



TERMS OF REFERENCE

Digital Gendered Disinformation Ecosystems Scan

Background and Project Overview

Equimundo: Center for Masculinities and Social Justice is implementing a project aimed at addressing gendered disinformation and other online harmful behaviors through strategies that engage men and boys - a multi-year initiative funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands. Running from June 2026 through December 2028, this initiative will tackle the growing threat of gendered disinformation and technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) in Eastern Europe and sub-Saharan Africa, two regions where rapid digital expansion has outpaced legal and social protections for women, girls, and marginalized communities.

At the heart of the project is a bold and necessary premise: preventing online violence requires engaging the men and boys who disproportionately perpetrate, enable, and normalize it, while also recognizing that they are themselves frequently targeted, exploited, and harmed by the same online ecosystems. Through strategic grantmaking to local and regional organizations, Equimundo will support interventions across three pillars - critical digital literacy, policy and corporate advocacy, and the creation of caring online spaces. Grounded in rigorous regional research on the 'manosphere' and other online ecosystems, the initiative will fund evidence-based programs that challenge harmful gender norms, foster positive digital masculinities, and build safer online environments for everyone. By investing in locally led solutions, the project aims not only to reduce harm but also to reshape the conditions that allow gendered disinformation and online harms to thrive.

Equimundo serves as a strategic grant manager and technical lead, responsible for identifying high-quality local partners to support and ensuring that grantmaking and program design are informed by robust evidence on the digital ecosystems in which gendered disinformation circulates. To this end, Equimundo is seeking consultant(s) to conduct two regional rapid digital gendered disinformation and online harm ecosystem scans - one in Eastern Europe and one in sub-Saharan Africa. The findings will directly inform country prioritization, grantmaking strategy, program design, and the development of the competitive call for proposals. This TOR defines the scope, deliverables, timeline, and qualifications for the consultant(s) contracted to lead this work.

Purpose and Objectives

The digital gendered disinformation ecosystem scans serve two primary purposes:

- Mapping the digital ecosystems: Identify and analyze the online platforms, actors, narratives, networks, and enabling conditions through which gendered disinformation, online misogyny and related harmful content, TFGBV and other gendered harms circulate in Eastern Europe (non-EU) and sub-Saharan Africa, with particular attention to masculinities, harmful gender norms, and the pathways through which men and boys are exposed, drawn or recruited into, and influenced by these ecosystems.
- Informing grantmaking and program design: Produce a structured assessment that enables Equimundo to prioritize target countries, identify the most relevant forms of digital harm and platform dynamics, and shape grantmaking strategies and programmatic interventions that are grounded in regional realities.

This ecosystem scan is not a general landscape mapping of organizations. This will be a separate and complementary piece of work. The focus of the digital gendered disinformation ecosystem scan is to better understand the nature of the digital environments across Eastern Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa, including: how does gendered disinformation operate, where and how does it spread, who amplifies it, who does it reach, what narratives and tactics are most salient, and what policy, platform, and civil society conditions shape the possibilities for prevention and response.

This assignment will need to be completed by the 6th of November 2026.

Geographic Scope

Two separate contracts will be awarded - one for each region. Applicants may apply for either region or both. While each contract carries responsibility for a specific region, both studies will follow a shared methodology developed in partnership with Equimundo to ensure comparability across regions. If an applicant indicates interest and demonstrates the capacity to conduct research in both regions, both contracts may be awarded to the same consultant or organization.

- Eastern Europe (non-EU): Includes countries such as Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the Western Balkans (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo). Final country scope to be confirmed in the inception note in dialogue with Equimundo.
- Sub-Saharan Africa: Broad regional scan, with deeper profiling likely in East, West, and Southern Africa. Specific countries to be identified during the scan based on ecosystem salience, platform dynamics, language, severity of risk, and enabling conditions.

Scope of Work

The scope of work outlined below represents the full range of questions, analytical domains, and methodological approaches that Equimundo seeks to explore through the digital ecosystem scans. Contractors are not expected to address every element or employ every methodology described; rather, proposals should identify and justify the approaches they consider most appropriate, feasible, and impactful for meeting the assignment's objectives. Following contractor selection, the final methodology and work plan will be refined collaboratively during the inception phase and approved by Equimundo through the inception note process.

