

# Acts of Symposium

**Online sexual exploitation  
challenges and responses  
in Europe**

**INTERNATIONAL  
SYMPOSIUM**

**Strasbourg  
(France)**



**FEBRUARY 14, 2025**

**OSEZ  
LE FÉMINISME** 

  
La Coordination Française  
pour le Lobby Européen des Femmes

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# FOREWORD

This international symposium held in Strasbourg in February 2025 focused on the fight against gender-based and sexual violence in the digital age. Bringing together MEPs, ambassadors, legal experts, associations and civil society organizations from several European countries, the event took stock of the violence facilitated or aggravated by technology - online sexual exploitation, trafficking for exploitation on platforms, pornocriminality, pedocriminality, harassment and digital violence targeting women.

In a variety of panels and presentations, experts, survivors and practitioners shared their findings, experiences and concrete proposals for building a coherent, feminist European response to the new technological challenges. The discussions highlighted the need to impose stricter obligations on digital platforms, strengthen transnational cooperation and harmonize legal responses to the proliferation of sexist and sexual cyberviolence.

This collective effort has resulted in the **Strasbourg Call**, an ambitious advocacy text by experts, political decision-makers, jurists and committed organizations, calling for concrete legislative reforms to frame the practices of digital players, strengthen victim protection and tackle new forms of online sexual crime.

Watch all the videos on the Osez le Féminisme' YouTube

Find all the information on the website :

<https://stopsexualexploitationonline.eu/en/home/>

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**PANEL 2 : PORNOCRIMINALITY AND PEDOCRIMINALITY : A CONCERN FOR EQUALITY, PUBLIC HEALTH, AND CHILD PROTECTION**

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**PANEL 3 : ADDRESSING PROSTITUTION : THE IMPACT OF DIFFERENT POLICY MODELS IN EUROPE**

**PANEL 4 : CURRENT LEGAL CHALLENGES IN FRANCE AND EUROPE : USING THE LAX TO END IMPUNITY**

**CLOSING REMARKS AND CALL TO ACTION**

# OPENING SPEECHES



## ALYSSA AHRABARE

President of the French Coordination  
for the European Women's Lobby (CLEF)



## CHRISTELLE WIEDER



Deputy Mayor of Strasbourg in charge of  
equality between women and men



## CÉLINE PIQUES



Writer of the High Council for Equality's report  
on pornocriminality,  
representative of Osez le Féminisme



## ROXANA MARACINEANU



Secretary General of Interministerial Mission  
for the Protection of Women against Violence  
and the Fight against Human Trafficking (MIPROF)



## REEM ALSALEM



United Nations Special Rapporteur  
on violence against girls and women

# ALYSSA AHRABARE

President of the French Coordination for the European Women's Lobby (CLEF)

First of all, I'd like to thank you for joining us here today to talk about a particularly important and topical issue : gender-based and sexual violence online and online sexual exploitation. Throughout the day, we will have with us a number of high quality panellists from different countries, so I would like to thank them all. In particular, I'd like to thank the organisations that have come from abroad. We have people with us today from Hungary, Sweden, Germany, Portugal, Spain, Belgium, Switzerland and France, of course. So thank you to all those who made the journey. I would also like to thank Reem Alsalem, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against Girls and Women, Aurore Berger, Minister Delegate to the Prime Minister for Gender Equality, Alexandra Louis, Interministerial Delegate for Victim Support, Delphine O, Ambassador and Secretary General of the Generation Equality, who will all be speaking today, as well as MEPs Evin Incir, Hélène Fritzon and Maria Noichl. Thank you to them and to all the experts who will be speaking throughout the day. And thank you, of course, to our entire organising team.

This morning we will have graphic facilitation by Christel Han. A graphic facilitation is an illustration, a board that is produced live during the discussions. This graphic facilitation, which you will be able to see during the exchange with the audience and during the Q&A at the end of each panel, will gradually come to fruition and will also serve as a support for our discussions.

Without further ado, I'd like to give the floor to our first guest for her keynote speech, Christelle Wieder.

# CHRISTELLE WIEDER

Deputy Mayor of Strasbourg in charge of equality between women and men

Hello everyone. I'm Christelle Wieder, Deputy Mayor of Strasbourg, responsible for women's rights and gender equality, and I'm pleased to

welcome you here in the name of the Mayor of Strasbourg.

So, Strasbourg is a feminist city : our mayor is a young woman and she has feminist values, and this has allowed us to make some significant advances in the city's capabilities, such as a gynaecological health project, which is one of the latest innovations here in Strasbourg. We are also making progress with local associations, which of course we support. We are working on violence against women. We are also working in Strasbourg on gender budgeting, which allows us to work on equality across the board and to think about gender equality in many areas and in all our public policies, whether urban planning, education, politics, sport etc.

But today's subject is not a municipal responsibility. And this is what people have been telling me when, in 2022, we organised a major symposium devoted to the issue of pornography. At that time, 1 300 people attended, with many experts, including Céline Piques, thanks. It's still not a municipal competence to reflect on these issues, but we felt it was important to bring this reflection and expertise to the general public and to reflect together on how online violence can have a global impact on our society. A number of lessons were learnt during the day, notably that France is in the front line when it comes to paedophile crime, for example, and also when it comes to pornographic content, which is among the most extreme on the planet. These are all things I discovered thanks to this study day.

One of the lessons we learnt was that children and teenagers are on the front line, and the recent consequence of this was also to see in the High Council for Equality report that sexism is not declining in France, and is even consolidating, particularly among the younger generations, and obviously I suppose that many of us today see a quite obvious link between this stranglehold of pornography on our society and this reinforcement of sexism. And during the day, we were also able to see that from a symbolic point of view, the glamorization of violence against women consolidates a relationship of domination, and this is also what we see in the surveys on sexism carried out by the High Council for Equality.

Concerning the protection of children and adolescents, I am particularly sensitive as a teacher, since I still teach in a secondary school, and unfortunately we see the consequences each day on young people and both the dissemination of images and the ravages that these

disseminations of images can have on young people. Images are also imposed on young people as a form of game. One teenager will show another some particularly shocking images. And in our country, in the education system, we are extremely powerless. Who can talk to a 6th grader who is addicted to pornography, who can talk to his parents, who can help teachers to better identify and understand these issues ? There is a huge gap between our institution and our understanding of what is happening in the digital world and the phenomena of cyberviolence.

