-level legal mechanisms to hold social media companies accountable for failing to act against gendered disinformation.

Online anonymity: One interviewee noted that the ability of people to be anonymous online makes it easier for people to share hateful content without consequence. This interviewee advocates for stricter controls on users, such as accounts to be tied to IDs and real names, making it harder to troll people while using an alias. However, others cautioned that such measures could be misused by authoritarian governments to suppress political dissent.

Non-partisan politician and influencer accountability

“If the standards of decent behaviour are not set by institutions that have the power to do so, then it will just pile up. The attackers simply feel no threat.” – Journalist

Several interviewees stated the importance of mainstream politicians in setting an example of how to behave appropriately in society. Many interviewees argue that Slovakia's leaders - from all political parties - must be held to the highest standards of conduct, including how they choose (not) to spread disinformation and hateful rhetoric.

One respondent pointed out that gendered disinformation has been used as a tool to discredit not only individuals but also entire political parties, particularly those advocating for gender equality and human rights.

Interviewees and MEMO 98 emphasise the need for non-partisan efforts to combat gendered disinformation, noting politicians associated with social conservatism, including Slovak President Peter Pellegrini, have been subject to gendered, homophobic attacks.

MITIGATING THE IMPACT OF GENDERED DISINFORMATION ON THE TARGET

Reducing target exposure to gendered disinformation, timely reporting of threats and structured support, including crisis communications and psychological support, were noted by interviewees as important in reducing the impact of gendered disinformation on individuals targeted. Each recommendation outlined below is preceded by an indication of whether it is actionable by an organisation or an individual, or both.

Reducing target exposure to gendered disinformation

The majority of interviewees who had experienced gendered attacks online stated that they prefer not to look at hateful comments to be able to get on with their work without distraction. Many interviewees mentioned straightforward, practical steps that can be taken to reduce targets' exposure to gendered disinformation attacks.

“In some groups, they create self-censorship, in the spirit of - ‘I’m going to slow down so that it does not happen to me either.’ Another part of the victims who do not feel supported leaves as a consequence.” – Journalist

Organisational: Manual filtering of abusive content by the organisation to protect staff from gendered disinformation and hate. One politician described her organisation as having a human-operated ‘troll wall’ that protects her and her colleagues from hurtful content online, meaning party members are less distracted by hateful rhetoric and better able to focus on work.

Personal: Automated filtering. Create and adopt software or apps that filter out hateful comments and messages from potential targets' social media and email accounts. One politician interviewed suggested this could help potential targets deal with attacks where a ‘troll wall’ is unfeasible.

Timely reporting of threats

Organisational and personal: Clear protocols, including thresholding and escalation policies, on when to report gendered attacks, and to whom. One politician interviewed stated that her party has clear thresholding, in which any threats against party members or their families are reported to the police, and that the targets of the threats are notified and supported throughout the reporting process. Of the interviewees who have been the targets of gendered disinformation, two said they received threats, which they reported to the police.

However, multiple respondents expressed a lack of trust in law enforcement.

“I did not contact the police. I do not trust them. [What I experienced] was discomfoting, but not life-threatening.” – Journalist

“The state does not effectively protect victims of disinformation campaigns, even when minor children are involved. I had to explain false accusations to my family.” – Journalist

Practical training and support

Organisational and personal: Crisis communications support. One interviewee reflected that, when her organisation was subjected to backlash over their feminist activism, the organisation was overwhelmed by the sheer volume and scale of online attacks, and she and her team felt ill-equipped to deal with it. This research recommends that organisations advocating for women and/or LGBTQ+ individuals invest in crisis communications training to be able to contain the spread of gendered attacks affecting their staff and any affiliated activists.

Organisational and personal: Operational security training. In addition to some interviewees reporting online threats, local analysts for this report became aware of a hacking attack following a gendered disinformation campaign against an NGO. The hackers could take control of the target organisation's social media accounts and troll the organisation from within. Operational security training is highly recommended for all staff, affiliated activists, and supporters of organisations advocating for women's and LGBTQ+ rights, to protect both organisations and individuals from malicious actors.

Organisational and personal: Several interviewees stated that increased psychological support would benefit the targets of gendered disinformation attacks, and that this support could be offered by the workplace in cases where the attacks relate to the professional activity and identity of the target.

Personal resilience

“... problems on the side of the sender, not the receiver.” - Academic

Several interviewees reflected on personal coping mechanisms and how essential these were in not allowing negative, gendered comments to “get under their skin”. While some interviewees said that their coping mechanism is to avoid and ignore gendered attacks as much as they can, others note the importance of having confidence in the fact that the attackers are the ones with the problem, not them. A journalist interviewee said she made a conscious decision to filter out the negativity, refusing to allow her gender to be used against her or to weaken her professional standing. At the same time, a politician interviewed said that she clearly views gendered attacks as reflections of the perpetrators’ frustrations or prejudices rather than something that should shape her actions.

FINDINGS CZECHIA

WHAT DO GENDERED DISINFORMATION ATTACKS LOOK LIKE IN CZECHIA?

MEMO 98 and Women in Media analysed Czech-language gendered disinformation posts tied to three key political events:

- Czechia's potential ratification of the Istanbul Convention in 2023-2024
- European Parliament (EP) election in 2024
- Presidential candidacy of Member of European Parliament (MEP) Danuše Nerudová in 2022-2023

Using Gerulata, researchers developed and manually validated search terms to identify relevant posts. The most viral content—measured by views, engagement, and volume—was then qualitatively analysed for tone, themes, and tactics. Quantitative spikes in gendered disinformation were used to identify the top spreaders, forming a seed list for the network analysis of Czechia's broader disinformation ecosystem.

Findings show a coordinated effort to mislead and discourage public support for policies that promote gender equality. In particular, same as in Slovakia, disinformation actors falsely linked the Istanbul Convention to so-called “gender ideology,” alleging it would impose same-sex marriage and sex education, thereby fuelling public resistance to protections that could benefit Czech citizens.

