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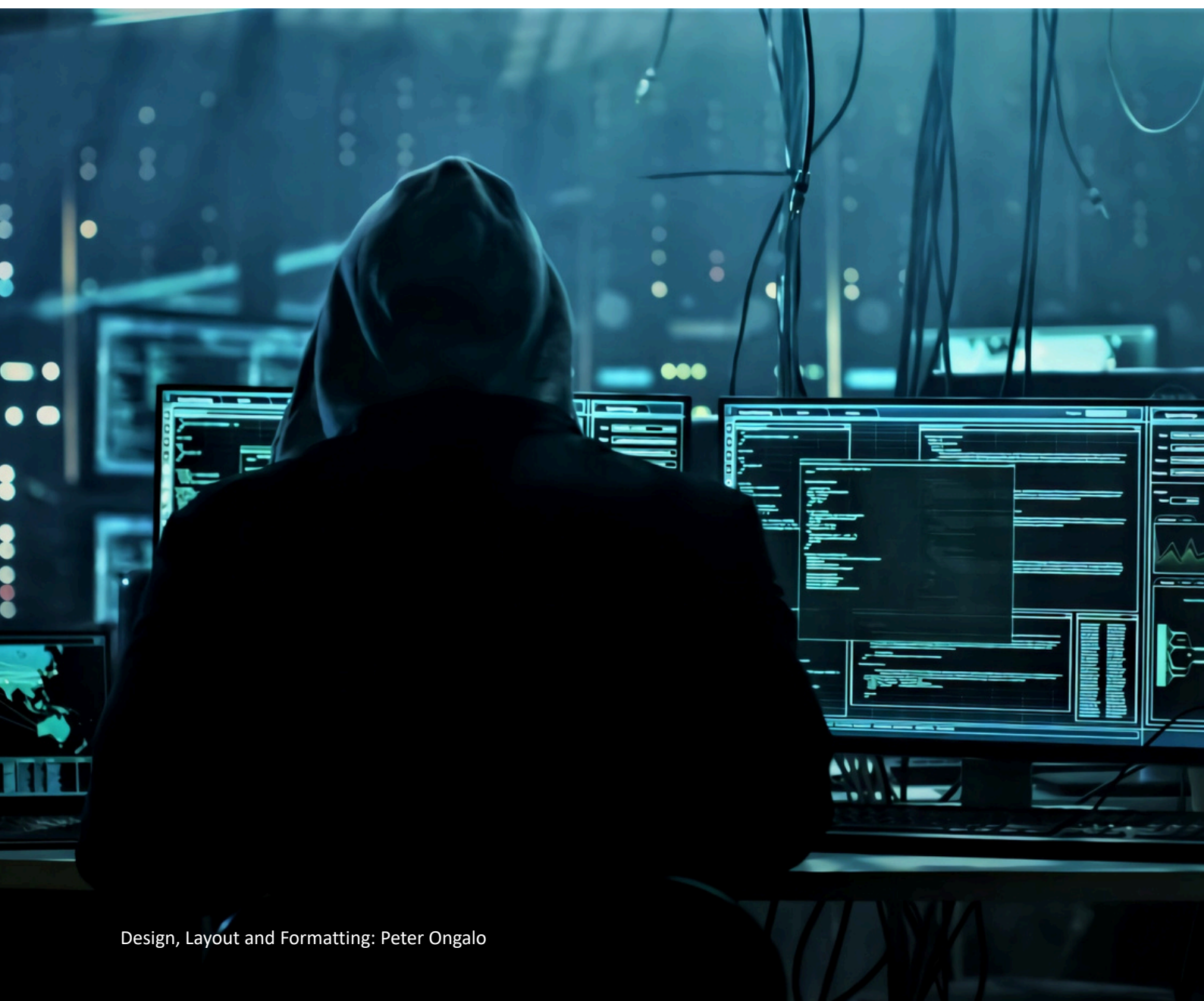
POLICY BRIEF NO. 02