And to fight, which is obviously what we're doing together today, there are unfortunately several obstacles, because we have to act internationally, and I'm very glad to know that today there are people from many European countries, because this must be a European response. And here you are, of course, in a city that is a European capital, so we obviously have to trust the local institutions, the ECHR, the Council of Europe and the European Parliament to push legislation forward, and this is true not only in Ministry of National Education but also in the world of politics : digital issues are relatively little understood and little known by political decision-makers, and that's another major obstacle: we need to move towards greater acculturation, and that's also what this day is obviously contributing to. And there is also a significant taboo around this subject.

So there are a lot of hurdles that we're getting ready to cross together, and I'm delighted about this in behalf of child protection, in behalf of the protection of women, those caught up in human trafficking networks, but also the protection of women in a symbolic way, of course.

Today is a day of hope, and I would obviously like to thank the French Coordination for the European Women's Lobby and the superb association Osez le Féminisme, of which I was a member, and which is obviously still dear to my heart. I firmly believe in European institutions and in European cooperation to advance equality issues. I still have hope that we can work together to achieve equality. Welcome once again to our superb city of Strasbourg. I wish you an excellent day of reflection.

# CÉLINE PIQUES

## Writer of the High Council for Equality's report on pornocriminality, representative of Osez le Féminisme

Hello everyone, I'm extremely honoured that so many of you are here today. Let me introduce myself, my name is Céline Piques and I am a spokesperson for Osez le Féminisme, which is co-organising this symposium with the French Coordination for the European Women's Lobby. In this introductory speech, I'm going to show you by way of an example that the issue of sexism and sexual cyberviolence, the issue of pornography, is absolutely central. It's not a marginal issue, it's not something where we would have a certain number of pornographic shoots that go wrong, with exceptions that this industry would have to be regulated. No, pornography now is the main instrument for reinforcing rape culture, the main instrument for normalizing sexist and sexual violence.

For this demonstration, for this introduction, I'm going to tell you about the Mazan case. The whole world watched what happened in the village of Mazan during this quite exceptional trial, which lasted from September to December 2024. You're all familiar with this case : a man who, for more than ten years, had hundreds of men come and rape his drugged wife. And what's important to note in this trial is that the role of pornography and sexist and sexual cyberviolence is absolutely central to this case, and unfortunately no one has approached the issue from this point of view. Why ? Because it was the video recordings that led to the condemnation of the 51 rapists who were Dominique Pelicot's accomplices. Everything was recorded. One by one, each rape was recorded and carefully put away in Dominique Pelicot's computer, who named the files using titles found on pornography, with titles that are constantly found in pornography : « slut », « smash ». He made his own home-made pornography. What the trial showed, and the computer expert testified, was that Dominique Pelicot, before committing these rapes, did several searches on pornographic sites using two key words : « asleep », « porn ». He reproduced what he had seen on porn sites. There are thousands of unconscious, drugged women being raped on seemingly legal porn sites. This apparent legality of online pornographic content when in fact it is rape - because sexually penetrating a sleeping woman is rape - is the principal instrument for normalising, trivialising and eroticizing sexist and sexual violence.

So I'm a member of Osez le Féminisme and I'm also co-president of the Violence Commission of the High Council for Equality, which is the organisation attached to the Prime Minister that makes public policy recommendations, and rapporteur for a report that was published in September 2023 on pornocriminality. We've done some hard, exhaustive work to list the key words. And the keyword « surprise », for example - sexually penetrating an unconscious woman by surprise is rape under French law - brings together 70,118 videos on the 4 biggest pornographic platforms. These are unconscious, drugged, drunk women who are sexually penetrated. And it's presented as something sexually exciting. So pornography was the driving force, the trigger, and perhaps even Dominique Pelicot's motive for recording his own homemade pornography.

Let's continue our analysis of this trial : most of the Mazan rapists, the 51 accused, consumed pornography. Many also often went to see prostitutes, saying that they had irrepressible needs. We wondered a lot about these men from Mazan. They were men like everyone else. The common denominator of all these men was that they were completely colonised by the deeply misogynistic idea of the pornographic system that women are sexual objects, that they like violence and that it is sexually exciting to rape and torture women.

So I'm going to use a word because I think we need to put the right words to the reality of what is happening today at this symposium. I'd like to use the word « radicalisation ». Pornography is today the main instrument of misogynist « radicalisation » of men. All this has been made possible by a website - and here we are at the center of the subject of the symposium - all this has been made possible by the website Coco.fr. Coco.fr is well known to people who have long been involved in the fight against violence in prostitution. We've all known for ten years - and I'd already heard about the Coco.fr website before the Pelicot case - that this site hosted a number of forums, including of course the « A son insu » forum (which means « without her knowledge »), where Dominique Pelicot recruited her accomplices over a ten-year period, but Coco.fr also hosted pimping of minors, prostitution ads and even homophobic guetapens that led to homophobic violence.

So all of this is perfectly illegal. The site was never closed down, and the sad thing about this trial is that the owner of the site, who was well aware of what was going on, and who was not regulated in any way, was not in the dock. He was not charged with complicity in the rapes.

What should also be remembered is that the « A son insu » forum was open for 10 years, so tens of thousands of men logged on to it and saw that tips and tricks for raping unconscious women were being exchanged. No one has reported to the police to prevent and stop the abuse of Gisèle Pelicot and all the women who have been raped and drugged as a result of the interactions that have taken place on this forum.

So the Coco.fr website is now closed. And it's interesting to know how it came to be closed down : it was done in the spring of 2024 because the French Ministry of the Interior issued what is known in France as an « article 40 », which is a report that anyone can make. And it was finally closed a few weeks before the start of the trial. And on this occasion, the Ministry of the Interior, in an article in Le Monde, declared that there had been 23,051 proceedings against the Coco site. 23,051 proceedings. It took 23,051 proceedings before it was decided to close the site.

The aim of this symposium is to make the platforms responsible for the violence they facilitate. This kind of forum that facilitates rape is not marginal. Recently, in December, a case broke out in Germany and 70 000 men were found on a Telegram group. 70 000 men were exchanging tips and tricks on how to rape drugged women in complete impunity. Here too, Telegram is responsible. It must be held responsible for allowing the creation of this type of forum, which today enables sexual and sexist violence to be committed online.