Non-ratification of the Istanbul Convention

The Istanbul Convention was introduced in 2011 and same as in Slovakia, ever since has faced significant delays in terms of its ratification. Although Czechia signed the Convention in 2016, ratification has been repeatedly postponed. The process, initially planned for 2018, was delayed under Prime Minister Andrej Babiš's administration and pushed as far as late 2023 (iRozhlas.cz).

During this period, the Convention became a major target of disinformation. According to Hana Stelzerová, former director of the Czech Women's Lobby (speaking to HateFree Culture), false narratives claimed the treaty promoted “positive discrimination” against men, introduced “new genders,” and mandated sexual education for young children—misleading frames intended to stir public opposition.

Despite support from liberal leaders—President Petr Pavel urged ratification in May 2023, stating, “I don't see a single real reason why we should not do it” (ČT24)—the Czech Senate ultimately rejected the proposal on 24 January 2024, following a prolonged campaign of misinformation.

Gendered disinformation around the Istanbul Convention

- Two major surges:
 - Mentions of gender-focused disinformation jumped ~500 % after President Petr Pavel urged ratification in May 2023 (684 posts, ~564 k views, 84 k interactions) and ~800 % during the Senate vote in Jan 2024 (300 posts, ~556 k views, 27 k interactions). In total, 1,901 posts drew at least 1.42 million views between 2022–24.
- Key spreaders:
 - Six Facebook pages drove most false claims: Tomio Okamura - SPD; Zdeněk Hraba; Jana Zwyrttek Hamplová; Tradiční rodina z.s.; Zuzana Majerová; and Jindřich Rajchl.
- Disinformation ecosystem:
 - Many belong to the Interior Ministry's “anti-establishment” scene, which dominates Czech extremism and often pushes pro-Kremlin or conspiratorial content.
 - Far-right actors (SPD, Trikolóra) and populists like Okamura and Majerová fold Kremlin talking points—e.g., ending arms to Ukraine, lifting sanctions—into anti-Convention messaging.
 - High engagement on Rajchl and Hamplová posts shows the reach of government-opposing voices.
 - Conservative traditionalists such as Hraba oppose progressive policies but stay clear of overt pro-Russian narratives.

DETAIL

Tomio Okamura – SPD

Leader of the far-right populist party Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD), Okamura is one of Czechia's most prominent disinformation figures. His Facebook activity is marked by xenophobia, anti-government rhetoric, and fear-based messaging around migration, Islam, and Ukraine. He has a large online following and frequently amplifies pro-Russian narratives—opposing EU sanctions, transatlantic cooperation, and Czech aid to Ukraine—under the guise of defending national interests. The European Values Center for Security Policy lists him among the politicians most responsible for “enabling Russian influence.” Okamura vocally opposed the Istanbul Convention, framing it as a neo-Marxist threat to the “traditional family.” He is currently facing prosecution over racist campaign materials (ČT24).

Zdeněk Hraba – Senator (Independent, ODS-affiliated)

Hraba, a conservative Czech senator, was one of the most vocal opponents of the Istanbul Convention and played a key role in its rejection. He argued the treaty would introduce “gender ideology” into Czech law. Although his follower base is smaller compared to other actors in the sample, his posts had the highest visibility—over 156,000 views—indicating strong traction in the anti-Convention debate.

Jana Zwyrttek Hamplová – Senator (Independent)

Known for her spread of COVID-19 disinformation, Hamplová frequently reposts from conspiracy platforms like Parlamentní listy and 42TČen—the latter identified as a successor to the banned Czech-language version of Russian state outlet Sputnik News. According to the Interior Ministry's Centre Against Hybrid Threats, she disseminates pro-Russian content under a “patriotic” banner. She opposes the Istanbul Convention and regularly engages in anti-EU, anti-liberal messaging.

Tradiční rodina z.s. – Facebook Page

Operating under the banner of defending “traditional family values,” this account spreads misinformative content opposing LGBTQ+ rights and feminism. Its posts often promote falsehoods about “gender indoctrination” and position the Istanbul Convention as a threat to families and moral order.

Zuzana Majerová – Chair, Trikolora

Majerová, head of the far-right Trikolora party and former MP, has a track record of spreading disinformation—first about COVID-19, then about the war in Ukraine. She falsely claimed mobilisation was imminent and is being investigated for spreading panic-inducing content. She has appeared on Voice of Europe and AllatRa—both linked to Russian influence operations. She also condemned the Istanbul Convention, calling it a “terrifying product of gender-feminist ideology.”

Jindřich Rajchl – Chair, PRO Party

Rajchl, a lawyer and head of the far-right PRO party, rose to prominence through mass protests against COVID-19 measures and the Fiala government. His posts frequently target gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, and Western alliances. He shares pro-Russian narratives and has given interviews to Voice of Europe and AllatRa. A March 2023 protest he organised included calls to end arms to Ukraine and lift sanctions on Russia—accompanied by Russian flags, the “Z” symbol, and attempts to remove a Ukrainian flag from the National Museum. The Centre Against Hybrid Threats flagged this as part of a Kremlin-backed “peace” propaganda effort.

Analysis of sample posts spreading gendered disinformation narratives related to the Istanbul Convention

During key moments of public debate around the Istanbul Convention in 2023–2024, disinformation posts exploiting gender-based fears and falsehoods received high levels of engagement on Czech social media.

Zdeněk Hraba – 23 June 2023

The most interacted post came from conservative senator Zdeněk Hraba, who falsely labelled the Istanbul Convention an “ideological document” that inserts “gender ideology” into schools and law, and finances gender NGOs. This post ignored the Convention's core focus—preventing violence against women—and instead misrepresented gender equality efforts as ideological threats.

- Reach: ~103,500 views
- Engagement: 7,731 interactions (reactions, comments, shares)

Jana Zwyrttek Hamplová – 26 January 2024

In a now-deleted Facebook post, archived by Gerulata, Hamplová described the Convention as a “Trojan horse” and “perverse”—framing it as deceptive and dangerous. This post reflects her wider pattern of sharing COVID-19 disinformation and Kremlin-aligned messaging.

