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THE RISE OF ANTI-GENDER NARRATIVES IN KOSOVO

Far-Right Ideologies, Digital Violence, and Threats to
Women's Rights



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Key findings

- > Anti-gender ideology in Kosovo does not operate through a formally organized movement but is widely disseminated through individual actors, political discourse, religious narratives, and digital networks. These narratives closely mirror transnational far-right and anti-gender ideologies present across Europe and the Western Balkans, adapting them to Kosovo's post-war context, social insecurity, and nationalist frameworks. Gender equality, feminism, LGBTIQ+ rights, and reproductive rights are framed as external threats imposed by "the West," enabling moral panic and resistance to democratic reforms.
- > Gender and family are central symbolic battlegrounds through which ethno-nationalist and far-right ideologies are articulated. The "traditional family" is constructed as the foundation of national survival, while deviations from heteronormative gender roles are portrayed as existential dangers to Albanian identity, morality, and demographic continuity. Parliamentary debates on the Civil Code and reproductive rights reveal how legal reforms are reframed as attacks on the nation itself, collapsing gender equality with narratives of national betrayal, racial purity, and historical violence.
- > Women in public and political life, feminist activists, journalists, unmarried women, and LGBTIQ+ individuals are the primary targets of anti-gender narratives. These groups are systematically subjected to delegitimization, dehumanization, and harassment through misogynistic, homophobic, and transphobic language. Gender-based hate speech functions not only as personal abuse but as a mechanism for policing moral and national boundaries, discouraging women's participation in public life and reinforcing patriarchal norms.
- > Technology-facilitated violence against women and girls is a key operational tool of anti-gender ideology in Kosovo. Online harassment, disinformation, deepfakes, doxing, and non-consensual image sharing are widely used to intimidate, silence, and discredit women and gender rights defenders. These practices translate ideological opposition to gender equality into everyday digital harm, reinforcing offline inequalities and posing serious risks to women's safety, mental health, and economic security.
- > The AlbKings case illustrates the scale, coordination, and severity of digital gender-based violence in Kosovo. The mass non-consensual distribution of intimate content, targeting of journalists, and subsequent psychological and social harm to victims exposed major gaps in institutional responses. The leniency of judicial outcomes further demonstrated the failure of existing legal frameworks to adequately recognize, investigate, and sanction technology-facilitated gender-based violence.
- > Institutional responses remain weak due to limited political will, lack of gender-sensitive legal frameworks, and insufficient technical capacity. Anti-gender narratives and online gender-based violence are often treated as isolated incidents or civil matters, rather than as interconnected manifestations of far-right, patriarchal, and exclusionary ideologies. The absence of specific criminal provisions addressing gender-based cyber violence, combined with poor interinstitutional coordination, enables the continued normalization of misogyny and undermines protections for women and marginalized groups.

Introduction

Gender ideology has been considered one of the pillars contributing to the rise of far-right extremism. Far-right extremism, a growing concern across Europe, is characterized by authoritarianism, anti-democratic ideologies, and exclusionary nationalism. This movement undermines democracy, promotes hatred toward foreigners, and targets women, LGBTIQ+ individuals, and minority groups. In Kosovo, efforts to address extremism have primarily focused on religious extremism, leaving far-right extremism relatively underexplored. However, as new trends emerge, it is increasingly important to examine this phenomenon within Kosovo's unique social and historical context. Gender equality has become central to far-right ideological discourse. Gender equality activists, women, and scholars working in this field are frequently targeted and portrayed as threats to the nation. As Butler explains, gender is framed not only as a threat to children, national security, heterosexual marriage, and the normative family, but also as part of an alleged plot by elites to impose their cultural values on "ordinary people." Moreover, the targeting of sexual and gender minorities as "dangerous" to society, aimed at stripping them of fundamental rights and protections, links anti-gender ideologies to fascist thought. This further highlights the close connection between gender ideology and ethnic nationalism.¹

In recent years, concerns have grown about the potential for violent right-wing extremism in the Western Balkans, including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. The region has historically been perceived as politically volatile, with a legacy of violence rooted in right-wing political ideologies and actions.² Over the years, gender ideologies have risen in the Western Balkan countries, which have also been very much related to ethnic nationalism. These movements portray "gender ideology" as

an existential threat to traditional values, national identity, and social stability, and they use this to fuel a broader agenda that restricts human rights and weakens democratic norms.³ The rise of the anti-gender movements in the Western Balkans is not an isolated phenomenon; they are part of a broader transnational network that strategically aligns itself with far-right political actors, conservative religious institutions, and populist regimes across Europe. And that is common among all these rising anti-gender movements in Europe, that they are driven by the great wish of restoring the patriarchal dream order where a father is a father, and women, conceived as born female at birth, resume their natural and moral position within the household.⁴

Across Europe, the term "gender ideology" has become a central concept used to oppose perceived ideological ideas such as gender equality, abortion, sexual education, reproductive rights, and LGBTIQ+ rights.⁵ Anti-gender mobilizations take various forms, from opposing same-sex marriage to protesting against abortion. However, they often converge around the idea of a "threat to the family" and the need to defend it. The family they seek to protect is exclusively a heterosexual, heteronormative unit comprising a (married) mother, father, and children, a "traditional family." This "complete family" is portrayed as the only "healthy" environment for raising children. Consequently, protecting this family equates to safeguarding children, restoring traditional family models, and resisting perceived threats such as socio-economic and demographic trends, divorces, shifts in "natural" gender roles, or LGBTIQ+ rights.⁶

While anti-gender ideas have a long historical pedigree, the expansion of the internet has created new spaces in which these concepts have mutated and proliferated. Feminists are often framed by anti-gender groups as primary adversaries,

1 Judith Butler, *Who's Afraid of Gender?*, Penguin, UK, 2024, p. 4-8

2 Mirza Buljubasic, *Violent Right-Wing Extremism in the Western Balkans: An overview of county specific challenges for P/CVE*, European Commission, 2022.