Let's continue our analysis of this trial to try and unravel the thread of this violence, this cyberviolence and this sexual exploitation, which goes way beyond the simple prostitutional context that we all know about, and let's examine a number of the accused and what they have been accused of. For example, Cédric, one of the 51 accused, had also planned to drug his wife to rape her. And what was shown during the trial was that he had also filmed his wife having sex, and then uploaded the videos of his sexual encounters to Coco.fr, and then to porn sites. His wife testified that she couldn't understand why, for years, men would come up to her in the street and say « You're sexy, madam. You're sexy ». Then one day, a man said to her : « Yes, I've seen you on a porn site ! ». Years later, when she was heard at the Mazan trial, she said that these videos were still on porn sites. We need to be clear today : there is no control over what is uploaded to porn sites. Anybody, any man can put what we call a sex tape online, and women

have zero ability to remove it. And that, we'll come back to, is a way for men to prolong the suffering of victims. Because there is the initial act of sexual violence on the one hand, but also the possibility, through distribution on these pornographic sites, of perpetuating the abuse of these women, of prolonging their suffering. And this woman, years later, almost ten years later, the uploaded video of her having sex is still online.

So, if we continue, we had five accused who have also been prosecuted for possessing images of child pornography. And at the second panel, we'll be focusing in particular on child abuse and child pornography content. So you don't have to go far to find it. Here too, in the report by the High Council for Equality, we have evaluated the key words. So, for example, on the four biggest porn platforms, we have 1 297 000 videos with the keyword « teen ». We also have 138 750 videos with the keyword « daddy », which is videos of incest. In France, 165 000 children are victims of child abuse. And the number one aggressor is the incestuous father. And so, here too, there is a powerful normalising effect on child abuse on pornographic sites. In addition to pornographic sites, there has been an explosion in online paedo-crime. According to the NCMEC, the US organisation responsible for the fight against online pedocriminality, it has been estimated that by 2024 there will be 105 million paedo-criminal images and videos online. According to CIVISE (a French commission on incest and sexual violence against children), this represents an explosion of 6 000% in 10 years, a 60-fold increase in videos and images of child assault or rape.

So, back to Mazan, one last point, the question of sadism and torture. Today, what we find online, whether on pornographic sites or OnlyFans, we have extremely sadistic acts. And here again, I'm going to quote Gisèle Pelicot, who with great dignity and courage declared at one of her hearings in September 2024 : « When you see this woman drugged, tortured with forceps, she's a dead woman. I have been sacrificed on the altar of vice. » She was tortured with forceps, these acts of torture and barbarism were not recognised by the courts, the defendants were convicted of rape, but the question of torture arises and here too, I'm going to bring out a figure on key words. On pornographic sites, there is also an eroticisation of this torture. Words like « BDSM », « hardcore », « bukkake » or even just the word « torture » are used to euphemise and trivialise this torture. We counted 13 898 videos with the keyword « torture ». Torture has become something of a sexual turn-on for men on porn sites, « torture », precisely and « bukkake ».

In France, thanks to a huge mobilisation, in particular by three associations that are civil parties, helped by our lawyer Lorraine Questiaux, whom you will see at the fourth panel, we are preparing a trial, the « French Bukkake » trial, which is in fact quite similar to the Mazan trial. What is it ? It all started with the bukkake organisation. So what is bukkake ?

A man called Pascal OP rented a hangar and put a pallet on which a woman was to be put to death. And all around - there's a photo in the report of the Twitter banner used to recruit men to take part in these shoots - we have dozens of hooded men who are going to penetrate this woman, one by one. We can question the notion of torture in link to the intensity of the suffering endured by these women who were trapped, manipulated, raped and tortured on these shoots. And the preparation of this trial shows us that there was a system organised between the biggest producers in the French pornographic industry, a system to trap these women. There was a fake female profile on the Internet, on Facebook, which contacted women and promised them easy money, and then the trap closed. We hope that this trial, in which 17 people have been charged with rape, aggravated procuring and human trafficking, will help to change society's view of what is happening on porn sites and in the porn industry today. Alongside the 17 people who have been charged, we are accompanying 42 people, and we have joined as civil parts. They are incredibly courageous, telling of the violence they have suffered. But in addition to the 17 accused, there are over 500 men who took part in the bukkake sessions who will not be in the dock. And yet, like the Mazan rapists, these are ordinary men, men with jobs, families, friends and children, who on a Sunday afternoon said to themselves : « Hey, it's normal to go and shoot a « 'pornographic film' » » in quotes, of course, to go and take turns penetrating a woman on a pallet in a shed and call it « pornography » and « sexuality ». No, these women were tortured.

To conclude, I'd say that pornography is adapting to opportunities, and so today we're seeing a change in the way pornography is practised, with an explosion in particular ; and this will also be the occasion for a talk by an expert on OnlyFans. Pornography is changing. We are now on live streaming models. So everything may or may not be in live, but in any case the models we're seeing are based on the codes used by young people's social networks, and in particular OnlyFans. It will be interesting to examine the question of OnlyFans. For your information, OnlyFans had a turnover of 6 billion last year. 6 billion in turnover, and

the owner takes 20% of all commercial sex acts committed through OnlyFans. You might wonder why the owner of OnlyFans isn't being investigated for what he is : a pimp.

With OnlyFans, we're also into one-upmanship. And here I'm going to tell you a very recent story : it's the story of Lily Phillips. Lily Phillips is an Englishwoman who is a « star » of OnlyFans, and here again I'm putting quotes because you can see that it's the words of pornographers that make violence invisible. She has a « good » account OnlyFans and has decided to take up a challenge. The challenge was to be penetrated by 100 men in one day. And a documentary was made in which 100 men came and penetrated her in turn, and the whole thing was filmed and broadcast on a OnlyFans account in exchange for money. A documentary interviews her at the end of the day : she's shaking, she's crying and she's in a clear state of dissociation. And I'll quote her words : « It's not for weak women, I have to say, to be honest. It was really hard. It's like being a prostitute. » She tells us then that her eyes stung from receiving sperm. Another quote : « I was like a robot. After the 30th, I dissociated. That's not normal. I remember 5 to 10 guys, it's weird, isn't it ? If it wasn't for the videos, I wouldn't have believed I'd done it » and she was saying this in a room with a floor covered in used condoms and dirty tissues. His suffering is obvious, his state of dissociation is also absolutely obvious and, it's asbestos, there was a debate on social media. There was a debate between those who were outraged at the lack of decency and dignity - perhaps the word dignity will come up again at this symposium - and on the other side, people who defended the idea that she had consented, that there was consent, and that she had made a lot of money. As if consent and money were enough to make the material reality of the violence committed invisible. Is there no limit to the dehumanisation of a woman ? Does money make everything possible ? That's another question we'll be asking at the symposium. Dignity versus sadism. And then, revoltingly, she recently announced that she was setting herself a new challenge, and the next challenge would be for 1 000 men to penetrate her in one day.