- Reach: ~60,790 views
- Engagement: 2,657 interactions

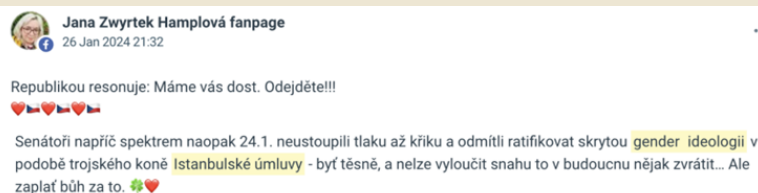


Figure 3: Excerpt of post by Jana Zwyrttek Hamplová fanpage on Facebook on 26 January 2024, with keyword search terms highlighted in text (Source: Archived on Gerulata, 2 April 2025).

Tomio Okamura – 26 January 2024

Okamura's post paired alarmist text with provocative visuals. He claimed the Convention would destroy families, incite “class hatred” of men, and introduce a “totalitarian gender ideology.” The post included an edited image of Conchita Wurst (Eurovision winner) framed with religious and racialized symbolism—contrasting an LGBTQ+ figure with a blonde mother and crying child. This imagery, combined with false claims, played on fear and moral panic to boost SPD's populist messaging.

- Disinformation themes: Misleading gender ideology narratives, moral degradation, family breakdown
- Fact check: The Council of Europe clarifies that the Convention seeks to prevent domestic violence and promote gender equality—not to impose ideological doctrines or undermine families.



Figure 4: Excerpt of a post by Tomio Okamura saying the Istanbul Convention tears apart families and promotes class hatred and discrimination against men (Source: Facebook, 26 January 2024).

The Association for Societal Responsibility flagged the claim that the Convention threatens family values as one of the most persistent and harmful myths surrounding it in Czechia. Together, these posts illustrate how gendered disinformation weaponises fear, emotion, and cultural tropes to distort public debate and block progress on gender-based violence protections.

European Parliament Election in Czechia in 2024

The European Parliament (EP) elections took place on 7–8 June 2024. According to the Czech Statistical Office, the winner was Andrej Babiš's ANO party, securing 26.14% of the vote. STAN (Mayors and Independents) followed with 8.7%, while the SPD–Trikolora coalition gained 5.73%. Notably, several accounts linked to political parties that won EP seats were found to have shared content containing gendered hate speech and negative stereotypes, as detailed in the “Actors spreading gendered disinformation” section of the report.

STAN, whose candidate Danuše Nerudová was elected MEP, was a key target of disinformation and smear campaigns. A Transparency International CR study identified STAN as the most targeted party by false or misleading content during the EP election. This research confirms that trend, showing a spike in gendered disinformation and stereotypes directed at Nerudová.

Gendered disinformation and content featuring negative gender stereotypes or hostile/inflammatory rhetoric surged in Czechia around the 2024 EP elections, with Czech-language public posts related to the election reaching at least 1.35 million views.

The first major spike occurred between March and May 2024, aligning with the campaign period ahead of the 7–8 June vote. During this time, 525 such posts were recorded, generating around 619,000 views and 52,730 interactions (reactions, comments, and shares)—a roughly ten-fold increase in posts containing gendered hate speech or stereotypes.

The most-interacted post during the first disinformation spike was published on 7 April 2024 by PRO-oficiální, a far-right Czech party led by Jindřich Rajchl. Reacting to Slovakia's presidential election, it praised Peter Pellegrini's win and rejected “woke ideology.” The post had around 14,000 views and 915 interactions (reactions, comments, and shares).

A second wave of gendered disinformation occurred between August 2024 and January 2025, comprising two smaller spikes. During this period, 670 posts containing gendered disinformation or stereotypes were recorded in Czechia—an increase of around 650% compared to March 2024. These posts garnered approximately 701,800 views and 33,510 interactions.

While not focused on a single topic, gendered narratives tied to the EP election remained prevalent throughout this period. Common themes included attacks on the so-called “Brussels dictatorship” or the promotion of “gender ideology” by far-right Czech politicians. For example, on 24 October 2024, Ivana Turková of the PRO party accused MEP Danuše Nerudová of pushing “gender ideology” in schools.

Actors spreading gendered disinformation relating to the EP Election

The main spreaders of gendered disinformation related to the EP election, according to the research, were five accounts of prominent political figures and one inde-

pendent media outlet. The top accounts included: Tomio Okamura – SPD (Facebook), V.O.X. NEWS (YouTube), Radim Fiala – SPD (Facebook), Tomio Okamura SPD (Instagram), Andrej Babiš (Facebook), and MUDr. Ivan David (Facebook).

Four of these accounts are linked to members of the far-right SPD party, which campaigned on strong opposition to the EU, support for Ukraine, migration, the Green Deal, and what it labels as “neo-Marxist, genderist, and multicultural agendas and indoctrination.”

TOP SPREADERS OF GENDERED DISINFORMATION (EP ELECTION)

Tomio Okamura – SPD (Facebook & Instagram)

Most interactions by far.

Promotes anti-EU, anti-gender, anti-immigration rhetoric; paints the EP as a promoter of “neo-Marxist, genderist” agendas.

Radim Fiala – SPD (Facebook)

SPD co-founder and MP. Reposts SPD content, amplifies anti-gender and anti-EU messaging.

Shares links to disinfo platforms (Parlamentní listy, Proti proud, První zprávy), supports pro-Kremlin narratives, and previously backed Russia's annexation of Crimea.

MUDr. Ivan David – SPD (Facebook)

MEP affiliated with the far-right Europe of Sovereign Nations.

Runs the now-banned Nová republika disinfo site, known for promoting Kremlin propaganda.

Posts glorify Orbán, Trump, Fico; attack Ukraine and liberal democracy.