STRENGTHENING POLICY RESPONSES TO TECHNOLOGY FACILITATED GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN KENYA

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Key Messages

- **TFGBV exposure increases with digital participation**, with daily internet users facing more than twice the adjusted odds of exposure.
- **Women with disabilities face heightened risk**, recording 15.7% exposure compared with 8.6% among women without disabilities.
- **Digital safety capability strengthens response**, but prevention cannot rely on individual awareness alone. Practical response skills must be complemented by safer platforms, stronger institutions and effective enforcement.
- **Exposure varies across geographic contexts**, with higher levels recorded in semi arid and more digitally connected settings.
- **Fragmented reporting and legal pathways weaken protection**, creating a need for clearer referral systems, stronger institutional capacity and greater platform accountability.

1. Policy Context and Rationale

Digital participation now underpins economic activity, professional communication, education and civic life, but the same digital environments also create new spaces for gender based violence. Technology facilitated gender based violence (TFGBV) includes online harassment and abuse, cyberstalking, digital surveillance and coercive control, image based abuse and technology facilitated intimate partner abuse. Digital technologies can extend the reach, persistence and intrusiveness of abuse through repeated contact, monitoring and control across physical and digital spaces (Afrouz, 2023; Bailey & Burkell, 2021; Dragiewicz et al., 2018; Henry et al., 2020).

Digital spaces offer important opportunities for youth, women and marginalised groups to access markets, employment, finance and entrepreneurship, helping to narrow longstanding economic gaps. Across Africa, improved digital connectivity has been associated with higher employment and economic participation, while mobile money has strengthened livelihoods and reduced poverty, particularly for women (Hjort & Poulsen, 2019; Efobi et al., 2018; Suri & Jack, 2016). These gains depend on digital spaces being safe and accessible. Where online environments reproduce gender bias, violence against women and girls or disability discrimination, they can exclude the very groups that digital transformation is expected to empower (Bailey & Burkell, 2021; Tyabashe Phume et al., 2025).

The consequences extend beyond the immediate incident. TFGBV can produce psychological distress, fear, withdrawal from digital spaces and reduced participation in public and professional life. A systematic review of online abuse targeting politically active women found that 81% of studies documented psychological distress, anxiety or fear, alongside reduced engagement with digital platforms and public life (Koch et al., 2025).

These effects are increasingly important as digital participation becomes central to livelihoods, education and social and economic inclusion.

Evidence from sub Saharan Africa remains limited and uneven. A recent regional review identified only 17 eligible studies, concentrated mainly among university populations and in a small number of countries, despite evidence of cyberharassment, cyberstalking, cyberbullying, digital surveillance and image based abuse across the region (Tarefa & Abdulai, 2026). Emerging research also shows that exposure is shaped by intersecting social positions. Among women with disabilities in South Africa, exposure varied across disability and socioeconomic characteristics, while broader reviews continue to identify major evidence gaps at the intersection of gender, disability and digital violence (Ned et al., 2026; Tyabashe Phume et al., 2025).

Three policy gaps remain particularly important. Intersectional differences in exposure are poorly quantified, geographic and institutional variation is insufficiently understood, and the role of digital safety capability in preventing harm or supporting response remains unclear (Bauer, 2014; Heise, 1998; Helsper, 2021). These gaps limit the ability of governments and digital inclusion programmes to identify who is most exposed, where risks are concentrated and what forms of support are most effective.

Kenya provides an important setting for addressing these questions because digital participation is expanding across counties with very different socioeconomic, infrastructural and geographic conditions. Existing evidence remains concentrated in particular populations, leaving limited understanding of whether TFGBV exposure follows established patterns of structural marginalisation or increases where digital participation is more intensive (Tarefa & Abdulai, 2026). Addressing this distinction is important for ensuring that digital inclusion, gender policy and online safety interventions are targeted to the environments and populations where risks are emerging most rapidly.