Finally, I'd like to quote the philosopher Hannah Arendt : « The death of human empathy is one of the first and most revealing signs of a culture on the verge of sinking into barbarism ». Here we are. So who are the criminals ? The pimps and rapists, of course, but also the platforms. First, the pornographic platforms, because barbarism is their business : Pornhub, Xvideo, Xhamster, OnlyFans, and all the pornographic and live

streaming sites that make money from it. Their business model is to make money from sexist and sexual violence committed against women. But also all the platforms, I mentioned Coco.fr, Telegram, Skype, Twitter - since Pascal OP recruited bukkake men on Twitter - all the platforms that allow sexual content to circulate in the digital space, in public or in private chat, without any control, with the aim of violating, humiliating and degrading women, should be recognised as responsible. Their inaction and opposition to attempts at regulation are disgusting, and we'll be talking about a certain number of directives and regulations currently in force at European level that are either inadequate or blocked, even though they would make it easier for platforms to take responsibility for facilitating sexist and sexual cyberviolence.

Finally, and this is my conclusion, so far this impunity has been made possible because words are twisted, distorted and emptied of meaning. As in George Orwell's 1984, a novlanguage is preventing us from thinking properly. So I'm going to quote a few twisted words that we're going to have to put right at this symposium : the first word is « cinema » or « performance ». No, it's not cinema. The acts are real. Nothing is simulated. The acts of violence are real, the sexual acts are real, the violence, the blows, the slaps, the crying, the suffering is real. Consent changes nothing. Another word we're going to have to put right is « freedom ». It's being used in all sorts of ways : « freedom » of trade, sexual « freedom », « freedom » of expression, « freedom » to consent are the arguments against our indignation. This word « freedom » is used by pimps and hatemongers. And yet, in the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, there is a sentence that should strike us : « Freedom consists in being able to do everything that does not harm others ». In a twist on the word « freedom », I'd like to quote Muriel Fabre-Magnan, who is here today and who will be taking part in the fourth panel : « The freedom to dispose of one's own body becomes the right to consent to its alienation and commercialisation. The freedom to trade becomes the right to make money from the torture and sexual violence inflicted on women and girls. The freedom to consent makes the violence suffered invisible. As if it were enough for the pornocrat to extort and fabricate consent, most often vitiated, to make the criminally reprehensible violence disappear. You cannot consent to your own torture, your own degradation, your own sexual exploitation. Consent is touted as a new norm, but in reality it is the law of the strongest. We're going to have to put the right meaning back into words, by focusing on the material reality of the facts and basing

ourselves on the law, on the concepts that underpin it, such as dignity, which underpins the freedom of each and every one of us ». And I'll end with a second quote from Muriel Fabre-Magnan : « Through the rigour of its reasoning and the confrontation with reality that it implies, the law can help to lay bare and deconstruct its reversals. Contract and consent are not enough to guarantee freedom. In fact, they sometimes destroy it. However, prohibition and dignity are not always its enemies. The law also contains the means to resist oppression, to limit relationships of power and domination. The weakest and most disadvantaged easily understand the importance of the law and the limits to the omnipotence of others. They also understand the vanity of certain libertarian claims, because you have to be bourgeois and comfortable to think that freedom can be won by methodically attacking any rule of law, and above all to be able to afford the luxury of playing at undermining its foundations. The law is not a game. On the contrary, it contains valuable resources for working towards freedom, understood as the complex and demanding project and process of emancipation for all ».

At a time when libertarian extremists are flourishing - Elon Musk and Donald Trump are the best examples of this today - who oppose any form of online regulation in the behalf of freedom and trade, which suits the tech giants who have opportunely rallied behind the new American president, we in Europe have the opportunity and the absolute necessity to act now and here. With this symposium, we must forcefully reaffirm the urgent need to put an end to the impunity of digital platforms that profit from sexual exploitation, sexist and sexual violence and hatred against women and girls. The fight against sexual exploitation and sexist and sexual cyberviolence must be at the heart of the European agenda. Thank you very much, we have the levers to take action. This is the ambition of the symposium.

## **ROXANA MARACINEANU**

**Secretary General of Interministerial Mission for the Protection of Women against Violence and the Fight against Human Trafficking (MIPROF)**

Good morning to you all. Madam Deputy Mayor of Strasbourg, I would like to thank you for hosting this symposium, which is so important, and this subject, which Ms Céline Piques has set out with great ambition

and conviction. I'm delighted to be here with you today.

First of all, I would like to congratulate Osez le Féminisme and Coordination for the European Women's Lobby for organizing this event and for bringing an international dimension to the fight against violence against women, particularly in mobilizing against the scourge of online sexual exploitation. My name is Roxana Maracineanu, you can call me Roxana, it's easier. I was Minister of Sport for four years from 2018 to 2022 and I did what I could to fight sexual abuse in sport during my mandate. Now I have been at the head of MIPROF since 2023. This is an interministerial mission responsible for promoting a shared culture of protecting women and fighting against all forms of exploitation of human beings. Essentially, through training tools and awareness-raising sessions, but also through the publication of data on violence against women and human trafficking. And also, by coordinating public policy to combat all forms of exploitation. I am honored to have been invited here to speak at this opening.

MIPROF's missions are rooted in European and international legal frameworks that establish fundamental principles : the protection of women and girls and vulnerable people, the respect of human dignity, and equal access to rights for all. I want this context to be systematically referenced in the tools we develop.

The Istanbul Convention is a foundational text. It says that violence against women is a persistent manifestation of structural oppression rooted in historically unequal power dynamics between men and women. But hearing from you, Mrs. Piques, we really understand that now, especially with online transactions. It becomes real terrorism against women. And as you told us, this is a shared competence in France between the State and the local authorities. The departments are responsables for child protection. Cities also contribute to equality between men and women but this equality can never be achieve without tackling violence against women.