Andrej Babiš – ANO (Facebook)

Former PM and ANO leader. While less radical, his Facebook includes populist, anti-government content.

Combines political messaging with relatable lifestyle content.

Controversial background includes alleged StB, which he denies, and a business empire.

V.O.X. NEWS – YouTube

A fringe media outlet promoting anti-liberal, anti-gender narratives.

Hosts polarising guests and spreads far-right disinformation, as reported by Seznam Zprávy.

SUMMARY

- Far-right actors, particularly those linked to SPD, dominated gendered disinformation around the 2024 EP elections.
- Danuše Nerudová and pro-European parties like STAN were common targets, often framed as proponents of “gender ideology” or “Brussels dictatorship.”
- Posts often intertwined gender narratives with broader populist, anti-EU, and pro-Kremlin themes—illustrating how gendered disinformation is deployed to inflame cultural division and mobilise nationalist voters.

Danuše Nerudová and Gendered Disinformation in Czechia

Danuše Nerudová, elected as an MEP in June 2024, is an economist, professor, politician, and mother, according to her website danusenerudova.cz. She was the first woman to serve as president of Mendel University in Brno, as noted by *Brněnský deník*. In the 2023 Czech presidential election, she finished third in the first round with 13.92% of the vote—around 780,000 votes—the highest number ever received by a female candidate in Czech history. In 2024, she joined the STAN coalition, led its EP candidate list, and won a seat in the European Parliament.

Nerudová was the target of disinformation during both her 2023 presidential and 2024 EP campaigns. According to [Aktuálně.cz](https://aktuálně.cz), false claims during her presidential bid included that she would abolish free healthcare or that she was a puppet of Prime Minister Fiala's government. Ahead of the 2024 EP elections, researchers found posts portraying her as part of the “Brussels dictatorship” or accusing her of promoting “gender ideology.”

Gendered disinformation and abuse targeting Danuše Nerudová in Czechia

Gendered disinformation targeting Danuše Nerudová surged ahead of key political moments: the January 2023 Czech presidential election, the June 2024 EP election, and again from August to December 2024. During this time, she faced public attacks from far-right MEPs and Czech politicians, often targeting her intelligence and appearance. Overall, gendered disinformation posts about Nerudová were viewed at least 3.5 million times during the data observation period.

Interestingly, one of the accounts identified during the manual validation of posts using relevant keywords was Nerudová's own. Researchers noted that her posts defending herself against gender-based attacks had a positive impact on public discourse. As a result, the total figures for views and interactions include not only disinformation but also posts contributing constructively to discussions on gender and politics in Czechia. According to Gerulata data, two of the 1,884 posts in this dataset were published by Nerudová herself, generating around 139,600 views and 11,270 interactions.

The first spike in gendered disinformation targeting Danuše Nerudová occurred between October 2022 and January 2023. During this period, there was a nine-fold increase in posts containing gendered disinformation keywords compared to non-peak months, peaking in January 2023 with 160 such posts. This rise coincided with the lead-up to the first round of the Czech presidential election, in which Nerudová was a candidate.

A second, even larger spike took place from March 2023 to May 2024, with a fifteen-fold increase in posts with gendered disinformation keywords, culminating in 208 posts in May 2024—just before the EP election, where Nerudová was elected as an MEP for the STAN coalition. The third spike in gendered disinformation targeting Danuše Nerudová occurred between August and Decem-

ber 2024. This period saw two peaks in social media content containing keywords linked to negative gender stereotypes or gender disinformation—an average 16-fold increase compared to non-peak months. December 2024 recorded the highest volume, with 196 such posts.

Actors sharing gendered disinformation posts on Danuše Nerudová

TOP SPREADERS OF GENDERED ATTACKS

- **Jindřich Rajchl – far-right PRO leader**
Shared mocking content and debate clips to question Nerudová's competence.
Promotes pro-Kremlin and populist narratives.
- **Karla Maříková – SPD MP**
Known for anti-NATO, anti-EU rhetoric.
Shared content from disinfo sites like *Parlamentní listy* and *42TČen*.
Targeted Nerudová's integrity and qualifications.
- **Petra Rádová – disinfo influencer**
Former COVID-19 disinfo spreader turned pro-Kremlin promoter.
Called Nerudová a “symbol of stupidity, depravity, and a security risk.”
- **Jsem Zděšena – anonymous anti-liberal Facebook/X account**
Shares collages and memes mocking Nerudová and journalists.
- **Hranatost – Facebook account supporting Filip Turek (Motorists/Patriots for Europe)**
Known for hyper-masculine branding and opposition to gender equality.
Ridiculed Nerudová's views and appearance.

Responding to Disinformation: Nerudová's Counter-Narrative

Nerudová used her own social media, particularly Instagram, to push back against disinformation.

Example: On 24 April 2024, she responded to Filip Turek likening her CO₂ emissions to a cow's by fact-checking his claim and criticising his sexist rhetoric.

Impact: Her two most-viewed posts addressing gendered abuse reached ~139,600 views and 11,270 interactions. Though responses were mixed (many included insults), her counters had visible reach and highlighted the role of public figures in challenging misogyny.

Sample Gendered Attack: Roman Roun (KSČM)

- Post (12 Dec 2024): Roun called Nerudová “stupid, ugly, and vulgar” in response to her criticism of KSČM's anti-NATO stance.
- Context: Nerudová told KSČM to “go to hell” after they called for NATO withdrawal. Roun replied with personal insults and false claims, such as blaming NATO for “raping and murdering women and children.”
- Significance: His language exemplifies gendered disinformation: using insults about appearance and intelligence to delegitimise female political figures.

- Broader pattern: As seen in Discourse & Society’s research, women in politics are disproportionately attacked with sexualised or emotional language questioning their legitimacy and competence.

KSČM and Pro-Kremlin Narratives

- The Communist Party has long supported anti-EU and anti-NATO positions.
- Its members, like Jozef Skála, have appeared on Sputnik News and promoted Kremlin-aligned messaging.
- While KSČM removed some content post-2022 invasion, archived versions confirm its alignment with Russian propaganda.

