

POLICY BRIEF | SEPTEMBER 2026

GATEWAY IDEOLOGY: WHY EUROPE MUST TREAT MISOGYNY AND ANTI- LGBTQIA+ HATE AS EXTREMISM

*What six EU Member States tell us about masculinity, platforms,
the pathway to violent extremism, and what policymakers can do
with the tools they already have*

Authors

EMMELO consortium



Funded by
the European Union



HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ **Misogyny¹ and Anti-LGBTQIA+ hate are a way in, not a side effect.** In all six countries studied, anti-gender narratives and rigid ideals of masculinity are structural to extremist movements and one of the entry points through which young men are drawn into far-right ecosystems.
- ▶ **Platform design does the recruiting.** Recommender systems carry users from fitness, dating, and finance content to extremist material in steps that are individually legal and invisible to automated moderation.
- ▶ **Europe has the legal tools.** The Digital Services Act (DSA), the Istanbul Convention, the Terrorist Content Online (TCO) Regulation and the 2024 Directive on combating violence against women already cover these harms; what is missing is enforcement and coordination on their gendered dimension.
- ▶ **Civil society is the most effective actor and the least protected.** Organisations that reach at-risk young men and support victims run on two- to three-year project grants and are being harassed out of the online spaces they work in and increasingly defunded.
- ▶ **Four priorities:** (1) name misogyny and Anti-LGBTQIA+ hate as extremism in threat assessment and prevention; (2) enforce the Digital Services Act (DSA) systemic-risk, transparency and data-access rules for masculinist content; (3) fund comparative research that connects the gender-based violence and counter-extremism communities at European level; and (4) move civil society from project funding to core funding and protection.

1. CONTEXT: A EUROPEAN PROBLEM, A NATIONAL RESPONSE

The European Union now has a legal architecture that addresses the online drivers of gendered and sexualised violence and extremism together. The Digital Services Act obliges Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs) to assess and mitigate systemic risks, and it names gender-based violence among them.² Member States must transpose the Directive on combating violence against women by June 2027, the first EU law to criminalise forms of online violence against women.³ The Terrorist Content Online Regulation allows rapid removal of terrorist material, and the ProtectEU internal security strategy and the European Democracy Shield both address online radicalisation and extremist content.⁴ This brief addresses the European Commission, Digital Services Coordinators and the national ministries responsible for interior, justice, equality and digital affairs. It asks one question: if the instruments exist, why does the pathway from misogyny to extremism remain largely unaddressed, and what would it take to change that?

The EMMELO project examines how gendered narratives, anti-feminist mobilisation, Anti-LGBTQIA+ hate and misogyny shape radicalisation, recruitment and mobilisation across the EU.⁵ Its six country profiles cover France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Slovakia and Sweden, spanning contrasting political histories and digital ecosystems. Comparing them revealed five trends present in every country, each taking a local form. Those trends structure the project's recommendations and this brief.

Current policy falls short in three ways. Misogyny and Anti-LGBTQIA+ hate are treated, at best, as a warning sign of radicalisation rather than a form of extremism in its own right and a driver of others.⁶ Practitioners working on gender-based violence and those preventing violent extremism operate in separate communities, funding streams and policy networks, although they study the same phenomena.⁷ National prevention strategies stop at borders while the content, ideologies and organisational models they confront do not. With anti-gender politics moving from fringe forums into governing parties, this is no longer a niche security concern.

¹ In this report the term misogyny refers to hate against women.

² Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 (Digital Services Act, DSA). Articles 34–35 oblige very large online platforms (VLOPs, over 45 million EU users) to assess and mitigate systemic risks, expressly including gender-based violence. Article 27 covers recommender-system transparency, Article 40 researcher data access, Article 22 'trusted flagger' status. Digital Services Coordinators (DSCs) are the national enforcement authorities.

³ Directive (EU) 2024/1385 on combating violence against women and domestic violence criminalises non-consensual sharing of intimate images, cyber stalking, cyber harassment and cyber incitement to violence or hatred. Transposition deadline: 14 June 2027.

⁴ Regulation (EU) 2021/784 on terrorist content online (TCO Regulation) allows authorities to order removal of terrorist content within one hour. The EU Knowledge Hub on Prevention of Radicalisation succeeded the Radicalisation Awareness Network in 2024; CERV is the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme.