2. Evidence Base

The brief draws on a quantitative analysis of individual survey data collected through the DigiKen programme needs assessment implemented by ACTS through the Green and Digital Innovation Hub (gDIH) across 14 Digital Innovation Hubs in Kenya. The original assessment was designed as a mixed methods exercise to inform digital skills curricula. For this study, its quantitative component was repurposed to examine TFGBV exposure, digital safety capability and response, with qualitative hub reports used where relevant for contextual interpretation. The survey instrument was digitised in KoBoToolbox. Trainers of Trainers affiliated with participating hubs were trained by gDIH and administered interviews in person and by mobile telephone between September and October 2025.

Sixty respondents were targeted in each hub, producing a national target of 840. The study surpassed the target and included 854 respondents across 14 DigiKen hubs in 11 Kenyan counties. Women accounted for 52.2% of respondents and men 47.8%. By age, 41.6% were 18 to 25 years, 34.5% were 26 to 35 years, 23.2% were above 35 years and 0.7% were below 18 years. Respondents were nested within hubs situated in settings ranging from Nairobi and coastal counties to arid and historically marginalised counties, creating an empirical basis for examining both individual and contextual variation.

Evidence interpretation

- The exposure measure is a general online bullying or harassment item and does not capture all forms of TFGBV. The 9.1% estimate should therefore be read as prevalence of this proxy within the study sample, not as a national prevalence estimate for TFGBV.
- Digital safety capability is based on self reported confidence items rather than observed behaviour.
- The hubs were purposively established and the sample was not designed to produce county representative prevalence. Geographic patterns identify differences within this hub based sample and should guide further surveillance, not be treated as county population rankings.

3. Key Findings for Policy Action

3.1 Gender alone does not identify where exposure concentrates

Reported exposure was similar between women and men at 9.4% and 8.8%. The pattern changed when disability was considered jointly with gender. Women with disabilities recorded the highest exposure at 15.7%, followed by men with disabilities at 10.6%, while women and men without disabilities each recorded about 8.6%. Disability was associated with approximately twice the adjusted odds of exposure in the complete case model, although this estimate became less precise in the full sensitivity analysis. The policy implication is that single category targeting can obscure the groups in which risk is concentrated. Disability needs to be treated as a central axis of TFGBV monitoring, digital inclusion and response planning, especially in combination with gender.

