



PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Digital Violence as a Mirror to Offline Realities

What does the public in Turkmenistan think about the status of women and girls?

Women and girls in Turkmenistan are not safe online and their chances of encountering hateful content have been increasing over the last two years. The Saglyk program of Progres Foundation unveiled today the findings from the first-ever social media listening project. Social media has been used as a source of data for the research because it provides the public with a forum to express their opinions, an almost non-existent feature in offline Turkmenistan.

The research project is aimed at understanding how women and girls feel about their status in the society. It also included men's perspectives on the issue, which have been absent in research and public discussions in Turkmenistan. Researchers have manually collected and analyzed data from 44 sources, for a total of 1,904 posts and comments shared by the public in the Turkmen, Russian, and English languages from January 2020 to August 2022. The research group evaluated the collected data by various themes: reproductive rights, advocating against violence, hate speech, gender roles, gender equality and feminism, and women's success stories.

By listening to the public, we identified significant trends and attitudes towards women and girls and gender-based violence (GBV) in Turkmen society. Since vital statistics regarding the current realities of GBV are sparse, these data have been long-awaited and needed in the public domain. The team hopes that the research will launch informed and constructive discussions and further research on the issues.

Turkmenistan does not have a law on domestic violence and sexual harassment. The research findings demonstrate the need for urgent action by the government of Turkmenistan in acknowledging the problem and taking immediate steps to guarantee the protection of women's and girls' rights both in online and offline spaces.

Aynabat Yaylymova, executive director of Progres Foundation, noted "I hope the government of Turkmenistan will not respond to the findings with further Internet restrictions but will instead

choose to learn about the challenges and opportunities, and initiate discussions with stakeholders on constructive measures to reverse the tide of hateful and harmful content.”

The research identifies important and alarming trends:

- Content encouraging violence against women and girls took up to 18% of posts and comments in 2022, while in 2021 it was only 2.8%, and in 2020 it was 10%.
- Hate speech accounted for over a quarter of the conversations during 2020-2022.
- Two topics dominated conversations: hate speech against women and gender roles.
- The share of negative content and content encouraging violence was significantly larger by those identified as men.
- Language plays a role: content on women’s success stories was typically shared in English, hate speech was predominantly in Turkmen, and gender roles were more often discussed in Russian.
- Hate speech dominated the YouTube and Instagram platforms, and Facebook had more discussions on gender roles than others.

TO LEARN MORE:

Full research and an executive summary are available at Saglyk.org. Interested members of the media can reach the team at turkmen.progres@gmail.com.

ABOUT PROGRES FOUNDATION

[Progres Foundation](#) (“Progres” with one “s” as in the Turkmen language) is a non-profit organization based in the United States. Progres supports progressive initiatives that contribute to understanding social realities and to shaping a new vision and approaches to sustainable human development in Turkmenistan. Progres Foundation’s flagship program Saglyk (Saglyk.org) has been working on improving public health literacy since 2009. [Progres.online](#) is an online analytical journal that promotes a nuanced understanding of the societal trends in Turkmenistan by providing quality research and policy analysis.