Danuše Nerudová’s political rise has been accompanied by waves of gendered disinformation—especially during electoral moments. Attacks target her intelligence, appearance, and legitimacy, and are often driven by far-right, populist, and pro-Kremlin actors. Despite this, her active rebuttals demonstrate the potential for public figures to counter gendered disinformation through transparency, engagement, and direct communication.

TIES BETWEEN GENDERED AND OTHER FORMS OF DISINFORMATION

Using a seed list based on the spike analysis and expert insights from MEMO 98 and Women in Media, researchers constructed a network map illustrating how gendered disinformation overlaps with broader disinformation narratives in Czechia. For more information, please see the long form report

Overview of Czechia’s Disinformation Landscape

Czech disinformation circulates widely via social media and quasi-media websites.

Key themes include:

- COVID-19 conspiracies
- Anti-immigration narratives
- Disinformation about the war in Ukraine
- Anti-EU, anti-NATO, and anti-liberal sentiment

Often rooted in Kremlin-aligned narratives, these messages contrast “decadent” Western values with “traditional,” nationalist, or pan-Slavic ideals—undermining democratic trust and serving hybrid threats.

MAIN ACTOR GROUPS IN GENDERED AND BROADER DISINFORMATION

Anti-establishment figures

Typically nationalist, populist, or conspiratorial
Distrust in democratic institutions, often pro-Kremlin
Represented by Jindřich Rajchl, Jana Zwyrtková Hamplová, and alternative outlets like Raptor and Parlamentní listy

Far-right and populist political actors

Often overlap with anti-establishment views
Mainstream political parties that spread Kremlin-aligned or anti-gender narratives

Represented by SPD, Trikolóra, and segments of ANO
Conservative traditionalists

Resist progressive norms without overtly opposing democracy

Include Aliance pro rodinu, Tradiční rodina z.s., and Zdeněk Hrabá

Less connected to Russian influence, though exceptions exist

NETWORK MAP OBSERVATIONS

Most influential account: Tomio Okamura (SPD) on Facebook

Other top nodes:

- Radim Fiala (SPD)
- CNN Prima News
- Novinky.cz
- TV Nova Zpravodajství

Platform dominance: Facebook (78.19% of 376 nodes), followed by websites (10.11%) and a minority of Telegram, YouTube, X, and Instagram accounts.

A closer look at the content amplified by influential political actors reveals that the network as a whole, as well as these politicians’ connections, includes a relatively high number of news platforms with a high out-degree. This means their content is frequently shared by other actors, making them rank among the most influential actors in the network. These are state media like ČT24 (the 7th largest node), private news channels such as Zpravodajství TV (the 5th largest node), and CNN Prima NEWS (the 2nd largest node), and news websites such as Novinky (the 4th largest node), Zprávy iDNES.cz (the 2nd largest node) and Deník N (the 10th largest node).

This demonstrates an interesting trend: a significant portion of the amplified content originates from legitimate sources that can be, with some reservations, considered serious journalism. However, since most actors share this content to serve their political messaging, they often present it to fit their needs, meaning that even truthful information can become misinformation through selective presentation, omission of context, or manipulative framing. This does not necessarily involve outright deception but rather the strategic use of snippets, interview cutouts, or article headlines to reinforce their stances or criticise the government, the EU, and other matters. In many cases, such content is accompanied by biased or misleading descriptions designed to provoke an emotional response and encourage widespread sharing.

POLITICAL AMPLIFICATION OF DISINFORMATION

Populist politicians frequently contribute to disinfo platforms to legitimize their views.

Main clusters:

- SPD cluster: Strongly interconnected—Okamura, Fiala, Ivan David, Radek Koten amplify each other and draw on nationalist, anti-EU, anti-migrant, and anti-gender rhetoric.
- ANO cluster: Smaller, more diffuse, centred around Andrej Babiš and Alena Šillerová.

Example: Radim Fiala’s Network

- Shares from groups like LIGA LIBE and Aliance pro rodinu
- Reposts Slovak disinfo from Luboš Blaha and Luboš Hrica
- Interacts with Kotleba’s far-right party in Slovakia
- Connected to anti-Islam pages like euRabia and Říkáme ne migrantům v ČR

Example: Ivan David’s Network

- Linked to anti-Islam groups (Islám v ČR nechceme, Blok proti islamizaci)
- Connected to pro-Orbán, pro-Salvini, and pro-Russian actors
- Close to activist Martin Konvička

Manipulation of Mainstream Media

Despite disinformation actors attacking the media, they frequently reuse content from mainstream outlets like:

ČT24, CNN Prima News, TV Nova, Novinky.cz, iDNES.cz, Deník N

Such content is selectively framed or stripped of context to fit disinfo narratives—turning factual information into misleading propaganda.

‘Alternative’ Media as Amplifiers

A distinct cluster in the top-right of the map includes:

- Parlamentní listy (11th largest node) – widely read quasi-media outlet that blends legitimate news with pro-Kremlin narratives.
- Raptor TV – operated by disinfo actor Žarko Jovanović, shares Kremlin propaganda, anti-immigration rhetoric, and pro-AfD content.
- Interviewed AfD’s Petr Bystron, allegedly linked to Russian funding
- Connected to SPD politicians, Zwyrtke Hamplová, and Tradiční rodina z.s.

Other notable outlets:

42Teen, Sputnik CZ, Svobodný vysílač, AC24, KTV Live, Skrytá pravda, PRVNIZPRAVY.cz, XTV, Deník TO, Pravý prostor, euRABIA, O čem se mlčí.