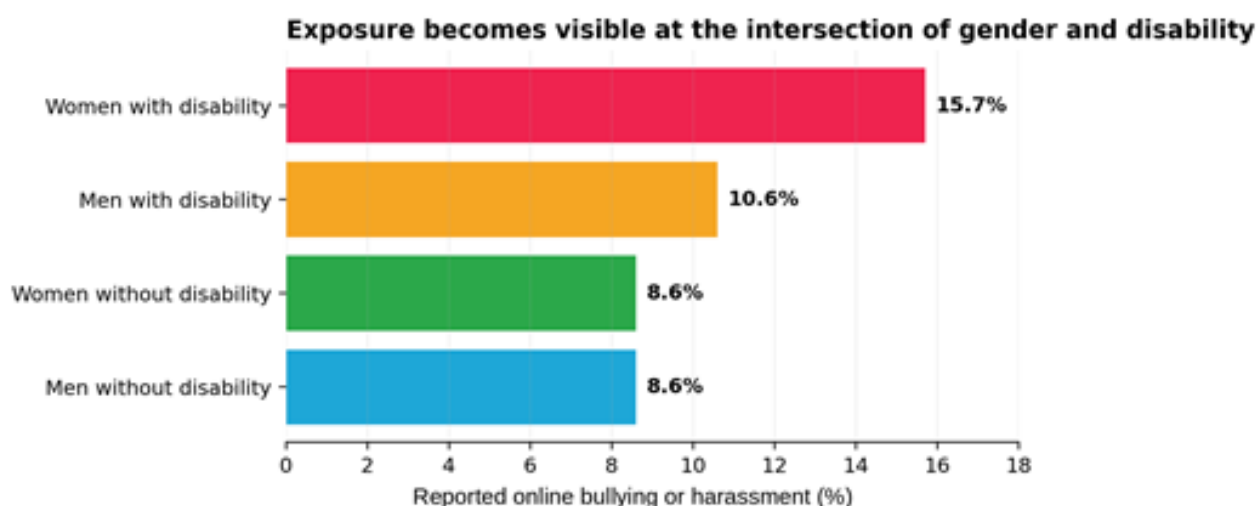


Figure 1: Reported exposure by gender and disability

3.2 Digital participation is the strongest exposure signal

Internet use frequency produced the clearest individual pattern in the study. Exposure was 10.2% among respondents who used the internet daily and 4.8% among those who connected less frequently. After adjustment, daily internet users had more than twice the odds of reporting exposure, with an odds ratio of 2.36 and a 95% CI [1.18, 5.33]. The association remained stable in sensitivity analysis. Exposure also increased with breadth of media participation, from 6.0% among respondents selecting one or two channels, to 9.1% among those selecting three or four channels, and 10.7% among those selecting five or more. These findings support a policy approach that treats digital participation as an exposure opportunity that grows alongside the benefits of connectivity.