⁵ EMMELO (European Men, Masculinity and Extremist Leadership Online) is a 36-month Horizon Europe project (grant agreement no. 101177204) that began on 1 May 2025. This brief draws on its six country profiles (D2.1) and policy recommendations (D2.2); see references 1 and 2.

⁶ 'Anti-gender' narratives oppose gender equality and diversity and seek a social order built on traditional gender roles. 'Masculinist' content promotes a rigid, dominance-based ideal of manhood; the 'manosphere' is the online ecosystem of such communities (incels, 'alpha male' coaches and others).

⁷ P/CVE: preventing and countering violent extremism. GBV: gender-based violence. TFGVBV: technology-facilitated gender-based violence, i.e. abuse, harassment or intimidation carried out or amplified through digital technology.



2. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations follow the five trends and are ordered by urgency within each group. Each rests on evidence summarised in section 3. None requires new legislation (Table 1).

2.1 Recognise misogyny, Anti-LGBTQIA+ hate and anti-gender narratives as extremism

To EU institutions and Member States.

- **Write misogyny and Anti-LGBTQIA+ hate into threat assessment and prevention in all four roles they play:** as extremism in its own right, as the underpinning of other extremisms, as a risk factor and as a warning sign. National P/CVE strategies, early-warning and horizon-scanning systems and the EU Knowledge Hub should treat anti-gender narratives as a recruitment mechanism that cuts across diverse extremist movements.
- **Agree on a common taxonomy of hybrid harms** spanning misogyny, technology-facilitated gender-based violence, anti-LGBTQIA+ hostility, racism, antisemitism and Islamophobia and violent extremism, so that regulators, police, prevention services and platforms classify and refer the same case in the same way, backed by a whole-of-government coordination mechanism with assigned responsibilities.
- **Fund prevention as a public health task** across the full continuum, from building resilience before risk appears to rehabilitation. Programmes offering boys and young men diverse, healthy models of masculinity, delivered in schools, sports clubs, gaming communities and youth services, should go beyond approaches that only counter manosphere messaging, and frontline practitioners should be trained to recognise gendered pathways.

2.2 Enforce the platform obligations that already exist

To the European Commission, Digital Services Coordinators and platforms.

- **Enforce existing DSA obligations more rigorously, recognising algorithmic pathways into masculinist extremism as a systemic risk.** The DSA already requires VLOPs to assess and mitigate systemic risks, including gender-based violence, mental wellbeing, non-discrimination and public security (Articles 34 and 35), with recommender systems named as a key risk factor. The Commission and the European Board for Digital Services should recognise this pathway as falling squarely within the existing systemic risk framework. Platforms should reflect it in their risk assessments, and mitigation measures should be assessed against the pathway itself (exposure, amplification and design) rather than only against individual pieces of illegal content.
- **Enforce recommender transparency and researcher data access with deadlines and consequences.** Making these pathways observable depends on Article 40, yet several major platforms have delayed access or imposed restrictive conditions.⁸ The DSA already provides the timelines and penalties needed; what is missing is consistent enforcement of them. Applying these obligations rigorously would unlock the data that prevention and regulation depend on.
- **Apply the DSA, the TCO Regulation and Directive 2024/1385 as one toolkit.** The Directive covers offences and victim protection, the DSA systemic risks and their mitigation, and the TCO Regulation content that glorifies terrorist violence. Joint guidance should map which applies where, and clarify where DSA mitigation duties end and TCO removal duties begin.
- **Protect feminist and LGBTQIA+ content from wrongful removal and improve extremist content's moderation.** Automated systems can remove survivor testimony and education while leaving abuse in place. Platforms should pair them with resourced human review, and Digital Services Coordinators (DSCs) should encourage support organisations with grassroots expertise on anti-gender hate and Anti-LGBTQIA+ hate to meet Article 22 criteria for trusted flaggers.

2.3 Close the research gap

To the European Commission, national research funders, researchers and civil society.