The new directive on gender-based violence adopted on May 14 marks a fundamental step forward since the Istanbul Convention. For the first time, it provides EU member states with a common framework to combat all forms of gender-based violence, including domestic violence ; it significantly strengthens member states commitment to tackling cyber violences. The directive explicitly recognizes that the use of information technology carries the risk of easy, rapid, and widespread

amplification of violence. Which can cause and exacerbate deep and lasting harm to victims. It defines a wide range of offenses committed through digital tools, such as non-consensual disclosure of intimate images or disclosures, cyber surveillance, cyber control, cyber harassment, deepfakes, and online incitement to violence, or heart rate to name just a few. Cyber violence is part of a broader continuum of violence against women and their children. It has the particularity of intensifying and prolonging other forms of violence, affecting all spheres and stages of life, including post-separation.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the tremendous work of Mrs. Member of the European Parliament, Evin Incir, Rapporteur of this directive, who fought tirelessly to secure an ambitious text. While we would certainly have liked to go even further on some aspects. We must acknowledge the significant progress this represents for women's rights within the European Union.

A second European text highly relevant to today's discussion was adopted in June 2024. The new directive on human trafficking stresses the 2011 framework by placing even greater emphasis on the protection and assistance of victims, particularly children. It also expands the definition of trafficking to include new forms of exploitation, such as forced marriage, the exploitation of surrogate motherhood and illegal adoption. These are major advances that now require effective implementation by member states. Just as our mission contributed to shaping these two texts by advocating for ambitious positions. We are now fully engaged alongside the Ministry of Justice to ensure their transposition into French law. Work is ongoing at European level, particularly regarding the crucial discussions on the directive addressing the sexual abuse of minors. A heartfelt thank you to the European Parliament for its ambition and determination in the face of challenges. As part of the national strategy to combat the prostitution system and sexual exploitation, launched by Aurore Bergé in May 2024, you will listen to her this afternoon, MIPROF will publish a thematic letter every April the 13th, the anniversary of the 2016 law through the National Observatory on Violence against Women.

The aim of this letter, the first of which was published when the Strategy was presented, is to highlight the realities of the prostitution phenomenon, with regard to both adults and minors. It will include data collected from ministerial statistical services, as well as from associations supporting victims. Collecting, analyzing and publishing

this data is absolutely essential. We can only effectively combat what we measure with precision. This is the foundation of public policy. A shared observation based on indisputable data. MIPROF stands at the crossroads of the fight against prostitution and sexual exploitation. While these two issues are addressed in separate national plans, they remain complementary.

This is the same public policy, the one that defends women's rights and therefore, human rights. The one that protects women, girls, and children from sexist and sexual violence. We are actively engaged in several initiatives within the strategy to combat the prostitution system and are leading the implementation of the national plan to combat human trafficking. This plan includes a strong focus on tackling sexual exploitation. With a clear imperative to advance in the digital sphere. I will therefore pay close attention to today's discussions on this crucial subject.

To conclude, I want to emphasize that our current efforts are focused on threatening rights, particularly in three key areas ensuring access to health care for all victims identified by associations, securing access to residency for foreign victims, guaranteeing access to justice and reparation for all survivors. I extend my deep appreciation to lawyers and to the national schools of magistracy for their unwavering support in this regard. I also want to express our great satisfaction at the recent publication of the emotional, relational and sexual education program called EVARS. This program has been long awaited and marks a historic step forward in France. I thank the associations as well as the ministers of women rights and national education who have fought for decades to ensure that this session is delivered towards children's schooling. I'm proud that MIPROF has contributed to this achievement and we are waiting for the next academic year to see it for all children as a reality.

I would really like to thank you for the invitation and I will spend all day with you and I wish you a perfect day. I hope that all these debates will advance this subject and will be really the portfolio of what will be said here to the other ministers, authorities and administrations. Thank you very much.

# REEM ALSALEM

## United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against girls and women

Thank you very much to the organizers of this event, Osez le Féminisme and others, also for the kind invitation to speak today. I'm very sorry that I couldn't be there with you in person.

First of all, let me say that as some of you may know, the mandate has had a longstanding interest and engagement on the issue of online violence, otherwise known also as technology facilitated violence against women and girls as well as obviously the issue of online sexual exploitation of women and girls in a nutshell, what the mandate has said is that, of course, there's a very clear gendered dimension to exploitation and violence of women and girls, because they are women and girls both offline and online. By now, I'm sure many of you are aware of the report that I produced last year on the issue of prostitution and violence against women and girls. You will probably also know that there, I have also addressed the issue of pornography, which I consider to be a form of online sexual exploitation of women and girls.

In that report, what I said is that pornography is very much part of prostitution. It is, in fact, filmed prostitution and there are a number of reasons why I say that. First of all, in terms of its characteristics and in terms of sort of manifestations, it shares everything with physical prostitution. Both are actually a system of exploitation, violence and abuse of women and girls. Also, the actors that are involved are the same. You have the women and girls that are prostituted for the offline or online. You have the pimps, those that benefit from the exploitation, abuse and sale of the bodies of women and girls whether it's individual pimps, whether it's businesses, including online technology, service providers, online platforms, can also be states that are pimps that benefit from the exploitation and abuse of women and girls. And the third actor is also the buyers of sexual acts. Now, I know that perhaps when it comes to pornography, we tend to think less of those that consume pornography as perpetrators of violence. And this is something I think we have to work on, not only in terms of raising awareness about the consequences of consuming pornography in terms of violating the rights of those that are being prostituted online, but also the immense harm that this causes to these women and girls but also to wider society.

I know that internationally we have the challenge of actually thinking about pornography as a system of violence exploitation and abuse because in international discussions, on international platforms, we tend to see separation or distinction between « harmful » pornography, and that term is usually reserved for the online sexual exploitation of children. So pornography involving children is de facto seen as harmful, which is how it should be but then when it comes to pornography involving adults, there we get into much more murky territories, because there often the suggestion is that you can distinguish between what is consented safe, empowering, entertaining pornography that falls within the realm of one's right of freedom of expression, freedom of thought, and then you have pornography involving adults that may involve violations of rights because the person is trafficked, or because they have been cursed or because they have been subjected to violence.

My view on this following also the inquiry I did for the report is that all forms of pornography are harmful, because as I said, they de facto result in egregious violations of human rights, rights that are fundamental, that involve the safety, dignity, humanity and equality of those that are being prostituted in pornography, but also because some of the violation actually many of these violations are so serious that they amount to grave human rights violations. They involve things like as I said trafficking, slavery or slavery life situations, arbitrary or unlawful killing, torture in human and degrading treatment, the list really can go on.