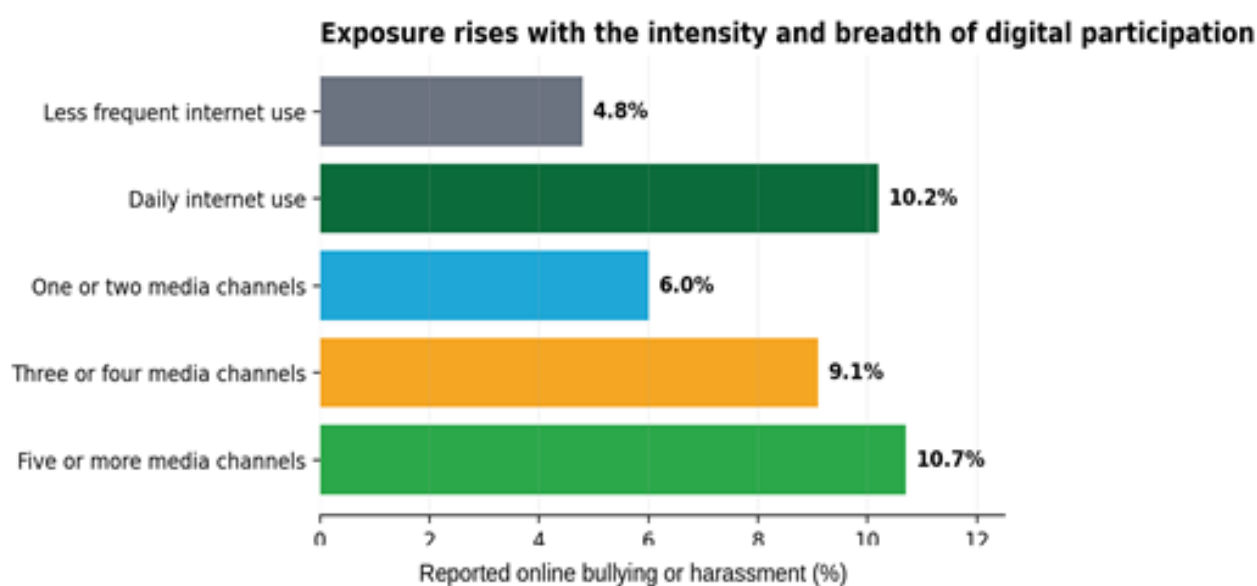


Figure 2: Exposure and digital participation

3.3 Geographic variation does not follow a simple marginalisation gradient

Exposure varied across the study contexts. Reported prevalence was 4.6% in arid contexts, 8.8% in non ASAL contexts and 13.9% in semi arid contexts. Within the sampled county contexts, Kilifi recorded 20.5%, Mombasa 15.9% and Nairobi 12.5%, while lower levels were recorded in Mandera, Busia, Garissa and Isiolo. Semi arid context remained associated with higher exposure after individual characteristics and daily internet use were considered. The lower observed exposure in arid settings should therefore not be read as evidence of lower underlying gender vulnerability. It can also reflect lower participation in the digital environments through which the measured harm occurs. Policy needs to distinguish structural marginalisation from exposure opportunity and invest in safety as connectivity expands.

3.4 Capability shapes response more clearly than it prevents exposure

Responsible online communication and awareness of online safety risks did not show a protective relationship with exposure. Respondents reporting stronger awareness were not less likely to report online bullying or harassment.

The combined capability measure was, however, strongly associated with response readiness. With gender, disability, LNOB status and MSME status accounted for, each one point increase in capability was associated with 1.33 times the odds of identifying a need for training instead of reporting no response knowledge, and 4.36 times the odds of reporting that one knew how to respond. The policy implication is important. Digital safety education should not imply that sufficiently knowledgeable users can prevent victimisation. Its most defensible role is to strengthen recognition, evidence preservation, reporting, support seeking and recovery after an incident.

3.5 Similar exposure can coexist with very different response deficits

Exposure was broadly comparable across the DigiKen programme groups, at 8.4% among LNOB respondents, 12.4% among MSME respondents and 8.1% among respondents outside both groups. Response capability differed sharply. A need for training was reported by 56.6% of LNOB respondents and 61.5% of MSME respondents, while 48.0% of other respondents reported that they did not know how to respond. This difference matters for programme design. Some groups recognise a specific skills gap that can be addressed through structured training, while others require a more basic response pathway that starts with recognition of available options.