Digital Ecosystem Identification and Scanning:

- Identify and map the principal online platforms, channels, and digital spaces through which gendered disinformation, online misogyny, anti-feminist narratives, and related harms circulate in the target regions, as well as the forms, manifestations, and scale of tech-facilitated gender-based harms online.
- Identify how and why users migrate across / between platforms and analyze how platform usage varies across regional and country contexts, including the roles of mainstream and fringe platforms and technologies, encrypted or semi-private channels, creator-driven ecosystems, and mobile-first communication environments and services, such as dating apps and ride-share platforms.
- Pay particular attention to regionally salient platform infrastructures. These may include, for example, Telegram, YouTube, Reddit, Discord, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, VKontakte, and locally significant forums or messaging ecosystems, depending on context. The scans may also include references to and evidence of other digital technologies, including dating apps, ride-share apps, and financial, crypto, and banking apps.
- Identify how online and offline factors - including economic precarity, demographic markers, political polarization, conflict, displacement, democratic backsliding, access to technologies, and social norms around gender - shape the spread and appeal of gendered disinformation.

Narrative, Actor, and Network Analysis: Risks and Vulnerabilities Assessment

- Identify key narratives, frames, tropes, and discursive strategies used to normalize misogyny, reinforce harmful masculinities, undermine gender equality, target women, girls, LGBTQI+ people, individuals in public life, including women, and other marginalized groups, as well as particular targeting of men and boys.
- Analyze how these narratives are tailored to local cultural, political, linguistic, and religious contexts, rather than assuming that English-language or Global North manosphere taxonomies apply directly.
- Where feasible and appropriate, provide a high-level mapping of how content flows across platforms, communities, or influence pathways, as well as linkages between local ecosystems and transnational manosphere, extremist, anti-rights, or disinformation networks, including where narratives, tactics, and audiences overlap.
- Identify key types of actors within the ecosystem, such as influencers, anonymous content producers, online communities, political amplifiers, media actors, streamers, or

networked communities that drive, enable, monetize, or normalize gendered disinformation.

- Assess the principal harms associated with the digital ecosystems, including risks related to technology-facilitated gender-based violence, coordinated harassment, doxing, AI-generated abuse, hate speech, intimidation, and chilling effects on participation in public life, recruitment, sextortion, etc.
- Identify which populations are most affected in the target contexts, including women in public life, activists, journalists, gender-expansive people, LGBTQI+ communities, refugee and displaced populations, including women, and women in conflict-affected settings. This should include consideration of how gender intersects with other dimensions, such as race, class, language, age, disability, religion, urbanization, migration status, and conflict exposure, in shaping vulnerability and patterns of harm.
- Highlight risks to boys and men themselves where relevant, including pathways through which harmful digital masculinities contribute to isolation, radicalization, or the policing of masculine conformity, as well as digital extortion, recruitment, or trafficking.

Narrative, Actor, and Network Analysis: Opportunities and Levers Assessment

- To support Equimundo in designing the grantmaking design and decision-making, the digital ecosystem scans should help us better understand opportunities, levers, and entry points for strategic investment. To do this, the scans should also:
- Identify existing spaces/communities/channels of information that men are already using to address their concerns around masculinity? What features attract them? What keeps their continued attention/engagement? What platforms have the easiest on-ramp? What do they dislike about these spaces?
- Assess which messages mobilize men to adopt progressive takes on masculinity without provoking resistance? What organizations are doing this right? When and how is the best way to send messages? What messages are unsuccessful/rejected? Do messages or campaigns that polarize intentionally motivate change? (e.g., “which side are you on?”)
- Identify what issues resonate with a critical mass of men? What issues unite men of diverse backgrounds? What issues are taboo and harder to talk about? What national or regional figures / influencers have the potential to positively mobilize men to question traditional takes on manhood?
- Identify relevant language / lexicon: when men talk about masculinity, what words / lexicon / code words do they use (e.g. alpha/beta male, high/low level men, looksmaxxing, Chad / Stacy)?

Country-Level Consideration

- As part of the regional digital ecosystem scan and risk and opportunities assessments, the contractor(s) should consider highlighting particular country contexts to prioritise as part of a strategic grantmaking investment. To do this, the contractor(s) will be encouraged to highlight countries in which there are all or a combination of the following criteria: 1) a demonstrable and sizeable gendered disinformation ecosystem; 2) demonstrable and existing spaces/communities/channels/messages men are already engaging with to address concerns around masculinity; 3) enabling policy and institutional environment for policy and corporate advocacy; 4) manageable and

mitigatable risks associated with strategic investments in gendered disinformation ecosystems; and 5) any additional factors deemed relevant by the contractor(s) to consider.

Reporting and Knowledge Products

- Produce regional digital ecosystem scan reports
- Participate in at least one feedback and revision cycle with Equipundo
- Present findings to the Equipundo team in a structured briefing.
- Ensure that findings are presented in a way that supports practical use for grantmaking, intervention design, and future regional research.

Deliverables

All deliverables are to be submitted in English. The final report should not exceed 40 pages, excluding annexes. The consultant may propose an adapted structure in the inception note, subject to Equipundo approval.