3 Angel Dimitrievski, *The anti-gender movements as a threat to democracy in the Western Balkans*, GMA, <https://www.gmfus.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/The%20Anti%20Gender%20Movement%20as%20a%20Threat%20to%20Democracy%20in%20the%20Western%20Balkans.pdf>

4 Judith Butler, *Who's Afraid of Gender?*, Penguin, UK, 2024, p. 14.

5 *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing Against Equality*, Ed. Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, Rowman and Littlefield, New York, London, 2017.

6 Adelina Hasani, *Combating Extremism in Kosovo: Trends, Challenges and Counter-Measures*, Sbunker, 2025, https://ex-sbunker.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Sbunker-Report-Anglish_28.01.2025.pdf

accused of undermining conservative social norms. Often frames masculinity as being in crisis and positions patriarchy as a solution to this perceived gendered uncertainty. Within this discourse, the traditional family serves as an anchor for reclaiming masculinity, with religion playing a legitimizing role. While the invocation of traditional family structures lies at the core of anti-gender movements, they also mobilize around narratives of male victimhood, both in response to women's independence and rights and to broader challenges to male supremacy.

Although the anti-gender movement has not been formally traced in Kosovo, its narrative is widely embraced and circulated among individuals, particularly on social media, where it has primarily manifested as hate speech targeting women in the political and public spheres. As will be discussed, this narrative emerged and was further crystallized in response to the Civil Law article on same-sex unions. They have been manifested as traditionalist pushback against gender equality, fueled by nationalism and religion, challenging women's rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and reproductive health through disinformation, political rhetoric, and cultural pressures that reinforce stereotypes and patriarchal norms, creating a risk of societal regression despite legal frameworks for equality. Anti-gender narratives in Kosovo falsely portray gender equality as a Western imposition, aiming to re-traditionalize society, often linking it to

hypermasculinity and resisting advancements in gender rights and sexual education, but also posing a threat to women's security and well-being. These narratives leverage disinformation and fear to polarize public opinion. They deliberately associate concepts of gender diversity and LGBTIQ+ rights with misinformation about the "destruction of the traditional family."⁷

While Kosovo does not have a formally organised anti-gender group or movement, anti-gender narratives are embedded in hate speech targeting women and in various forms of gender-based violence (GBV), particularly on online platforms. These practices function as tools commonly employed by anti-gender actors. Online GBV reinforces patriarchal norms, polices gender boundaries, and mobilises political or social opposition to gender equality.

This report situates online GBV within broader anti-gender networks, far-right ideologies, and transnational movements that deliberately target women, LGBTI+ individuals, and activists. While anti-gender narratives often frame feminism, LGBTI+ rights, and reproductive rights as "threats" to traditional values, online GBV operationalizes these narratives in everyday digital spaces. Gender ideologies are disseminated online through tactics such as deepfakes, non-consensual image sharing, doxing, and cyberstalking, which are used to intimidate, discredit, or silence targeted individuals.

⁷ Ibid.

Methodology

This report investigates the causes, forms, narratives, and impacts of anti-gender discourse and hate speech, with a particular focus on women and female journalists and the risks they face to their safety and well-being. The research is based on ten in-depth interviews with journalists, security and human rights experts, representatives of the international community in Kosovo, and the Ombudsperson. Additionally, focus groups were held with members of the Kosovo Police to examine perceptions of anti-gender narratives and gender-based threats within security institutions, as well as to assess existing preventive mechanisms.

I. The spread of Gender ideology (anti-gender narratives) in Kosovo

Hate speech has persistently targeted women in politics and public life in Kosovo, including politicians, activists, and journalists. In recent years, however, the spread of anti-gender narratives and the so-called “gender ideology” discourse has intensified. In many cases, these narratives are linked to far-right extremist ideologies that frame gender equality and progressive reforms as threats to “traditional” values.⁸

Hate speech is widespread on social media, particularly against women in public roles, and often takes forms such as harassment, disinformation, and deepfakes. Nevertheless, anti-gender movements differ from such speech in important ways, as it tends to be more structured, ideologically driven, and transnational, operating beyond local contexts while adapting their narratives to specific national environments. As Judith Butler has noted, these movements often receive financial and organisational support from far-right actors or religious organisations with radical elements. Even when initiatives are not directly financed by transnational religious or far-right networks, they frequently reproduce similar discourses and demonstrate a high degree of coordination.

Findings from this study, supported by existing research, indicate that although Kosovo lacks a consolidated anti-gender movement, the patterns and tactics associated with such movements are increasingly visible at the individual level, particularly through online platforms. These narratives are disseminated through hate speech targeting women and are often accompanied by hostility toward feminist and queer activists. Interviewees also highlighted context-specific factors that enable the “threat to the family” narrative to resonate in Kosovo, pointing to a combination of persistent social insecurity, economic instability, and the country’s post-war

context.