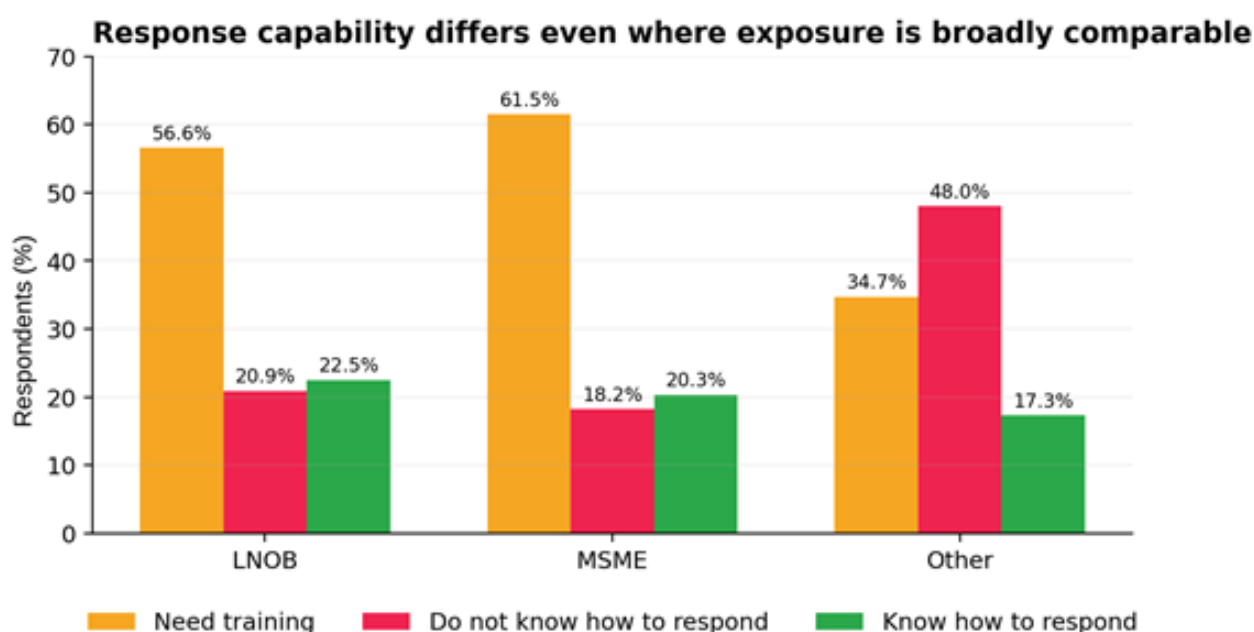


Figure 3: Reported response capability across program groups

3.6 Regulation determines whether response capability becomes protection

The findings place regulation and institutions around the entire risk and response pathway. Kenya has relevant provisions across cybercrime, data protection, domestic violence and sexual offences law, but survivors and frontline institutions still need coherent routes for applying them to digitally mediated abuse. A respondent may know how to preserve evidence and report an incident yet still face uncertainty about the applicable law, the responsible institution or the evidence required for action. Response capability is therefore necessary but insufficient. Protection depends on whether platforms, law enforcement, justice institutions and survivor support systems can receive, classify and act on the incident.

4. Policy Gaps

The study points to a set of connected policy gaps. These are not gaps in awareness alone. They arise because vulnerability, digital participation, response capability and institutional protection operate at different points in the TFGBV pathway.

- Disability is not consistently treated as a primary axis for targeting, monitoring and accessible digital safety support, even though the study shows that aggregate gender comparisons can conceal elevated exposure at the intersection of gender and disability.
- Digital inclusion and skills programmes can expand participation without embedding an equally concrete response curriculum on recognising abuse, preserving evidence, using platform tools, identifying reporting routes and seeking support.
- Prevention resources can be directed mainly by conventional measures of marginalisation even though the study shows that observed exposure is strongly associated with the intensity and breadth of digital participation.
- Reporting and redress are dispersed across legal and institutional routes, creating a navigation burden for survivors and frontline providers.
- Institutional capacity for digital evidence, cyber harassment investigation and survivor centred referral needs to match the capability that programmes ask individuals to develop.
- TFGBV measurement remains inconsistent. Proxy measures cannot distinguish cyberstalking, image based abuse, digital sexual coercion, doxxing and other forms, limiting comparison and accountability over time.

5. Policy Recommendations and Implementation Pathways

The recommendations are action points for ministries responsible for gender, ICT and justice, digital inclusion programmes, law enforcement and justice institutions, regulators, platforms, civil society and regional bodies.

5.1 Evidence Informed Policy Actions

Policy Box 1: Intersectional Targeting • Make disability a primary axis of TFGBV monitoring and digital inclusion policy, with results disaggregated by gender and disability and by disability type where feasible. • Design accessible programme content that considers reliance on others for device or account access and other participation conditions that can increase exposure. • Use combined social positions to identify priority groups instead of assuming that gender alone captures differential risk.	Policy Box 2: Digital Participation and Skills • Embed TFGBV safety modules in digital literacy, entrepreneurship and content creation programmes from the beginning of connectivity and skills expansion. • Reframe curricula toward post exposure response, including recognition, evidence preservation, blocking, platform reporting, support seeking and referral. • Assess demonstrable response competencies instead of relying only on self reported confidence or generic awareness.
Policy Box 3: Reporting and Institutional Response • Establish a coherent reporting and triage pathway that can classify an incident and direct it to the appropriate cybercrime, data protection, domestic violence or sexual offences route. • Build digital forensic and cyber harassment investigation capacity and strengthen guidance on screenshots, metadata and platform records. • Integrate TFGBV response into existing GBV support systems so digital incidents can access psychosocial, legal and protection services.	Policy Box 4: Platform Governance and Measurement • Require simple and accessible reporting pathways, clear response processes and greater transparency on complaint handling for platforms operating at scale. • Adopt a validated behaviour specific TFGBV measurement instrument and integrate disaggregated indicators into national GBV surveillance and programme monitoring. • Promote regional coordination on definitions, referral standards and platform obligations because digital platforms and abusive interactions operate across borders.