Many were briefly blocked in February 2022 for national security concerns related to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

Telegram as a Niche Amplifier

Telegram accounts form only 2% of nodes but include high-impact disinfo spreaders:

- Úschovna >>CZ<< – spreads Kremlin narratives and Sputnik content
- Casus Belli and Infokanál klubu nekonvenčne myslíacich – Slovak channels linked to Russian Embassy narratives
- Interact with fringe Czech TikTok and YouTube disinfo nodes like V.O.X. NEWS

Enabling Russian Influence

The network reveals diffuse but potent pro-Kremlin influence, enabled not by formal agents, but by:

- Populist and far-right politicians
- Disinformation influencers
- “Alternative” media
- Pages cloaked in patriotism and tradition, resonating with Russian narratives

Rather than direct intervention, Russia’s influence appears embedded through narratives that erode trust, promote polarisation, and glamorise authoritarianism. The SPD, particularly via Tomio Okamura, stands out as the most influential political vector of this ecosystem. Further detail is explored in the long form report (Annex 4.3) and in research by Deník N, Seznam Zprávy, and Atlas vlivu.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF THESE ATTACKS?

Women in Media interviewed 10 individuals in Czechia, nine women and one man, on gendered disinformation in their country. Most of the interviewees have been the targets of gendered disinformation.

The interviewees’ names are anonymised and are referred to by their profession.

THE INTERVIEWEES WERE:

- Šárka Homfray, lawyer and trade unionist
- Markéta Kutilová, Journalist
- Filip Milde, LGBTQ+ rights activist
- Johanna Nejedlová, activist and Konsent NGO Founder and CEO
- Diana Soták Gregorová, Czech Women’s Lobby Director
- Zuzana Schreibová, Multicultural Centre Prague Director
- Klára Laurenčíková Šimáčková, Government Commissioner for Human Rights
- Veronika Šprincová, Gender expert
- Apolena Rychlíková, Journalist
- Academic, who wished to remain anonymous

The interviews identified retreat from public life, fears for personal safety, loss of funding or job opportunities, psychological distress, harassment and the suppression of policies that could improve gender parity and LGBTQ+ rights in Czechia as major impacts of gendered disinformation.

Self-censorship; retreat from professional life and activities

“I’m a fat ugly feminist who hates men because no men want her, and so she has declared war on them and is trying to eliminate them.” - Lawyer

The lawyer often experiences online attacks in response to her work. The most common narrative of these attacks is that she has made a business of advocating for women’s rights and looking for problems where they do not exist purely as a source of revenue. She also experiences fat-shaming. An NGO worker told Women in Media of a similar experience; that her outspokenness on topics relating to gender and immigration resulted in gendered attacks against her, including body shaming and calling her character into question. According to the lawyer, the persistence of such attacks highlights the challenges faced by people who speak out on gender issues, and the fact that attempts are made to shame and embarrass them into silence.

Even before she was accused of being sympathetic to extremist movements, a journalist interviewee faced gender-based discrimination and insults, with people (she says mainly men over the age of 45) questioning her ability to be a foreign correspondent as a woman. She said some people also criticised her for being a bad mother because of her choice of profession. Although these insults did not deter her from pursuing her work, she says

that the threats she received have made her more careful about what she shares publicly.

An academic and activist said that increased backlash for expressing socially contentious views, coupled with a lack of robust support mechanisms for staff at her university, has led to her self-censoring. The suppression of policies and viewpoints that could benefit women and LGBTQ+ individuals in Czech society

“Gender-based disinformation attempts to discredit organisations focused on human rights and undermine trust in democratic institutions. We see that similar tactics are used as in other countries – spreading fear, manipulating emotions, and trying to create the impression that gender equality is a threat.” - NGO Director

An NGO representative pointed out that certain groups have been using disinformation narratives as a mobilisation tool to delay the legalisation of same-sex marriage by spreading lies about the LGBTQ+ community. A significant disinformation narrative has been circulating around the adoption of children by same-sex couples, falsely linking it to child trafficking. This false claim was propagated by ultra-conservative groups, notably the Alliance for Family (AliPro), led by Jana Jochová. In September 2021, just before the parliamentary elections, Jochová publicly stated that homosexual marriage would lead to child trafficking, a claim that was widely disseminated through social media platforms like Facebook. This claim was further spread through various media channels and public statements by influential figures. For example, Senator and respected presidential candidate Pavel Fischer has said that adoption of children by same-sex couples could lead to child trafficking if same-sex marriage receives the same legal recognition as heterosexual marriage.

The lawyer interviewee said that disinformation campaigns are hindering the adoption of policies that could help women's lives in Czechia. For example, she noted that although Czechia has one of the highest gender pay gaps in the EU (a gap of 16.4%), a wave of disinformation was sparked with the adoption of the EU Directive on Transparency of Remuneration (EU 2023/970) in April 2023. One of the primary misconceptions propagated by opponents of the Directive was the outright denial of the existence of a gender pay gap. Critics argued that the pay gap is merely a statistical artifact resulting from flawed calculations rather than a genuine societal issue; that “it’s just a miscalculation”. Furthermore, misleading information about the directive's impact on individual privacy has been disseminated. Echo24, an online daily news portal, published claims that the directive would lead to complete transparency of individual salaries, implying that all salary information would be disclosed, satisfying employees' curiosity about their colleagues' pay. This is inaccurate, as the directive's main aim is to strengthen the application of equal pay principles between men and women, rather than have unrestricted sharing of salary information.

The lawyer observed that clickbait headlines were often employed to perpetuate the common misconception that the directive would eliminate salary confidentiality. Other narratives erroneously claimed that the directive would impose an undue burden on businesses, particularly smaller ones, though in reality, the directive's reporting requirements were graduated, with different timelines and thresholds for different-sized companies. According to the lawyer, the aim was to foster resentment among employers and incite anti-Brussels sentiment along the lines of “What has Brussels done to us now”, with the potential impact on current and future generations of women workers ignored.