Deputy Ombudsperson Majlinda Sinani Lulaj further explained that gendered disinformation crises are often framed as moral panics, noting that “issues related to gender are frequently presented in ways that provoke fear in society and oversimplify complex socio-legal debates.” When gender equality is portrayed as a threat to the family, it can easily be framed as an external influence often described as coming “from the West” that undermines social cohesion and, ultimately, the nation itself.⁹

Feminist activists, gender schoolers, unmarried women, LGBTIQ+ community have been the main target of the anti-gender groups. Unmarried women are often labeled with derogatory terms and there is a widespread fear of the “destruction of the traditional family,” closely tied to preserving male dominance and traditional gender roles.¹⁰ “The primary derogatory labels directed at women include terms like ‘cows,’ ‘sluts,’ and ‘whores.’ For the LGBTIQ+ community, the insults often include ‘psychopaths,’ ‘degenerates,’ ‘crazy,’ and ‘paedophiles’¹¹ These anti-gender narratives, particularly those targeting the LGBTIQ+ community, are widespread across social media platforms. In some cases, feminism itself is misrepresented as promoting nudity or encouraging women not to marry, with feminist women publicly attacked as “excessive” or “dangerous.” Organizations advocating for women’s and LGBTIQ+ rights are frequently labeled as “opportunistic” or “foreign-funded” to delegitimize their work, accompanied by narratives that gender equality is “destroying the family and the nation.”¹²

Anti-gender narrative gained prominence during debates over the Draft Civil Code and the Draft Law on Reproductive Rights and Medically Assisted Conception. The Draft Civil Code allows

8 Interview with Vlora Tuzi Nushi, head of the Office of UN Women in Kosovo, interviewed by authors, November 2025.

9 Interview with Majlinda Sinani Lulaj, the deputy ombudsperson of the Republic of Kosovo, October 2025.

10 Ibid.

11 Media Diversity Institute and Kosovo 2.0, Monitoring Report on Hate Speech in Kosovo, https://www.reportingdiversity.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/MRHS_Kosovo.pdf

12 Interview with Latra Demaci, Researcher at Kosovo Women’s Network, interviewed by authors, October 2025

registered civil unions between people of the same sex, prompting a swift response from religious leaders who issued a joint declaration opposing the proposal. Leaders from various religious communities, including Muslim, Jewish, Evangelical, and Catholic representatives, justified their opposition by citing religious, cultural, and traditional values, emphasizing the preservation of “family values” and the protection of the traditional definition of marriage.¹³

This anti-gender narrative was echoed within the Assembly of Kosovo, where several members openly challenged the recognition of same-sex civil unions. Many inaccurately equate civil unions with same-sex marriage, despite the legal distinction. At the core of these anti-gender narratives is the self-perception of defenders of the “normal” and “traditional” family. For example, MP Mergim Lushtaku publicly opposed both the Civil Code and same-sex unions, arguing that “by nature, marriage is a heterosexual institution” and that recognizing same-sex marriage undermines the link between marriage and procreation.¹⁴ Similarly, Duda Balje, then head of the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights, opposed same-sex marriage on religious grounds, framing her stance as personal opinion, though her institutional role amplified its impact. In response, the Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR) submitted a public request to the Speaker of the Assembly, calling for the dismissal of Duda Balje and Labinot Demi-Murezi for their discriminatory rhetoric.

Discussions surrounding the Draft Law on Reproductive Rights and Medically Assisted Conception were met with strong resistance, revealing how anti-gender ideology has become intertwined with ethno-nationalist discourse in Kosovo. Proposals to allow unmarried women access to IVF and to expand reproductive services through public hospitals were framed by opponents as existential threats to the “traditional family,” often accompanied by racist, alarmist, and misleading claims. These narratives positioned reproductive autonomy not as a matter of health or rights, but as a deviation from an imagined moral and national order. This backlash was further

institutionalized when two deputies from the Self-Determination Movement (Lëvizja Vetëvendosje!) broke away to form a new political party that explicitly opposes the Civil Code’s provisions on same-sex unions as well as the Draft Law on Reproductive Rights and Medically Assisted Conception. From within Parliament, these actors actively promoted anti-gender narratives, resisted civil and reproductive rights initiatives, and sought to portray Vetëvendosje as a threat to “tradition” and the “normal family.” In doing so, they mobilized gender as a symbolic battlefield through which broader anxieties about social change, national identity, and moral authority could be articulated. This escalation coincided with the consolidation of a conservative political force that capitalized on rising far-right, anti-gender sentiment during Kosovo’s 2024 national elections under the banner of the Coalition for Family. By mobilizing voters around the defense of the heteronormative family, the Coalition normalized exclusionary rhetoric and contributed to a political environment increasingly receptive to far-right extremism. Same-sex marriage was constructed as a central threat, with electoral appeals explicitly urging voters to support candidates who pledged to oppose it.¹⁵ As Judith Butler argues, gender in such contexts functions as a psychosocial scene, a public mode of dreaming through which collective fantasies are projected. The past that anti-gender proponents seek to “restore” is less a historical reality than an imagined social order rooted in patriarchal authority, rigid gender hierarchies, and ethnic homogeneity. In Kosovo, cultural traditions and social norms that emphasize heteronormative family structures and clearly demarcated gender roles provide fertile ground for these narratives to take hold.

Consequently, the debate surrounding the Civil Code extends far beyond LGBTIQ+ rights, encompassing broader questions of marriage, love, reproduction, and the boundaries of the nation itself. Gender and sexuality become proxies through which ethno-national belonging is policed and “Albanian family values” are elevated as markers of moral and national authenticity.