I also look in the report, obviously, on the harms of pornography, not just for the individuals that are involved, but also for society as a whole, and it is very clear to me that we cannot ever pretend to achieve gender equality if we normalize the consumption of pornography. The harmful impacts on society as a whole are very well documented. We know that the consumption of pornography normalizes violence, it normalizes violence and degrading acts, in fact depicts them as entertainment, and it also normalizes the commodification of women and girls and their sexualization, and in fact reduces their value to sexual desirability.

Not to mention that the consumption of pornography then also further feeds these unrealistic expectations that we all can have or form about sex and sexual relationships, about our own bodies, about relationships, and it often also leads to a greater sense of entitlement in men and

boys. There is also studies that show that those who consume pornography will seek out to enact the scenes they see, which are often degrading and violent in real life, so it can lead to increased aggression during sexual acts, and it can lead also men and boys to seek out physical prostitution. And therefore it's not surprising that in recent years we have seen an increase in the number of minors, boys committing serious sexual offenses, including rape and gang rape. Now, for example, we talk also about strangulation, and how common that is, and we know that a number of cases have led also to the death of the girls or women involved. What really concerns me about normalizing the consumption of pornography is that it perpetuates these harmful stereotypes that are formed about girls and women and about their value. It internalizes for them and for society that the worth of women and girls lies almost predominantly in being sexually desired, and that the most viable, quickest, best, most suitable way for them to gain income or make a living is to sell their bodies and to be pornified.

Now, from a legal perspective, and in my report, I urge states to consider, therefore, pornography for what it is, for being a system of exploitation and violence and therefore respond to the human rights consequences that pornography creates. I have also requested states to adopt comprehensive regulation to target pornographic content to explicitly criminalize its production, possession, and its hosting, as it violates fundamental rights, including to life, dignity, and safety. So this means that digital platforms, porn sites, any tool or platform that provides access to it must be held accountable facilitating, participating, and promoting abuse, exploitation and violence. And given the very serious implications, what I'm also saying is that we cannot expect, therefore, any meaningful progress to be achieved if we only abide by voluntary guidelines or if we impose only voluntary guidelines, particularly on businesses. This will never result in effective regulation. That of course means that states must be willing to forfeit the profit that they make from hosting the headquarters of porn sites and sites that host sexually abusive and exploitative material, and I repeat again that I believe that we have to move towards a token ban because we really cannot distinguish between harmful and harmless forms of pornography.

Now, in the immediate term, there is a number of actions that can be taken. One of them has to be raising the minimum age of accessing pornographic content. Right now, anybody, including children can access it very easily so the minimum age for accessing pornography

must be raised to 18 or 21. We must also step up education, awareness raising, not just in schools, but also to wider society about the criminal responsibilities of consuming pornography, and also about gender equality and the importance also of ensuring access to age appropriate sex education because right now, boys and girls get most of their sex education from porn, and we know that this is really not sex education at all.

Then finally, we should really equip young people with real practical skills that allow them to navigate the media and understand the difference between what is real and what is not, so that they can also navigate all the dangers of that world.

I will stop here. Of course, I did not go into details on other forms of online sexual exploitation. There is a lot that can be said about the sharing of private images, about the deep fakes that probably needs a separate presentation or conversation from my side. And in any case, I'm sure you will also be discussing that in this forum. So once again, thank you very much, and I wish you a good discussion.

# ALYSSA AHRABARE

## President of the French Coordination for the European Women's Lobby (CLEF)

Once again, we thank Ms. Reem Alsalem for her speech. I would now like to introduce the guest of our first panel to join us. This includes Ms. Evin Incir, Member of the European Parliament, who was also the rapporteur for the directive previously mentioned on combating violence against girls and women, as well as domestic violence, which was adopted last year. Thank you very much for being with us. Also joining our panel for this first roundtable is Ms. Mariana Branco, a researcher at the Portuguese Platform for Women's Rights, who is conducting a thesis on OnlyFans and will be able to speak on this specific topic. Finally, we will be joined by Ruth Breslin, the director of the Political Research Institute on Sexual Exploitation based in Ireland. We therefore have a very European panel with us.

Okay, so I'm Alyssa Ahrabare, I'm the President of the French Coordination for the European Women's Lobby. Our organization is co-organizing this symposium with Osez le Féminisme, which is represented by Céline Piques, that we heard earlier today. The French Coordination for the European Women's Lobby is a platform of women's rights organizations. We represent 80 member organizations here in France, and we are also a member of the European Women's Lobby, which is the greater, biggest feminist force in Europe, with a network of 2 000 women's rights organizations. So, through this network, we actively monitor and participate to the EU legislative processes related to women's rights, and notably, we've been monitoring and really interested in participating in the analysis and negotiations around the violence against women directive that we will talk about in this panel.

We have the chance to have Evin Incir here with us to speak, who had first-hand experience in dealing with this file. But before I give the floor to our panelists, I would like to say a few words of introduction regarding the different topics that will be covered in this panel and through the day. So, first of all, it has been made clear already with the first presentations, we are witnessing in the past few years, or I would say in the past decade, an explosion of the forms of digital violence but the first point maybe that is important to mention is that these digital violences are intertwined within the continuum of existing violence against women and girls and violence against children. It is not so much new forms of violence that are emerging, but new tools that are used to facilitate existing forms of violence that find their roots in existing systems of inequality and domination. Regarding the specific forms of violence against women and girls online, as mentioned in the Directive

so, Evin Incir will speak about this, but it relates notably to the non-consensual sharing of intimate pictures, as well as cyber stalking, cyber harassment, and incitement to misogynist hatred. So all of these forms of violence, so far, they have been really absent from the EU and international legal frameworks and this is an important thing to mention because today we will address different instruments, especially EU legal instruments and also regulations such as the Digital Service Act or the AI Act that are very relevant to our discussion. These instruments that aim to regulate the digital space, they overlook the specific risks of these forms of violence and notably the use of artificial intelligence specifically to facilitate violence against women and girls. Notably, we can mention the use of deepfake pornography, which is not mentioned in the AI Act explicitly as a use of artificial intelligence that is unacceptable or carries high risks, which is the case for other uses of artificial intelligence, such as what poses a threat to democracies, which I agree, is an unacceptable use of artificial intelligence. But so is deep fake pornography, which is used to silence women and girls, which also has a negative impact on democracy and political life. But it is also harmful in many other ways and a public health issue.