5.2 Suggested Implementation Sequence

Short Term 0 to 12 months	Medium Term 1 to 3 years	Long Term 3 to 5 years
• Add a practical TFGBV response module to digital skills and entrepreneurship curricula. • Develop a national or interoperable referral map showing where different forms of digitally mediated abuse should be reported. • Revise monitoring tools to capture behaviour specific TFGBV and disaggregate by gender, disability, age and geographic context. • Train programme facilitators and frontline providers on survivor centred response and accessible support.	• Institutionalise reporting and triage protocols across relevant cybercrime, data protection and GBV response institutions. • Expand digital forensic capability and justice sector guidance on the collection and use of digital evidence. • Introduce routine monitoring of platform response, reporting completion and survivor referral outcomes. • Use local participation indicators and emerging surveillance to target prevention as connectivity and digital economic activity grow.	• Pursue greater coherence across laws and operational guidance so survivors can navigate TFGBV without having to identify the correct legal category themselves. • Advance regional standards on definitions, referral and platform accountability through African regional institutions. • Sustain comparable national surveillance that can track exposure, response capability and institutional outcomes over time. • Build safety and accountability requirements into the long term design of digital public and private ecosystems.

6. Policy Alignment

The recommended actions strengthen the practical implementation of Kenya's existing legal and institutional architecture. The Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act provides a route for cybercrime and cyber harassment and was amended in 2025. The Data Protection Act 2019 establishes rights and obligations around the processing of personal data. The Protection Against Domestic Violence Act 2015 recognises harassment, stalking, intimidation and psychological abuse within domestic relationships. Ongoing parliamentary consideration of sexual offences reform has also brought emerging digitally mediated harms such as sextortion and manipulated sexual imagery into legislative debate. The policy challenge is therefore not simply the absence of law. It is the need to connect these routes so that survivors and frontline providers can identify an actionable pathway.

At programme level, the recommendations align digital inclusion with safety by embedding response capability into skills, entrepreneurship and connectivity initiatives. At regional level, they support the role identified in the manuscript for the African Union and African human rights mechanisms in promoting more consistent definitions, referral standards and platform expectations across jurisdictions. This is especially important because platforms operate across borders while national reporting and legal systems remain fragmented.

7. Conclusion

The study shows why TFGBV policy needs a differentiated model of risk and response. In this DigiKen hub sample, aggregate gender differences were small, yet exposure rose at the intersection of gender and disability. Daily internet use and broader media participation were more consistent correlates of exposure than conventional markers of structural marginalisation. Digital safety capability did not prevent exposure, but it strongly differentiated whether respondents recognised a training need or knew how to respond. These findings separate four processes that policy frequently combines as if they were one, namely vulnerability, exposure opportunity, response capability and institutional protection.

The immediate policy task is therefore to build safety into digital participation without shifting responsibility for victimisation onto users. Programmes should identify intersecting vulnerability, anticipate higher exposure as participation expands, teach concrete post exposure response skills, and ensure that platforms and institutions can convert those skills into protection and redress. Kenya already has relevant legal routes. The next step is to make those routes coherent, accessible and operational while building a stronger and more comparable evidence base for TFGBV across the country's diverse digital environments.

Acknowledgements

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Related outputs

- [Needs Assessment Report: Data-Driven Insights On The Digital Gaps Of Micro, Smalland Medium Enterprises \(Msmes\) And Marginalized Populations In Kenya \(Leave-No-One-Behind\)](#).
- [Policy Brief: Bridging the Digital Gender Gap through Regional Innovation Hubs: Evidence from DigiKen-supported Girls' Hackathons](#)

Learn more about and the [Green & Digital Innovation Hub \(gDIH\)](#).

Learn more about [DigiKen](#)

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