This logic was made explicit during the electoral

13 Europa e Lire, ‘Religious communities against redefining marriages’ (Bashkësitë fetare kundër ‘ripërkufizimit të martesës’) February 2022, <https://www.evropaelire.org/a/projektetkodi-civil-martesat-e-gjinise-se-njejte-/31718770.html>

14 Aulone Kadriu, Yesterday Fascism Echoed in the Parliament, Kosovo 2.0, 2020, <https://kosovotwopointzero.com/en/yesterday-fascism-echoed-in-the-parliament>

15 Interview of Eman Rrahmani, Fol Drejtë, <https://www.facebook.com/gazetafoldrejt/videos/lëvizja-për-familjen-koalicion-vetëm-për-këto-zgjedhje-apo-projekt-afatgjatë/2324251894610741/>

campaign by Eman Rrahmani, leader of the Coalition for Family, who stated:

“There is no Parent 1 and Parent 2; there is a mother, a father, a woman, a daughter, and a son. Let anyone who dares to change the Albanian family forget it. In this political engagement, I assure you that none of us has joined this team for personal gain; each of us has expressed a commitment to protect the family’s values. The agenda that undermines the family is coming to an end.”¹⁶

Building on these developments, the spread of anti-gender narratives in Kosovo has increasingly been articulated through an explicitly ethno-nationalist framework, in which gender equality and reproductive rights are portrayed as existential threats to the nation itself. Within this discourse, the “traditional family” is constructed as the core unit of national survival, such that its preservation is equated with protecting the nation and its boundaries from perceived external and internal enemies. Gender and reproduction thus become central sites through which national continuity, purity, and belonging are imagined and policed.

This logic was articulated most starkly in public interventions by political leaders. For example, Gëzim Kelmendi, leader of the Conservative Party Fjala, accused Prime Minister Albin Kurti of supporting the Civil Code in a manner that “destroys the main pillar of the state: the family,” claiming that “if Serbia killed Albanians with weapons, Albin Kurti is killing them with this law.” Such statements collapse legal reform, gender equality, and national violence into a single narrative, framing reproductive and family law not as matters of rights

or governance, but as acts of national betrayal.”¹⁷ As Latra Demaci observes, anti-gender movements frequently adopt populist strategies that function as political tools for polarizing public opinion. In the Kosovar context, certain MPs and public figures further reinforce these narratives by drawing on religious symbolism and nationalist rhetoric, reshaping them to serve electoral objectives and mobilize support around exclusionary notions of tradition, morality, and national authenticity.¹⁸

While these ideologies present themselves as defenders of “family values,” in practice, they operate by misleading public opinion and by constructing women, LGBTIQ+ persons, and other minority groups as internal threats to the nation. Parliamentary debates on the Draft Law on Reproductive Rights exposed the extent of this ethno-nationalist framing, particularly through the stigmatization of unmarried women seeking IVF and couples unable to conceive “naturally.” During these debates, some MPs employed alarmist, racialized, and explicitly nationalist language, comparing the law to “Hiroshima and Nagasaki” and warning of children allegedly “born out of incest” or possessing “impure blood”.¹⁹ Reproductive technologies were thus framed as a direct danger to the Albanian “national genetic identity,” especially when sperm donors were imagined as originating from neighboring countries such as Serbia. This rhetoric reveals overtly racist and proto-fascist undertones, illustrating how anti-gender and ethno-nationalist ideologies converge to legitimize exclusion, reinforce biological and ethnically bounded conceptions of the nation, and normalize regressive narratives within both parliamentary discourse and the broader public sphere..

16 Kallxo.com, 2025, <https://kallxo.com/lajm/koalicioni-per-familjen-nis-garen-per-zgjedhje-agjendes-qe-cenon-familjen-po-i-vjen-fundi/>

17 Telgrami, 2020, <https://telegafi.com/en/kurti-calls-the-murder-of-Qerim-Kelmendi-a-crime-and-demands-a-full-investigation-by-the-prosecution-and-the-police/>

18 Interview with Latra Demaci, Researcher at Kosovo Women’s Network, interviewed by authors, October 2025.

19 Adelina Hasani, *Combating Extremism in Kosovo: Trends, Challenges and Counter-Measures*, Sbunker, 2025, https://ex-sbunker.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Sbunker-Report-Anglisht_28.01.2025.pdf

II. Technology-Facilitated Violence as a Tool of Anti-Gender Ideology

Anti-gender movements are gaining influence, particularly on social media platforms, by spreading and amplifying hate speech, especially targeting women in public and political spheres, as well as the LGBTIQ+ community. This mobilization and its narratives have fueled technology-facilitated violence against women and girls (TFVAWG), not only as a form of aggression but also as a means of justifying broader violence and subjugation against women. TFVAWG is among the most pervasive and complex forms of violence threatening the safety and well-being of women and girls today. It encompasses any act committed, assisted, amplified, or aggravated through information and communication technologies or other digital tools that causes or is likely to cause physical, sexual, psychological, social, political, or economic harm, as well as violations of fundamental rights and freedoms.

According to the 2024 Report of the UN Secretary-General on Violence against Women and Girls, three interconnected dynamics are driving the global increase in this form of violence:

1. a growing backlash against women's rights,
2. the rapid advancement and misuse of artificial intelligence (AI), and
3. The expansion of the “manosphere,” an ecosystem of misogynistic online spaces that increasingly permeates mainstream culture, shapes public attitudes toward women, and fuels gender-based violence.