I also wanted to mention that the legal frameworks that we have that are more general, such as GDPR, which mentions what is called the « right to be forgotten », so it's basically our right to privacy and to have control over our own image online. This is not applied consistently to the online social media platforms, and especially pornography platforms, where images, intimate images or videos of sexual violence are leaked. And then there is close to no recourse for women and girls, for victims to take these images out of the internet. This is something that was mentioned by Celine Piques and this is something that I think we will speak about several times today, because this is one of the key issues when it comes to victims of these forms of violence. The presence of these materials online leads to constant re-victimization. It leads to something that has been defined by survivors as a « social death ». Because they could be recognized at their work, in the streets. They could be rejected from their own families. They could risk also other forms, additional forms of violence. Such as physical, sexual violence, even femicides. When their relatives learn or see the images. So it has, of course, deep consequences.

Regarding the non-consensual sharing of intimate pictures, what I wanted to mention is that it is not a new phenomenon. In the sense that already in 1980, in the US, there was a trial where several women sued the magazine Hustler, so you know this pornography magazine that was also very, let's say, hardcore. They sued the magazine to say that the magazine published, without their consent, intimate pictures of them. So it actually is a historic fact that the pornography, the

sexual commercialization industry has been using, exploiting the image of women without their consent to make profits for decades. And of course with the use of the internet, which now makes the content very accessible, free and anonymous, and easily available, this has exploded. And it's more than time now that legal frameworks get up to date with this reality.

In terms of consequences, I mentioned social death, but I also really want to highlight that these forms of violence against women and girls online are really used as a tool of control by perpetrators. So Evin Incir will speak about cyberstalking, which is in the Directive. It is one specific example of how technology can be used in an overall context of coercive control and an existing context of domestic violence or intimate relationship violence. These new technologies are being used to strengthen the control that the perpetrators have over the victims.

And maybe to finish, I wanted to speak about deepfake pornography. This afternoon, Delphine O, who is ambassador for the Generation Equality Forum, she will speak about artificial intelligence in the context of violence against women and girls specifically. But I think it is very important to mention that 68% of the access to deepfake pornography goes through Google. And so there is a responsibility also of these search engines, these big platforms, they are not innocent in this system of promoting and profiting from violence against women and girls. And so today we are trying to look at all the actors that need to be concerned with this topic. So it's not only the platforms themselves, but it's also the internet providers, it's also the search engines, and so on and so forth, and of course the perpetrators themselves and the states, as well as the international, EU and European institutions, because there is a need for collaboration and cross-border action. This is something that exists in other areas, such as the fight against terrorist content. There is a regulation that explains how the collaboration between states in the EU must happen when it comes to terrorist content shared online, with very effective ways to take away this content within one hour after it is flagged. However, this does not apply to content of rape and extreme forms of violence, including torture, that we can find very easily on the internet.

So I will stop for now, because we really want to hear from our speakers. And I will, without further ado, give the floor to Evin Incir, who, as I said, is a Swedish MEP. So, Evin, you worked on the new EU Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence. It is a major step forward of course but it has sparked, also, a lot of debates regarding freedom of expression, regarding privacy online versus regulation, and that kind of narrative. So do you want to tell us maybe first of all what is in the Directive, why it is important, and also what are

the next steps in terms of implementation by the states, and what are your views overall about this fight ?

## EVIN INCIR

### Swedish MEP, rapporteur for Directive 2024/1385 on combating violence against girls and women

Well, first of all, thank you very much for the invitation to join this event and talk about the directive. And I would also say that I would like to want to express a big thanks to all of you who have been part of the struggle that we have conducted in the European Parliament. Without the European Women's Lobby and other feminist organizations, we wouldn't have had the legislation on the table. And one of my colleagues, Maria Noichl, who is also together with me and together with my other colleague, Hélène Fritzon, who is also here, knows that; I mean, we have been conducting this. It hasn't been easy in the European Parliament, but we also know that it hasn't been easy in the society at large. And this is something that the women of Europe has asked for and demanded for over 30 years. So this took 30 years to not only be put on the table, but also adopted. And I know that, I'm very much convinced that if my co-rapporteur, Francis Fitzgerald, which I'm very proud to have had as a co-rapporteur, was with me, she would also have expressed a big thank you to this allyship that we have had and that has made this legislation possible. As I said, it hasn't been easy. There has been a lot of fights. Of course, there have been discussions on the limitation of the freedom of speech, which I think is totally crazy. Because when we talk about offline violence, nobody questions it.

So why question online violence ? I remember two or three years ago, I think it was, I met a lady from Germany, working within the film industry, and she told her story about that she had been a victim of online violence, and she went to the police to report it in Germany. Instead of the police saying « Okay, we are here to help you, and providing her with all the help that they could » they told her : « Maybe you're too opinionated. ». So saying to somebody « maybe you're too opinionated », is actually saying « yes » to limiting democracy, limiting freedom of speech because harassment, violence in all its forms is an attack on the freedom of speech, both online and offline, of course. So this has been, of course, a discussion, but we always see these kinds of discussions when it comes to fundamental rights, on online platforms, there is always this argument of integrity coming up, that it will be an intrusion into somebody's integrity or privacy. But the same goes for limiting, or ensuring that the person cannot speak out, that's also actually limiting

somebody's access to fundamental rights. As much as privacy and integrity is a fundamental right, also freedom of speech for women is a fundamental right. And we need to be able to do both : as we can do offline, we must also be able to do online. We need to be able to combat crimes as well as find a way of ensuring privacy and integrity. And please, as a politician, I can tell you privacy and integrity is quite important. But, as well, it's my possibility to speak out without fearing that I will be targeted on online platforms and in that way silenced. And I know that many women in here, including myself sometimes, feel that : « Should I say this or should I say that, because I know that I will have a lot of attacks both when it comes because of my gender, but also because of my background as a person of color and as born outside of the European Union. »

So as a person of color, the intersectional perspective also is added to it. The racism attacks that come with it.