The lawyer also noted similar sentiments and disinformation emerging with the EU Work-Life Balance Directive (2019/1158), which has not yet been fully implemented in Czechia. This Directive was aimed at improving the work-life balance for parents and caregivers. When the Directive came out, a false claim was shared that the Directive would force men to take maternity leave. The directive provisions for paternity leave and shared parental responsibilities were framed as an assault on masculinity. This misconception became a focal point for conservative political rhetoric, feeding societal anxieties about changing gender roles and family structure. In the politically conservative climate of Czechia (Czechia's majority male Chamber of Deputies, with an average age of around 50, reflects a conservative political climate), such ideas again develop into a broader narrative that the EU is attempting to radically reshape society against the will of the member states.

A policy analyst interviewee faced gender-based disinformation and hate speech during her time in a government advisory role. A significant incident occurred when she and her organisation publicly criticised an exhibition at an educational event that featured semi-naked women reading books. Their open letter, questioning the appropriateness of such imagery at an educational event, sparked a backlash, including hate speech and disinformation campaigns against them. The backlash was particularly prominent on social media, where detractors used tactics such as taking unflattering photos of her and her colleagues, sending offensive messages, and accusing feminists of attempting to ban artistic expression. She recalled being subjected to misogynistic insults and absurd claims that she and her colleagues envied the women in the exhibition. Hate speech extended to social media messages and articles in politically biased media, misrepresenting the issue as a feminist censorship attempt. The interviewee noted that misleading narratives frame gender equality advocacy as censorship or an attack on tradition.

Two interviewees noted that organisations like the Alliance for the Family (AliPro) and the Society for the Defence of Freedom of Speech are key players in promoting anti-gender rhetoric under the guise of free speech advocacy in Czechia.

Physical threats/harassment

One journalist said that following online attacks that sought to undermine her credibility as a journalist, someone smeared faeces and wrote gendered insults on her car. An NGO director and her colleagues faced gendered attacks after criticising a sexist advertisement. They overcame this through mutual support within their team and in their households. An academic and activist who spoke to Women in Media said she had been doxxed by a far-right organisation due to her activism.

Hacking and online presence takeover by trolls

An NGO director told Women in Media how the NGO's critics hacked the NGO's social media accounts, spreading falsehoods from the organisation's own social media channels.

Severe psychological distress, anxiety

"It made me question my self-worth and how I saw myself."
- Anthropologist and activist

"Attacks ... against our campaign lasted for several weeks. We didn't expect it, and it was very challenging. For the first time, we faced such pressure. It had a long-term psychological impact on our team." - NGO director

One interviewee told Women in Media that attacks on her appearance and her personal life have led her to question her self-worth, while three other interviewees also described the psychological toll of gendered attacks against them. An NGO director said that the prolonged backlash faced by her organisation, lasting almost three weeks, caused significant psychological stress on the entire team.

Loss of employment or funding

An NGO director said her organisation experienced several incidents of disinformation directed at its activities by the Traditional Family group (TF) – an association that has been registered since 2018 and which opposes feminism and promotes traditional family values. According to the interviewee, the TF group recently wrote to the government, including the Prime Minister, claiming that her NGO and other NGOs, promote dangerous gender ideologies. Her NGO's participation in government advisory bodies has also been deemed problematic by TF, particularly around the Istanbul Convention, with calls from the TF group for the NGO's funding to be cut. Another NGO director interviewed by Women in Media faced similar challenges, with critics disseminating false claims about the cost of their campaigns, in addition to gendered attacks on their appearance.

Additional vulnerabilities

Some interviewees mentioned that gendered attacks appear to be more severe if the target is from a minority group.

HOW CAN CZECHIA IMPROVE ITS RESILIENCE AGAINST GENDERED DISINFORMATION ON A NATIONAL, INSTITUTIONAL, AND INDIVIDUAL LEVEL?

"People often get the impression that the majority opinion of society corresponds to what they see on social media – for example, hateful comments under posts about gender topics. However, surveys show that extreme views are not shared by the majority. It is necessary to create a counterbalance – share facts, positive examples, and support equality, otherwise toxic content will prevail."
- NGO Director

PREVENTION

Education, social media policy reform and government accountability were repeatedly highlighted by the interviewees as essential in curbing the spread of gendered disinformation.

Improved communication about socially contentious issues, disinformation, and their implications

Several interviewees observed that the primary spreaders and consumers of gendered disinformation in Czechia are individuals aged over 45 who have engaged with other forms of disinformation and conspiracy theories online. These interviewees recommend that state efforts to improve public awareness of disinformation consider the types of content and platforms that resonate with this age group.

An investigative journalist interviewee noted that to prevent hateful attacks and any form of disinformation based on protected characteristics from taking root, it is essential to remind people of the gravity of dehumanising an individual or group and the repercussions this can have. Several interviewees spoke of the importance of a nonpartisan, nationwide educational strategy in which teachers in Czechia's schools are equipped to discuss all forms of disinformation with students, emphasising empathy and critical thinking.

Several interviewees observed that a lack of awareness among the general public regarding the true aims of NGOs advocating for women's rights and LGBTQ+ rights, combined with a fear of change, was enabling gendered disinformation to thrive. Furthermore, the interviewees noted a general unawareness of disinformation, particularly gendered disinformation, which resulted in a diminished capacity for the public to critically engage with information.

Improved communication by actors advocating for women's rights and LGBTQ+ rights, including simple, 'myth-busting' style communications on social media platforms like Facebook – also home to disinformation narratives – could better equip people to make up their

own minds when confronted with campaigns to discredit initiatives such as the Istanbul Convention.

Furthermore, the growing use of AI tools to create and spread gendered disinformation content, such as sexualised deep fakes through bots, underscores the urgent need to allocate resources for combating the proliferation of such content. Several interviewees advocated for increased government funding to tackle and keep up with the issue.

At the same time, interviewees noted that nationwide campaigns - whether non-partisan, government-led or led by civil society - should emphasise to men that equal opportunities in careers or parenthood do not threaten their masculinity.