- **Fund comparative, cross-national and interdisciplinary research** on the anti-gender-to-extremism nexus through Horizon Europe and CERV. Priority questions include which platform architectures accelerate the pathway; whether positive-masculinity programmes work at scale; why socially isolated and neurodivergent boys and young men are particularly exposed to online-only trajectories; and where content crosses from DSA mitigation into TCO removal.
- **Use Article 40.** Researchers and civil society organisations should file data-access requests that frame manosphere amplification as a systemic risk to gender equality, a category the DSA already names. A body of formal requests builds precedent and pressure.

⁸See the Commission's 2025 fine against X for Article 40 failures and a researchers' account of a rejected data-access request (reference 4).



2.4 Respond at European scale

To the European Commission and Member States.

- **Build standing bridges between the gender-based violence and P/CVE communities:** implement practitioner mobility funding as a permanent programme, cross-border research consortia and joint collaboration through the EU Knowledge Hub, CERV and Horizon Europe, rather than one-off projects.
- **Embed gendered extremism in foreign and security policy.** Technology-facilitated abuse used as political intimidation, and masculinist ideologies linking the manosphere to violent far-right movements, are security questions as well as equality questions. Feminist foreign policy frameworks, pioneered by Sweden and currently pursued by France, show how this can be institutionalised.

2.5 Resource and protect civil society

To Member States and EU funding programmes.

- **Move from project commissioning to core, flexible, multi-year funding.** The state should let existing infrastructure scale rather than build parallel structures, while preserving the independence and community trust that make civil society effective.
- **Treat coordinated harassment of feminist, LGBTQIA+ and democracy-education organisations as a threat to civic participation.** Reporting channels, police support, digital-security assistance and staff wellbeing should be funded as core programme costs. Intersectional victim support should be resourced as the 2024 Directive is transposed.
- **Civil society should act politically,** engaging in DSA enforcement and platform governance as a political actor rather than only as a content reporter.

Action	Lead actor(s)	Instrument or channel
Recognise misogyny and Anti-LGBTQIA+ hate as extremism, driver, risk factor and warning sign	Member States, EU Knowledge Hub	National P/CVE strategies
Shared taxonomy of hybrid harms; whole-of-government coordination	Member States, DSCs, platforms	Existing toolkits; DSA guidance
Fund prevention as public health, incl. positive-masculinity programmes	Member States, Commission	CERV, national budgets
Recognise the anti-gender-to-extremism pathway within existing DSA systemic risks	Commission, DSCs	DSA Arts 34–35
Enforce recommender transparency and researcher data access	Commission, DSCs	DSA Arts 27, 40
Apply DSA, TCO Regulation and Directive 2024/1385 as one coordinated toolkit	Commission, DSCs, national regulators	Joint guidance
Fund comparative research on the nexus; file Article 40 requests	Commission, funders, researchers, CSOs	Horizon Europe, CERV, DSA Art 40
Standing practitioner-mobility programme bridging gender-based violence (GBV) and P/CVE	Commission	EU Knowledge Hub, CERV
Core multi-year funding for civil society; protection; victim support	Member States, EU funders	CERV, national budgets

Table 1. Summary of recommendations. None requires new legislation; all can be taken up through existing instruments and programmes.

3. EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

Five trends emerged from comparing the six country profiles. Each is present in every country; the examples show how it takes local form.

Trend 1: Misogyny and Anti-LGBTQIA+ hate are structural to extremism, not incidental

In **Germany**, ‘life coach’ content aimed at young men facing unemployment, relationship breakdown or isolation channels these vulnerabilities into far-right radicalisation. The Halle and Hanau attacks show where the misogynist far-right radicalisation pathway can end. A **French** practitioner described masculinist rhetoric as a ‘lever’ that ‘unlocks other mental boxes’ towards harder extremism. In **Sweden**, the gender-equality tradition has itself become a grievance narrative, incel-forum engagement is among the highest per capita in the world, and the radicalisation profile is shifting towards younger, isolated, often neurodivergent boys, some as young as twelve. In Slovakia, the 2022 Bratislava attack targeted an LGBTQIA+ bar. In **Hungary** anti-gender politics was a core part of state policy until the elections in spring



2026. What unites those targeted is not demography but identity uncertainty, biographical vulnerability⁹ and perceived status loss, which masculinist content is built to exploit.