While all women and girls may experience digital abuse, certain groups face heightened risks, particularly women in political and public life and those experiencing intersecting forms of discrimination, including women with disabilities, migrant women, and LGBTIQ+ individuals.²⁰ The

Monitoring Report on Hate Speech in Kosovo (2025) documents entrenched and targeted gender-based hate speech during the 2024–2025 monitoring period, particularly within Kosovo’s media and online ecosystem. Women in public life, especially those engaged in politics, activism, and the LGBTIQ+ community, were subjected to sustained patterns of harassment that extended beyond individual attacks. These narratives functioned as part of a broader effort to exclude women from the nation’s symbolic and political space.

As hate speech increasingly targets women in the public sphere and poses direct threats to their safety, Deputy Ombudsperson Majlinda Sinani Lulaj emphasizes the importance of clearly distinguishing hate speech from protected expression. While freedom of expression is fundamental to democracy, it is not absolute and must be assessed in relation to its potential to cause harm. Sinani-Lulaj references the Rabat Plan of Action, which outlines six criteria for determining whether speech constitutes hate speech: context, speaker intent, means of dissemination, content, form, and the likelihood of incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence. She cautions against the growing tendency to label all controversial expression as hate speech, warning that such overuse dilutes the concept itself a trend observed particularly in Kosovo over the past four to five years. According to her assessment, the most recurrent and typical cases of hate speech have been directed against women, closely linked to far-right narratives that thrive on polarization. Under such conditions, women and other marginalized communities remain the most exposed and vulnerable.²¹

Hate speech against women in Kosovo often operates not merely as misogyny, but as a mechanism for policing national and moral identity. Women who speak out, challenge dominant norms, or visibly occupy public spaces are frequently framed as transgressing the boundaries of

20 UN Women, 2025. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/faqs/digital-abuse-trolling-stalking-and-other-forms-of-technology-facilitated-violence-against-women>

21 Interview with Majlinda Lulaj, Deputy Ombudsperson, interviewed by author, October 2025, Prishtina.

accepted belonging.²² While women in politics are consistently targeted, researcher Valmira Rashiti notes that some political figures have been repeatedly attacked over multiple years. These include Vjosa Osmani, President of Kosovo (as referenced in the 2023 and 2025 reports), and Mimoza Kusari-Lila, Member of Parliament (also referenced in the 2023 and 2025 reports). Other prominent women politicians, such as Doarsa Kica-Xhelili, Duda Balje, Ariana Musliu-Shoshi, Hykmete Bajrami, Marigona Geci, Albulena Haxhiu, Ganimete Musliu, and Adriana Matoshi, have likewise been frequent targets of disinformation campaigns and gender-based attacks.²³

Interviews with experts and activists in Kosovo confirm that the rise of technology-facilitated gender-based violence against women and girls is widespread. According to Vlora Tuzi Nushi, gender-based hate speech increasingly manifests as verbal discrimination in online communication spaces, indirectly legitimizing violence against women. This language frequently circulates on digital platforms and has had severe consequences, including documented cases of young girls' suicides.²⁴ Anti-gender movements in Kosovo actively use social media platforms to target women, particularly those in public and political life. Female activists

seeking to strengthen their public role are routinely insulted and undermined, both personally and professionally. As Arbenita observes, digital discourse often reflects deeply entrenched patriarchal mentalities aimed at confining women to traditional roles.²⁵ On the other hand, Flutura Kusari highlights that gender-based hate speech continues to rise, with no serious policies to address or prevent it. Public figures often use denigrating language against women without facing consequences, fueling polarization and normalizing hostile discourse. This trend persists unchecked, with few institutional filters to intervene.²⁶

Women face multiple forms of violence in the online environment, including cyber harassment, cyberstalking, and deepfakes. As the following chapters will demonstrate, Kosovo's legal framework currently has significant gaps in addressing technologically facilitated gender-based violence. A striking example is the case of Alb Kings in Kosovo, which illustrates the intersection of deepfakes and doxing: women were targeted through the non-consensual sharing of personal information and digitally manipulated images, resulting in threats, harassment, and serious violations of their privacy and safety.

Case study: The “AlbKings” Case

One of the most prominent cases illustrating technology-facilitated gender-based violence in Kosovo is the “AlbKings” case. “AlbKings” (short for “Albanian Kings”) was a notorious group chat on the messaging application Telegram that became active in January 2023. At its peak, the group had more than 112,000 members and was used to distribute intimate photos, videos, deepfake content, and personal data of women and girls without their consent.²⁷

Journalist Ardiana Thaçi-Mehmeti conducted a critical investigation into the group, exposing how its members systematically violated women's privacy and dignity. Following her reporting on the case in her television program, some AlbKings members retaliated by disseminating her phone number within the group. As a result, she received an overwhelming number of abusive phone calls, emails, and messages requesting sexual services. More than ten women contacted her to share their own experiences of harassment linked to the

²² Valmira Rashiti, Mapping Gendered Disinformation in the Western Balkans, Kosovo 2.0, https://www.reportingdiversity.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Gendered_Disinformation_KS_fin.pdf

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Interview with Vlora Tuzi Nushi, head of the UN Women Office in Kosovo, interviewed by the authors, November 2025.