Social media company policies

- Departure from engagement at any cost. One interviewee noted that a vocal minority can distort public debate through algorithmic amplification. Legislation that would ensure algorithmic de-prioritisation of hateful content – not just in terms of what can and cannot be monetised, but also in terms of content exposure – would serve to reduce the spread of hateful content, including gendered attacks. While mainstream social media platforms work to demonetise hateful accounts, a ban on advertising on disinformation websites would limit disinformation actors' sources of financing.
- Moderation. Several interviewees highlighted the prevalence of gendered disinformation on social media and called for social media companies to be held to higher accountability standards regarding the content that can be shared and promoted on their platforms. National or EU legislation that would require these companies to be held to a high standard of hate filtering or moderation would therefore make a difference in preventing at least some gendered disinformation campaigns online.
- Online anonymity. One investigative journalist interviewee noted that the ability for individuals to remain anonymous online facilitates the sharing of hateful content – including revenge porn, extreme misogyny, and the dehumanisation and promotion of violence against women – without consequences. Stricter regulations on users, like requiring accounts to be linked to identification and real names, would make it more difficult for malicious actors to troll individuals while using an alias. However, these measures could also be employed to suppress dissent in countries with poor human rights records and limited social freedoms.

Non-partisan accountability for actors in the public sphere

Several interviewees noted that politicians, political lobbying organisations, and media outlets were not always held to a high standard when it comes to sharing factual information, nor when it comes to revealing financial in-

formation that could reveal vested interests in suppressing or promoting various narratives.

Researchers found that it is not only individuals from conservative or far-right movements who are sharing gendered disinformation. In light of this, it is vital that national efforts to hold individuals accountable for their public statements about others adhere to rigorous standards, irrespective of their political alignment.

Czech law does not recognise the terms 'disinformation' or 'propaganda'. The government's planned anti-disinformation law, which was included in its programme statement, is currently on hold. Additionally, the government abolished the position of the Media and Disinformation Commissioner, which had been held by Michal Klíma since March 2022.

MITIGATING THE IMPACT OF GENDERED DISINFORMATION ON THE TARGET

Reducing target exposure to gendered disinformation, timely reporting of threats and structured support, including crisis communications and psychological support, were noted by interviewees as important in reducing the impact of gendered disinformation on individuals targeted. Each recommendation outlined below is preceded by an indication of whether it is actionable by an organisation, an individual, or both.

Reducing target exposure to gendered disinformation

Most interviewees who had experienced gendered attacks online expressed a preference for avoiding hateful comments, allowing them to focus on their work without distraction. Several interviewees mentioned straightforward, practical steps that can be taken to lessen targets' exposure to gendered disinformation attacks.

Each recommendation outlined below is preceded by an indication of whether it is actionable by an organisation, an individual, or both.

ORGANISATIONAL

Manual filtering of abusive content by organisations to protect staff from gendered disinformation and hate. One former NGO director noted that her organisation has attempted to moderate hateful comments directed at the organisation and its staff.

ORGANISATIONAL AND PERSONAL

Automated filtering. Creation and adoption of software or apps that can filter out hateful comments and messages from potential targets' social media and email accounts. A former NGO director told Women in Media that her organisation has cooperated with an AI company to design and use a tool which filters out hateful comments. This interviewee emphasised her belief that AI solutions should be regarded as a last resort and that the underlying causes and environments enabling gendered

disinformation to flourish must be addressed.

ORGANISATIONAL AND PERSONAL

Setting clear guidelines for when (not) to engage online, for example, one women's rights NGO director told Women in Media that as an organisation, they do not engage with online trolls, and take action in reporting potential threats to authorities.

Timely reporting and actioning of threats

ORGANISATIONAL AND PERSONAL

Clear protocols, including thresholding and escalation policies, on when and to whom to report gendered attacks.

NATIONAL

Proper training for law enforcement on how to respond to reports of harassment against public figures. One analyst described authorities meeting her report of harassment with indifference and, implying that as a public figure, she should simply accept hateful attacks and online harassment. Another interviewee echoed the importance of adequate training for police and the judiciary in handling disinformation cases.

NATIONAL

Timely and accessible communications from the government, possibly coordinated by the Interior and Justice ministries, about emerging disinformation threats could be beneficial in curbing the spread of disinformation in Czech society, according to a policy analyst. These could take the form of straightforward myth-busting announcements, conveyed simply and engagingly, including on social media sites where disinformation is frequently disseminated.

Practical training and support

"Gender-based disinformation against our campaign led to weeks of intense pressure that psychologically exhausted the team. Lies about our funding were picked up by some media, and it was almost impossible to refute them. It was the first time we faced such an attack, and we didn't expect how long and strongly it would affect our organisation." - NGO Director

ORGANISATIONAL AND PERSONAL

Crisis communications support. An NGO director interviewee reflected that, when her organisation faced backlash over its feminist activism, they were overwhelmed by the sheer volume and scale of online attacks, leaving her and her team feeling ill-equipped to handle the situation. Since they were subject to a large-scale online attack, the NGO has endeavoured to ensure they are prepared for potential backlash. This research recommends that organisations advocating for women and/or LGBTQ+ individuals invest in crisis communications training to effectively contain the spread of gendered attacks affecting their staff and any affiliated activists, and that any funders prioritise allocating resources towards crisis communications to the organisations they support.

ORGANISATIONAL AND PERSONAL

Operational security training. One interviewee described a hacking attack following a disinformation campaign against her organisation. The hackers were able to take control of the target organisation's social media accounts and troll the organisation from within. It is strongly recommended that operational security training be provided to all staff, as well as to affiliated activists and supporters of organisations advocating for women's and LGBTQ+ rights, to protect organisations and individuals from malicious actors.

ORGANISATIONAL AND PERSONAL

Several interviewees said increased (funding for) psychological support would benefit victims of gendered disinformation attacks. They suggested that this support could be provided by workplaces when the attacks relate to the professional activities and identities of the targets.

NATIONAL

Budget allocation for fact-checking initiatives that assist the public in making more informed choices about the information they consume and the policies they support.