Trend 2: Platform design works as radicalisation infrastructure

Extremist and masculinist actors in all six countries understand how moderation works and evade it by embedding ideology in fitness, finance, dating and humour content. Individually innocuous, this content becomes harmful through cumulative exposure and algorithmic recommendation. A German practitioner put it plainly: ‘the transition from “this is just fitness” to “this is anti-feminist, this is problematic” is very subtle’, and automated systems are not designed to catch that subtlety. In **Hungary** actors use TikTok for radical messaging while keeping a ‘clean’ profile on Instagram. In **Slovakia**, a deepfake released during the 2023 pre-election silence period drew no effective platform response.

Trend 3: The research base lags far behind the threat

In **France** masculinities studies only emerged in the mid-2010s, and journalists and civil society have consistently outpaced academia. In **Slovakia** a one-off mapping by ISD and Strong Cities of 375 extremist accounts and 11,779 posts revealed the ecosystem’s breadth but had no follow-on monitoring. Deradicalisation practitioners in **Germany** and **Sweden** lack tools to trace how masculinist narratives spread digitally; in **Ireland** the evidence base is acknowledged to be thin. Because the content is disguised as lifestyle material, it cannot be studied without platform data, which Article 40 grants in law but platforms have been slow to provide.

Trend 4: The ecosystems are transnational; the responses are not

Extremist content, ideas and organisational models all travel across borders. Masculinist content from influencers such as Andrew Tate and Jordan Peterson is watched in all six countries. The ‘Great Replacement’ idea came from French identitarian networks and is now a core mobilising idea of the German far right. Active Clubs originated in the United States and have at least seven chapters in Sweden, with an average member age of 21. The Terrorgram network that radicalised the Bratislava attacker links Slovak extremism to a global accelerationist ecosystem.¹⁰ Responses, by contrast, stay national, and often fall short even at home: practitioners in **Slovakia** and **Ireland** still lack working multi-agency referral pathways, and short-term project funding is reported as a structural crisis in Germany, Sweden, Ireland and Slovakia.

Trend 5: Civil society is effective, under-resourced and under attack

In **Sweden**, EXIT and Agera Värmland reach at-risk individuals through independence and community trust that statutory bodies cannot replicate, but lack sufficient long-term funding. All five practitioner organisations interviewed in **Ireland** rated face-to-face work as far more effective than online counter-messaging, and all described being driven out of digital spaces by harassment, with women disproportionately targeted. Democracy-education practitioners in **Germany** are personally targeted by far-right actors while facing funding cuts; NGOs in **Slovakia** report surges of coordinated abuse after cues from officials; feminist organisations such as the Planning Familial in **France** face online harassment and physical attacks; in **Hungary** state policy has been shrinking safe spaces for LGBTQIA+ communities. At the same time, civil society organisations advocating gender or LGBTQIA+ rights proved effective in mobilisation yet faced increasing repression until 2026. Silencing can be a strategy, not a side effect.

Methodology and scope

The evidence comes from the six EMMELO country profiles (D2.1), produced by the consortium in 2025–26 through desk research and exploratory interviews with prevention practitioners and civil society organisations. The Institute for Strategic Dialogue led the cross-country synthesis and recommendations (D2.2). Findings are qualitative and practitioner-informed; the six countries were selected as diverse national contexts rather than a representative sample. Country figures come from the profiles and their sources.

4. REFERENCES

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⁹ Biographical vulnerability refers to individual-level characteristics (e.g., young age, early childbearing, and low educational attainment).

¹⁰ Active Clubs: decentralised white-nationalist fitness and fight groups originating in the United States. Terrorgram: Telegram channels promoting ‘accelerationist’ white-supremacist terrorism, which seeks to hasten societal collapse through violence.



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Contact: projekt.emmelo@umb.sk | www.emmelo.eu

To be cited as: EMMELO consortium (2026). Gateway Ideology: Why Europe Must Treat Misogyny and Anti-LGBTQIA+ Hate as Extremism. EMMELO Policy Brief. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.23069770

Contributing authors: Jozef Michal Mintal, Tomáš Beňuška, Kamila Borseková, Andrea D. Bührmann, Felix Butzlaff, Mary-Ann Ciosk, Madeline Elmitt, Edel Hughes, Joanna Lindström, Mary McGill, Maëlle Noir, Sandrine Rui, Helena Schwertheim, Friz M. Trzeciak, Violetta Zentai