

Lack of legal protections against doxing is putting women at greater risk of online stalking and harassment

National and international laws do not adequately protect against doxing, making it hard to combat and penalize abuse, finds research by AUDRi and Equality Now.

NEW YORK, NEW YORK, UNITED STATES, February 28, 2024

[/EINPresswire.com/](https://EINPresswire.com/) -- The absence of national and international laws specifically addressing doxing poses a significant threat globally to the safety and well-being of women and other vulnerable groups. New research finds that legislation worldwide does not provide adequate protection against the malicious online sharing of people's private information, making it far more difficult to combat and penalize.



“

Doxing poisons the entire digital ecosystem. A lack of legal frameworks to protect and support potential targets is playing into the hands of attackers who use doxing to intimidate women into silence.”

Emma Gibson, AUDRi

Inconsistencies in laws relating to doxing exist across different jurisdictions, and in some countries, a patchwork of several criminal and civil laws may apply. International human rights laws do not contain a definition of ‘doxing’ (or ‘doxing’) and do not include direct regulation.

Legal complexities and shortfalls in state and tech industry protections make it arduous and slow for victims to obtain help with getting personal and confidential details removed from online platforms. And targets of attacks face a legal labyrinth when attempting to seek redress for

problems caused.

This lack of effective legal and practical recourse leaves doxing victims vulnerable to ongoing abuse and at heightened risk of intimidation escalating into major emotional, professional, and

physical harm. Meanwhile, wrongdoers are able to act with impunity.

DIGITAL ABUSE, DOXING AND THE LAW

These are some of the concerning findings highlighted in [Doxing, Digital Abuse and the Law](#), a new policy brief by [Alliance for Universal Digital Rights \(AUDRI\)](#) and [Equality Now](#), which offers an overview of international human

rights law and gives a snapshot of legal frameworks in a selection of jurisdictions, including the European Union, Australia, England and Wales, Kenya, New Zealand, Nigeria, Scotland, South Africa, and California, Texas, and Virginia in the United States.

The research was conducted with pro-bono assistance from international law firm Hogan Lovells International LLP, which provided analysis of over 100 different laws across four continents.

Despite the considerable threats inherent in doxing, legal frameworks examined were found to provide very little protection or legal recourse, and there were no laws specifically related to doxing, although some countries do have privacy laws that might apply.

WHAT IS DOXING?

Doxing involves the sharing of private, personally identifiable information on the internet, with malicious intent and without the victim's consent.

This form of online harassment can include the release of private information to undermine someone's credibility or reputation and to shame and humiliate them; disclosure of personal and private information so an individual can be located physically; or revealing the identity of someone who was previously anonymous.

Attacks can incorporate a range of actions, from unsolicited sign-ups to services using a victim's name and address, to more grievous violations like identity fraud, cyberbullying, harassment, stalking, and targeting of family members, personal contacts, and employers.

Frequently, victims only discover their information has been shared publicly - such as on social media platforms - when people start contacting them. Doxing can result in the target receiving an onslaught of abusive messages and threatening phone calls to their personal or work numbers, and personal details are sometimes circulated amongst specific groups to increase the scope of attacks.



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Doxing is often accompanied by other forms of harassment, such as the non-consensual sharing of intimate images. One manifestation is when sexually explicit images or videos are posted on specialized advertising sites for prostitution together with private information, such as a woman's home address.

The repercussions can extend beyond the digital realm, with many victims experiencing real-world consequences such as physical intimidation and violence, and job loss.

DOXING IS A WOMEN'S RIGHTS ISSUE

Doxing is a threat to all internet users, but women are disproportionately targeted, especially women of color, those in the LGBTQI+ community, and other marginalized minority groups. It is frequently used as a tool to silence women in the public eye, particularly those involved in politics, journalism, and activism.

The endangerment and distress caused by doxing can result in self-censorship, with victims deterred from freely expressing their opinions. They may reduce or stop their online activities, limit or delete their social media profiles, or feel compelled to change careers. This chilling effect silences individuals and diminishes the diversity and depth of perspectives in public discourse.

Emma Gibson, Global Coordinator for AUDRi, highlights how the failure to address doxing has a knock-on effect on gender and representation in the digital space. "With little or no legal recourse, those targeted, or who with good reason, fear being targeted by doxing and other forms of online abuse, have very little option but to moderate their behavior to avoid potential threats."

Gibson warns, "Because these harms disproportionately affect women, their voices and contributions are being marginalized even further. The consequence of risk avoidance is an even more divided digital space."

The gendered nature of doxing necessitates robust legal protections, digital literacy initiatives, and community support networks to safeguard women's rights to privacy, safety, and participation in the digital age.

"Doxing poisons the entire digital ecosystem. A lack of legal frameworks to protect and support potential targets is playing into the hands of attackers who use doxing to intimidate women into silence. Tech industry leaders and governments both have a responsibility to take whatever measures are necessary to correct this damaging state of affairs," Gibson states.

A FAST-CHANGING DIGITAL SPACE IS NO EXCUSE

Amanda Manyame, Equality Now's Digital Law & Rights Advisor, reiterates the need for comprehensive legal reforms addressing the risks and violations women and other vulnerable

individuals experience online.

“Governments urgently need to introduce and implement laws that effectively deal with the rapidly evolving digital world. But doxing has been happening since the internet’s early days, and there is no excuse for the failure by policymakers to introduce legislation and tackle the underlying causes of this and other online abuses.”

Manyame says that governments have an obligation to fulfill their duty to provide protection from digital abuse. “Doxing and other forms of online harm are part of a continuum of sexual and gender-based violence rooted in the same systems of misogyny that perpetuate the subordination and silencing of women and girls in society more widely.

“We urge governments to review their existing legal frameworks and assess whether they provide adequate protection to victims of doxing. This requires taking into account the specific issues and risks experienced by women and girls.”

In addition, governments need to recognize and address cross-border challenges. The multijurisdictional nature of doxing complicates matters, as it often involves individuals and activities spanning different legal jurisdictions. Mechanisms for multilateral international cooperation need to be adapted to ensure victims can access criminal justice and other remedies wherever they live.

Laws and standards must also hold tech platforms accountable for cooperating with law enforcement agencies within and across borders. Tech companies should be obliged to proactively identify harms and perpetrators, and take swift actions to respond to incidents.

Alliance for Universal Digital Rights (AUDRI) exists to explore ways of creating a digital future in which everyone can enjoy equal rights to safety, freedom, and dignity – whoever they are and wherever, whenever, and however they exist and connect in the digital world.

Co-founded by Equality Now and Women Leading in AI, AUDRI focuses on women, girls, and other people from discriminated-against groups, all of whom face intersecting forms of discrimination and gender-based stereotypes in the physical world. Because it is only when the most vulnerable in society are protected that everyone is safe. For more information, go to www.audri.org.

Equality Now is an international non-governmental human rights organization that works to protect and promote the rights of all women and girls around the world by combining grassroots activism with international, regional, and national legal advocacy. Our international network of lawyers, activists and supporters achieve legal and systemic change by holding governments responsible for enacting and enforcing laws and policies that end legal inequality, sex trafficking,

online sexual exploitation, sexual violence, and harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and child marriage. For more information, go to www.equalitynow.org.

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