Deliverable	Description	Due Date
Inception Note	Brief (max 5 pages) confirming approach, methodology, interview list, and work plan	Within 15 days of contract start
Draft Digital Gendered Disinformation Ecosystem Report	Full draft report covering all sections (see Section 5)	By 9 October 2026
Final Digital Gendered Disinformation Ecosystem Report	Revised report incorporating Equipundo feedback	By 30 October 2026
Presentation to Equipundo	60-minute presentation of key findings and priority country recommendations	By 6 November 2026

The final Gendered Disinformation Ecosystem Scan Report should include the following sections as a minimum:

- Executive Summary (max 3 pages)
- Methodology and limitations
- Regional overview of digital gendered disinformation ecosystem dynamics in line with requirements outlined in the scope of work section above
- Platform and channel analysis

- Narrative and actor analysis
 - Network and ecosystem features, including transnational linkages where relevant
 - Risk and vulnerability analysis
 - Implications for grantmaking and design of the open call for proposals, including strategic recommendations for interventions and/or advocacy entry points and levers
 - Reference List
 - Annex: If relevant, a list of key informants interviewed
 - Annex: Any platform or narrative typologies used
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Required Qualifications and Profile

This assignment may be carried out by an individual contractor or a small contracting team. Where a team is proposed, the lead consultant must meet the minimum qualifications below.

Required

- At least 4 years of experience in digital research, disinformation analysis, online harms research, digital ethnography, policy analysis, or related research in the relevant region (Eastern Europe and/or sub-Saharan Africa).
- Demonstrated expertise in at least two of the following thematic areas: gendered disinformation; TFGBV or gender-based violence prevention; online misogyny or manosphere dynamics; digital rights or platform accountability; masculinities and male engagement in gender equality programming.
- Strong qualitative research skills, including experience designing and conducting key informant interviews and producing synthesis reports for practitioner audiences.
- Demonstrated ability to analyze digital ecosystems, narratives, or online communities, including across multiple platforms and languages where relevant.
- Fluency in English (written and spoken). For Eastern Europe, fluency in Russian, Ukrainian, or another relevant regional language is strongly preferred. For Sub-Saharan Africa, proficiency in French, Kiswahili, or another relevant regional language is an asset.
- Established networks in the target region's digital rights, online safety, research, media, or civil society ecosystem.

Preferred

- Prior experience conducting ecosystem scans, digital landscape analyses, online harms research, or due diligence assessments for grantmakers, international NGOs, or research institutions.
- Familiarity with gender-transformative programming approaches and the "do no harm" framework.
- Experience with rapid-turnaround assignments under tight timelines.
- Knowledge of extremist, anti-rights, or transnational disinformation ecosystems as they relate to online misogyny.
- Experience combining desk research with digital methods and expert consultation.

Management and Reporting Arrangements

The consultant will report to and work under the direct supervision of the Equipundo Project Director, with technical oversight from the Deputy Director of Research and Senior Research Officer.

- Regular check-ins will be held weekly or bi-weekly throughout the assignment, depending on the phase.
 - All interview guides, data collection instruments, and draft deliverables require Equipundo review and approval before finalization or public use.
 - The consultant will adhere to Equipundo's data protection, confidentiality, safeguarding, and digital security policies throughout the assignment.
 - Findings, datasets, and all work products are the property of Equipundo and may not be shared or published without prior written consent.
 - The consultant will flag any conflicts of interest related to relevant stakeholders, networks, or prior engagements at the outset of the assignment.
 - The consultant is expected to apply a conflict-sensitive and do-no-harm approach throughout the research process, particularly when analyzing harmful online communities and content.
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How to Apply

Interested consultants or consulting teams should submit the following materials to Equipundo by July 12th:

- A brief technical proposal (max 5 pages) outlining: your understanding of the assignment; proposed methodology, sampling approach, mechanisms to ensure contextualization; any known limitations or risks; and team composition, if applicable.
- A CV or team bios (max 2 pages per person) highlighting relevant experience.
- A financial proposal, including a daily rate and estimated number of days per deliverable phase.
- At least two professional references from recent, comparable assignments.
- Either samples of previous ecosystem scans, digital research, or online harms analysis (excerpts acceptable), or examples of references to existing work that you plan to replicate methodologically or in approach.

Applications should be submitted via email with the subject line: "Digital Ecosystem Scan Consultant - [Region]" to c.lewis@equipundo.org. Late or incomplete applications will not be considered.

Equipundo is an equal opportunity employer and encourages applications from consultants based in or with deep ties to the target regions. Women, gender-diverse individuals, and consultants from the Global South are strongly encouraged to apply.