²⁵ Arbenita Krasniqi, Project Manager, Jahjaga Foundation, interviewed by authors, December 2026.

²⁶ Flutura Kusari, Legal Advisor, European Centre for Press and Media Freedom, interviewed by authors, December 2026.

²⁷ Donika Gashi, Unprotected, Women in Albania, Kosovo Face Toxic Coexistence with Digital Abuse, Balkan Insight, 2025, <https://balkaninsight.com/2025/07/30/unprotected-women-in-albania-kosovo-face-toxic-coexistence-with-digital-abuse/>

AlbKings group.²⁸

After helping expose the network, Thaçi-Mehmeti was inundated with abusive calls and messages from men who had obtained her contact information through the group. She filed dozens of criminal complaints with the police but reported that authorities only pursued cases of “clear harassment,” such as repeated explicit sexual messages. In the television program Kiks Kosova, exclusive interviews were aired with young women who, after sustained pressure and harassment from AlbKings members, had dropped out of school, left their jobs, and experienced severe psychological distress and depression. These reports, broadcast in early 2024, contributed directly to the shutdown of the group and the arrest of several of its leaders.²⁹

Hundreds of women and girls, including a journalist

from KALLXO.com, were victims of harassment and the non-consensual distribution of intimate content through the AlbKings Telegram group. On 18 September 2025, the Prishtina Basic Prosecution submitted a plea agreement to the Basic Court under which the accused agreed to pay fines ranging from 2,000 to 2,500 euros for the ongoing harassment of the KALLXO.com journalist, whose identity remains withheld for safety reasons.³⁰ The harassment occurred after the journalist reported on gender-based violence in Kosovo. The plea deal prompted strong backlash. Sixty civil society organizations and more than 150 media outlets issued a joint statement condemning the agreement as overly lenient, arguing that it failed to reflect the gravity of technology-facilitated violence against women and the broader societal harm caused by such acts.³¹

28 Leonora Aliu, Out of Control: Kosovo Struggles to Curb Online Sexual Harassment, Balkan Insight, 2024, <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/05/28/out-of-control-kosovo-struggles-to-curb-online-sexual-harassment/>

29 Ibid.

30 BIRN, 2025. <https://balkaninsight.com/2025/09/22/kosovo-courts-lenient-plea-deal-with-birn-journalists-harassers-criticised/>

31 Prishtina Insight, 2025, https://prishtinainsight.com/kosovo-civil-society-opposes-2000-euro-fine-plea-deal-for-kallxo-com-journalists-harassers/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

III. Kosovo's Legal and Institutional Gaps in Tackling Anti-Gender Digital Violence

Interviewees reported cases in which lawsuits were filed over anti-gender statements or narratives during electoral campaigns. However, institutions often fail to respond in a timely manner and, by not treating these cases with sufficient seriousness, risk becoming complicit in the perpetuation of such phenomena. Moreover, most Western Balkan countries, including Kosovo, do not criminalize online gender-based violence and consequently lack mechanisms to systematically track such incidents.³² There is also a limited understanding of the spread of anti-gender narratives and the ways in which these narratives gain traction on social media platforms. Anti-gender ideologies, which promote traditional gender roles, patriarchal family values, and opposition to women's public participation, often underpin these narratives. Social media amplifies these ideas, providing spaces where misogynistic, exclusionary, and hostile content can circulate widely and influence public discourse.

One of the main challenges remains the absence of a comprehensive and up-to-date legal framework that reflects current developments in technology-facilitated violence. While Kosovo has a general strategy to advance gender equality, it requires reinforcement through concrete preventive measures. Limited technical capacities and resources for identifying cases of violence and hate constitute additional obstacles. Furthermore,

Flutura Kusari notes:

"Institutions such as the police and prosecution are not sufficiently informed about anti-gender movements and the risks they pose. Cases involving hate speech are often treated as simple civil disputes, without considering the gendered dimension."³⁵ She also emphasizes the need to

the normalization of misogyny and anti-gender narratives in media and public spaces presents a serious risk. Insufficient funding and weak inter-institutional cooperation are also significant barriers.³³

While the anti-gender narrative functions as a backlash against the progress made in gender equality by promoting traditional family values and masculinity, online platforms have become key spaces for spreading this narrative. The Alb Kings case in Kosovo illustrates how women have been targeted through deepfakes, harassment, and other forms of digital abuse. These movements exploit gaps in legislation and leverage cultural norms to dominate digital spaces and reinforce their agendas. Kosovo lacks a comprehensive system for tracking and recording gender-based cybercrimes. Law enforcement institutions, including the police, prosecution, and courts—currently rely on offences enumerated in the Criminal Code, such as blackmail, threats, coercion, harassment, sexual harassment, and violence.³⁴ However, Kosovo does not have a dedicated law or public policy specifically regulating online spaces or addressing technology-facilitated gender-based violence. The transnational nature of major social media platforms further complicates accountability and enforcement, leaving significant gaps in protection for victims.

review legal provisions related to anti-gender narratives, strengthen penalties, and create effective mechanisms to protect women online. She stresses that a more serious and systematic approach is urgently required.

³² Leonora Aliu, Out of Control: Kosovo Struggles to Curb Online Sexual Harassment, Balkan Insight, 2024, <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/05/28/out-of-control-kosovo-struggles-to-curb-online-sexual-harassment/>

³³ Interview with Vlora Tuzi Nushi, head of the UN Women Office in Kosovo, interviewed by the authors, November 2025.

