

Technology facilitated gender-based violence is another pressing challenge that Sri Lanka is currently facing. With the rise of digital platforms, women and vulnerable groups are increasingly subjected to harassment, cyberbullying, online threats, and exploitation. This form of violence is particularly harmful as it often goes unnoticed or unaddressed by traditional legal frameworks. The government is working to implement stronger laws and policies to protect individuals from such harm. This includes addressing issues related to privacy violations, online stalking, and hate speech, all of which disproportionately affect women and other vulnerable groups. Sri Lanka actively participated at the negotiations leading to the UN Convention on Cybercrime the need to address cyber trafficking and online sexual violence which is becoming increasingly challenging given the rapid advancement of technology. Sri Lanka is a party to the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime which has a focus on addressing online and technology-facilitated violence against women. The alarming growth in crimes committed using digital technology and online platforms has necessitated the strengthening of measures to safeguard rights of individuals and the society against their misuse. The Online Safety Act of 2024 is aimed at addressing this issue of growing public importance and to protect the vulnerable sections of the society in line with international standards. //

At the Review, several committee members made queries to the State party including if the Online Safety Act No. 9 of 2024 was best suited to protect women and girls from online harms, holding perpetrators and platforms accountable, and what steps have been taken to provide training to service providers and justice sector actors on addressing TFSGBV. Responses from the State party relied heavily on the operationalisation of the Online Safety Act as an adequate measure to protect the general public from TFSGBV. They also stated that new mechanisms including a cybercrime investigation unit, regional units and specialised women and children units have been established to tackle the issue.

The Online Safety Act (OSA) No. 9 of 2024 is a highly controversial piece of legislation, enacted in the aftermath of Sri Lanka's economic crisis and Aragalaya, a historic social movement, protesting corruption and failures of the Sri Lankan government. While the government promoted the legislation as a vital tool to protect women and children from online harassment, impersonation, and the non-consensual sharing of intimate images, its implementation has painted a vastly different picture. Human rights organizations and digital rights advocates have documented that the law's broad, vague provisions have primarily been weaponized to target political dissent, journalists, and activists, rather than to protect survivors of TFSGBV. Instead of fostering a safer internet, the OSA has intensified a chilling effect, forcing women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and human rights defenders into deeper self-censorship out of a dual fear of online mobs and state-sponsored legal prosecution. In 2025, a Private Member's Online Safety (Repeal) Bill was presented in parliament. The Bill was approved without debate at a second reading held in June 2026, though no other plans for the Bill's movement in Parliament have been announced since.

In its Concluding Observations, the CEDAW Committee made the following recommendation:

28) f. Strengthen measures to prevent and adequately punish online sexual violence, and ensure that providers of online platforms and distributors of online content are held accountable for failure to report, delete or block criminal content on their platforms.

Following this recommendation, CEJ conducted a **multi-stakeholder dialogue on 26th May 2026 in Colombo to gather stakeholders' views and identify action points** for implementing this recommendation. The dialogue was attended by senior officials from the Bureau for the Investigation of Abuse of Children & Women, the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs, Staff working at the National Women's Helpline-1938, the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, the Legal Aid Commission, the BAR Association of Sri Lanka, the Sri Lanka Press Institute, and representatives of civil society organizations working on TFSGBV in Sri Lanka.

The following action points and recommendations emerged from the discussion:

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1. Enact a single, centralised, comprehensive Act on TFSGBV. Although the existing legal framework contains several relevant provisions and safeguards, Sri Lankan Law does not currently provide a legal definition of TFSGBV.
 2. Make continuous efforts to improve digital literacy across all sectors, as technological illiteracy is the key driving force behind Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV).
 3. Incorporate new digital trends and emerging threats in all ongoing training programmes by the state.
 4. Conduct small-scale, community-based awareness programmes, as large-scale national programmes may not always be logistically feasible. Immediate efforts should focus on promoting individual digital awareness and responsible online behaviour.
 5. Integrate digital literacy into the national school curriculum and an intersectional approach, rather than relying solely on sporadic awareness programmes.
 6. Conduct regular multi-stakeholder dialogues on TFSGBV, including the Attorney General's (AG) Department and the senior Police hierarchy, to enhance their understanding of the realities faced by victim-survivors.
 7. Strengthen state institutions, including police and hotline service providers, particularly where female officers work night shifts, and respond to complaints.
 8. Increase the number of female officers in the police force, as there are currently insufficient female officers assigned to the Women and Children's desks at police stations.
 9. Promote digital best practices through a rights-based approach, including developing guidelines on the responsible use of technology, sharing posts, confirming online facts, and ethical use of Artificial Intelligence (AI).
 10. Address institutional and class bias by promoting professional and ethical media reporting.
 11. Increase legal awareness, particularly regarding the handling of electronic evidence, lawful recording of telephone conversations, and the legal procedures for using such evidence. This awareness should be strengthened among stakeholders of the state sector.
 12. Introduce special measures that enable victims to make complaints anonymously, where appropriate, while ensuring their privacy and confidentiality.

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13. Explore the establishment of specialized courts to hear TFSGBV-related cases, as the existing judicial system is already heavily inundated with backlogs. The judges handling such cases should also receive specialized training on TFSGBV.
 14. Develop practical and coordinated enforcement mechanisms for technology-related legal issues by building on successful collaborative approaches previously adopted by the judiciary and telecommunications companies. Policymakers should ensure that the implementation of new legal measures is harmonized with existing legislation, avoiding duplication, inconsistencies, or conflicts between laws.
 15. Promote a coordinated approach involving the judiciary, relevant regulatory authorities, and telecommunications service providers to strengthen enforcement while maintaining legal coherence and protecting the rights of all stakeholders.
 16. Appoint qualified and appropriately trained counsellors at police stations, service institutions and schools. At present, school disciplinary teachers often also serve as counsellors, discouraging children from seeking support.
 17. The state should increase the number of shelter centres across all districts for SGBV victims, including those affected by TFSGBV.
 18. Allocate sufficient budgetary resources for the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs and the relevant state institutions that provide services to the victims to ensure long-term sustainability of these services.
 19. Conduct regular human rights and gender audits in Sri Lanka to assess how programmes are being implemented and to strengthen the accountability of public officials.
 20. Strengthen the National Women's Commission by ensuring that it functions as an independent institution capable of providing national leadership and formally convening all relevant stakeholders.
 21. Ensure the effective implementation of the Assistance to and Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses Act, No. 10 of 2023. The Authority technically has the legal mandate and the funds to establish state-run victim shelters.



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