³⁴ Leonora Aliu, Out of Control: Kosovo Struggles to Curb Online Sexual Harassment, Balkan Insight, 2024, <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/05/28/out-of-control-kosovo-struggles-to-curb-online-sexual-harassment/>

³⁵ Flutura Kusari, Legal Advisor, European Centre for Press and Media Freedom, interviewed by authors, December 2026.

Key Challenges Highlighted by Experts:

1. Lack of political will to address online gender-based violence.
2. Dominance of men in security institutions and a lack of sensitivity toward violence against women.
3. Women's complaints are often not taken seriously.

In response, the Kosovo Women's Network has proposed introducing a new provision in the Criminal Code, Article 249 on Gender-Based Cyber Violence, which would explicitly define and criminalize a broad range of online abuses, including:

- > Cyberstalking
- > Digital threats
- > Non-consensual sharing of intimate images
- > Deepfakes
- > Sexist defamation

Advocates argue that, in the absence of such a provision, victims of online abuse have limited access to justice, and cases are frequently dismissed for failing to meet the thresholds of existing criminal offences.

While Kosovo lacks a comprehensive legislative framework to address gender-based hybrid harassment and violence, authorities also lack both the technical expertise and the political will to investigate such cases effectively. *The National Strategy for Protection from Domestic Violence and Violence against Women (2022–2026)* addresses online gender-based violence only partially, primarily through measures aimed at strengthening community policing and intelligence-led policing in cases of domestic violence and violence against women, as well as through training the Police Cybercrime Investigation Unit to respond to online violence against women.³⁶

The Law on Prevention and Protection from

Domestic Violence, Violence Against Women, and Gender-Based Violence (2023) recognizes online harassment as a form of gender-based violence. It defines "internet sexual harassment" as any unwanted verbal or non-verbal act, or other conduct of a sexual nature, that violates a person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment.³⁷ However, this recognition remains largely conceptual and does not articulate specific criminal offences or corresponding penalties for many hybrid harms that occur at the intersection of technology and gender-based violence. As a result, the law does not directly criminalize most forms of online gender-based abuse, instead offering general definitions without enforceable criminal provisions.

Similarly, Kosovo's existing cybercrime legislation remains limited in scope. It primarily addresses traditional cyber offences, such as unauthorized access to information systems or data, while failing to encompass newer and more complex forms of digital abuse, including doxing, cyber harassment, and non-consensual image-based abuse. The general cybercrime framework, Law No. 08/L-173 on Cyber Security, published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Kosovo, regulates institutional responsibilities and principles related to cybersecurity and information system protection, but does not foresee the criminalization of online behavior motivated by gender, nor offences specifically targeting women and gender minorities online.³⁸

In practice, harmful online behavior, such as creating deepfake pornographic images, doxing women to facilitate offline threats, or targeting

³⁶ National Strategy for Protection from Domestic Violence and Violence against Women (2022–2026), <https://kryeministri.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/ENG-Strategjia-Kombetare-per-Mbrojtje-nga-Dhuna-ne-Familje-dhe-Dhuna-ndaj-Grave-2022-2026.pdf>

³⁷ Law on. 08/ L-185 on Prevention and Protection from Domestic Violence, Violence against Women and Gender Based Violence, <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDocumentDetail.aspx?ActID=83131>

³⁸ Law No. 08/ L-173 On Cyber Security, <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=70933>

women in public roles, is prosecuted under general statutes (e.g., threats, harassment) that fail to account for the digital-physical overlap of these offences.

In practice, this legal gap means that harmful online behaviors disproportionately affecting women, such as the creation of deepfake pornographic images, doxing intended to facilitate offline threats or attacks, and widespread misogynistic harassment targeting women in public life, are prosecuted under broader criminal provisions, such as threats or harassment. These provisions fail to capture the combined digital and offline dimensions of the harm, as well as its gendered nature.

In this context, Kosovo's legal framework, particularly the Law on Prevention and Protection from Domestic Violence, Violence Against Women, and Gender-Based Violence, requires further amendment and harmonization with evolving European standards. In May 2024, the European Union adopted the Directive on Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence,

which explicitly addresses all forms of violence facilitated through information and communication technologies (ICTs) and requires the criminalization of such acts. Aligning Kosovo's legislation with this Directive would necessitate the incorporation of gender-based digital violence and related hybrid crimes into the Criminal Code of the Republic of Kosovo.

Interviews with institutional representatives reflect similar distinctions. Officials from the Information Office of the Kosovo Police observed that online hate speech is "constantly active," but most often manifests as isolated expressions or reactions to specific events rather than as organized or sustained campaigns. In contrast, anti-gender discourse is "spread through networks of repetitive actors, shared narratives, and interconnected online spaces." According to police officials, these networks generate societal harm and feelings of intimidation and fear but rarely meet the threshold required to be treated as organized extremism or criminal activity.³⁹

³⁹ Interview with the Information Office of the Kosovo Police, conducted by authors via email. October 2025.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This report demonstrates that while Kosovo does not currently have a formally organized anti-gender movement, anti-gender narratives are increasingly visible, normalized, and operationalized through hate speech, technology-facilitated violence against women and girls (TFVAWG), and exclusionary political discourse. These narratives are deeply intertwined with far-right ideologies, ethno-nationalism, and religious conservatism, framing gender equality, reproductive rights, and LGBTIQ+ rights as existential threats to the “traditional family” and, by extension, to the nation itself.

Anti-gender discourse in Kosovo has been particularly mobilized during debates on the Draft Civil Code and the Draft Law on Reproductive Rights and Medically Assisted Conception. In these moments, gender and sexuality became symbolic battlegrounds through which broader anxieties about national identity, social change, and moral authority were expressed. Parliamentary rhetoric and electoral campaigning further legitimized these narratives, normalizing discriminatory language and embedding exclusionary frameworks within mainstream political discourse.

The findings also reveal that online spaces play a central role in the dissemination and enforcement of anti-gender ideology. Hate speech and TFVAWG function not only as expressions of misogyny but also as strategic tools to intimidate, silence, and exclude women and LGBTIQ+ individuals from public and political life. Cases such as “AlbKings” highlight the severe consequences of digital abuse, including psychological harm, withdrawal from education and employment, and threats to physical safety. These harms are amplified by emerging technologies such as deepfakes and by the lack of effective institutional responses.

Kosovo’s legal and institutional frameworks remain inadequate to address these challenges. Existing laws recognize the online harassment conceptually but fail to criminalize most forms of technology-facilitated gender-based violence or to capture their hybrid digital-offline nature. Institutional responses are further weakened by limited technical capacity, insufficient political will, and a lack of gender sensitivity within law enforcement and judicial bodies. As a result, victims face significant barriers to justice, while perpetrators operate with relative impunity.

Recommendations

Short term:

- > The Criminal Code should be amended to explicitly criminalize gender-based cyber violence, including cyberstalking, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, deepfakes, digital threats, and sexist defamation. Existing legislation, particularly the Law on Prevention and Protection from Domestic Violence, Violence Against Women, and Gender-Based Violence, should be further harmonized to ensure that online and hybrid forms of abuse are clearly defined and subject to effective sanctions. Aligning Kosovo's legal framework with the 2024 EU Directive on Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence is essential to ensure compliance with European standards and to strengthen protections for victims.
- > At the institutional level, law enforcement, prosecution services, and the judiciary must enhance their capacity to recognize and respond to anti-gender digital violence. This requires mandatory, gender-sensitive training on anti-gender ideologies, online hate speech, and technology-facilitated gender-based violence, as well as the development of clear protocols for investigation, evidence collection, and victim support. Specialized expertise within police cybercrime units and prosecutorial offices should be strengthened to address the gendered and transnational dimensions of online abuse, and to improve coordination among institutions responsible for prevention, investigation, and protection.

Medium and long-term:

- > Awareness-raising initiatives should actively challenge disinformation surrounding gender equality, reproductive rights, and LGBTIQ+ rights, while promoting inclusive democratic values. Media literacy, digital safety, and gender equality education should be integrated into formal and informal learning environments, and civil society organizations should be supported in developing counter-narratives that reduce the social legitimacy of anti-gender ideology and strengthen societal resilience.
- > Given the central role of digital platforms in amplifying anti-gender narratives, Kosovo's institutions should strengthen cooperation with social media companies to improve reporting procedures, content moderation, and victim redress mechanisms. Greater transparency is needed regarding how platforms respond to coordinated hate campaigns, while regional and international cooperation should be enhanced to address the cross-border nature of anti-gender networks and technology-facilitated abuse.



Funded by
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About the Gender, Peace and Security Programme

The Gender, Peace and Security Programme has been developed to support Kosovo's progress in achieving objectives outlined in the Women, Peace and Security agenda. In line with UNSCR 1325, KCSS's Gender, Peace and Security Programme aims to support public security institutions in Kosovo in establishing internal and external gender responsive policies. Among others, the programme aims to ensure gender-equal participation across Kosovo's main security institutions such as the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) and the Kosovo Police (KP). Additionally, it seeks to consolidate a breadth of research identifying the main challenges related to gender-responsive security reform in Kosovo. Through providing robust gender analysis on Kosovo's security sector development, the programme aims to promote internal reform in line with the country's gender equality principles enshrined in the Law on Gender Equality. The programme will be further developed through:

- Central and local advocacy to identify prominent challenges related to women's participation in the security sector;
- Baseline, midline and endline monitoring of recruitment within public security institutions in Kosovo
- Gender-analysis in line with Kosovo's WPS objectives.

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Katalogimi në botim – (CIP) Biblioteka Kombëtare e Kosovës “Pjetër Bogdani”

316.662-055.2(496.51)(047)

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The Rise of Anti-Gender Narratives in Kosovo : far-Right Ideologies, Digital Violence, and Threats to Women's Rights / Adelina Hasani, Jon Limaj. - Prishtinë : Qendra Kosovare për Studime të Sigurisë, 2026. - 18 f. ; 24 cm. 1.

Limaj, Jon

ISBN 978-9951-842-60-0



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About KCSS

Established in April 2008, the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS) is a specialized, independent, and non-governmental organization. The primary goal of KCSS is to promote the democratization of the security sector in Kosovo and to improve research and advocacy work related to security, the rule of law, and regional and international cooperation in the field of security.

KCSS aims to enhance the effectiveness of the Security Sector Reform (SSR) by supporting SSR programs through its research, events, training, advocacy, and direct policy advice. Advancing new ideas and social science methods are also core values of the centre. Every year, KCSS publishes numerous reports, policy analysis and policy briefs on security-related issues. It also runs more than 200 public events including conferences, roundtables, and debates, lectures – in Kosovo, also in collaboration with regional and international partners.

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ISBN 978-9951-842-60-0



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