But additional to the discussion on freedom of speech, we had also two big discussions and that was the inclusion of the consent-based rape legislation, as you know very well but also something that was raised before in the last panel, and that's the issue of prostitution, among others. When it comes to the issue of prostitution, I must say that I'm very disappointed in many colleagues in the Liberal camp and the Green camp, who was actually constituted a hindrance to include it. They threatened and said : « If you include prostitution, we will vote down the whole legislation. » I was shocked, but in 2024 and today, 2025, there are still women who think that prostitution is something that somebody does because they want to. But I still think that it's important that we had this discussion, because as we all know, gender equality is a building block. Every day, taking the debate, one year it can be hard, and the year after it could have shifted due to us daring to actually take the debate. And the second is, however, I want to add there that one thing that we managed, even though we didn't manage to get in the whole banning rape, basically, banning buying rape, is that we managed to include that member states should offer, those who have legal prostitution, should offer exit programs. So one step forward.

The second was the consent-based rape legislation. And there we had a huge majority in the parliament joining and echoing the importance of the consent-based rape legislation. However, I must say that I'm very disappointed, I know that some of you already have heard me say several times before, but I was very disappointed by the unholy alliance of Macron in France, where we are, Minister of Justice Buschmann in Germany, and Orbán in Hungary, who bluntly said « No, we refuse ». And unfortunately, they, together with some other countries, constituted what is called a « blocking minority », which means that it cannot be

added in, so we had two alternatives : one is that we say we will continue fighting about it, and maybe losing the whole legislation, or we say « okay, so you have formed this blocking minority, shame on you, but we still want to go forward when it comes to the struggle against women's rights. » And some people said to me and all other colleagues who were a part of ensuring this legislation, that it's not enough with fighting online violence, which I think is quite important, of course, as more and more people, especially young people, are moving to online, but nevertheless, of course, we need to fight online and offline, and we also know that they are interlinked.

Some people wanted to postpone and ensure that, or make one more try to ensure the concept-based legislation was included, but after making a thorough analysis, both men came to the conclusion that if we postpone it to this mandate, which is this mandate, we risk the whole legislation. And I must say that : It is a historical and one of a kind, the first ever legislation on combating violence against women, and domestic violence. It's the first on the EU level. And as previously I've said also, been said : it's not everything we wanted, but it's one step forward. We wanted much, much more, but it's one step forward. But if we would have postponed it to this mandate, what would have happened ? Today, we have one third of the European Parliament coming from the far right. One third. And unfortunately, the EPP group, even though Francis, my co-rapporteur, belonged to the EPP group, I always told her that, I was a bit afraid when I heard that somebody from the centre-right conservative group will be the co-rapporteur, but she is very progressive and we are both small, but we have different backgrounds, look different, grow up differently, not only during different times, but also different contexts. But we had, both of us, a passion for women and girls, right ? And she made her group do things that I think that many others might not have been able to make the EPP group do.

So I am, even though I'm not satisfied that we were not able to include everything that we wanted, and we know that once again, that gender equality is a block-building process, we at least took one step forward and I am not ashamed that we pushed through the legislation the last mandate, because this mandate is a combat. And finally also, I want to say that the struggle hasn't stopped, because last week I was actually appointed to lead the work for pulling forward a consent-based proposal for consent-based legislation, but a report. And so that the Parliament makes one more try, once again, to ensure that the Commission once again puts forward a legislation regarding consent-based rape legislation. And I will come into more details on what the legislation is containing of, but I just wanted to give also a thorough and a holistic view on the process and what has happened and the big

parts that unfortunately are not there, but that doesn't mean that we didn't fight for it. It just means that we came halfway and the second half is still left, and the struggle continues. Thank you.

## **ALYSSA AHRABARE**

**President of the French Coordination for the European Women's Lobby (CLEF)**

Mariana Branco you're a researcher, you're working with the Portuguese platform for women's rights, so coming all the way from Portugal, thank you so much. And interestingly, you're also doing a thesis on OnlyFans, which is something we are really interested about because there is not a lot of research actually on what's really happening on OnlyFans in spite of the fact that many testimonies and many accounts highlight the strong links with human trafficking, sexual exploitation, and different extreme forms of violence. And so I think when we discussed preparing this, you also told me there are a lot of struggles for researchers to get access to data about this platform, so that's very interesting. Maybe you can tell us a little bit about what you have found, the fact that also although OnlyFans is often highlighted as an empowering kind of platform and tool, it has actually serious ties with different forms of exploitation and anything else you want to tell us about this.

## **MARIANA BRANCO**

**Researcher at the Portuguese Platform for Women's Rights**

Thank you so much Alyssa, thank you to everyone that's present here today. It's a pleasure to be here all the way from Portugal. I would just like to add that the Portuguese platform for women's rights that I'm representing here is also part of the European Women's Lobby. We fight, of course, for women's rights and we are an abolitionist platform.

When it comes to OnlyFans, I would like to just give a brief introduction to the platform as many people may not be familiar with it, has it has some new formats of sharing sexual content that I feel like are relevant when we talk about it. The first important thing is that OnlyFans allows for sexual content because it has very liberal terms of service and it allows to sell and to buy that content. The platform makes

it seem that it actually puts some restrictions on the content, for example, you can't use the word « Lolita », which is usually related to child pornography, but that doesn't mean child pornography or child sexual abuse isn't on this platform. I would like to add that around 98% of content on OnlyFans is sexually explicit and even though this platform tries to make it seem like not all content from it is sexually explicit that's not the fact, we know that 98% of it really is. the CEO of OnlyFans really tries to sell it as a feminist platform, she said she's a feminist herself. Her name is Keily Blair, you can check her out. She usually says that platforms like this not only empower women, but give women freedom of choice to make real and important decisions about their bodies. And that there is no connection to mainstream pornography, which I would argue is a very manipulative way of explaining what OnlyFans really is.

I would like to add also that OnlyFans is a subscription-based website, so you can create your account, people subscribe, and then they have access to the content itself. OnlyFans keeps 20% of every subscription, and the remaining 80% stay with the content creator. So we can actually debate if this is a pimp's cut or not. Some feminists would argue that it is, and so do I. The subscriptions can vary greatly. There's a lot of bundles and deals that can happen on OnlyFans like 50% off a six month subscription is usually what happens when you're trying to engage with subscribers.

This platform really works differently from other forms of mainstream pornography websites, because it has some specific ways to subscribe, and some specific ways to interact with the platform once you're subscribed. I would like to mention just four of them. The first one is the possibility to text creators : once you subscribe, you can interact with the person you've subscribed to. And this possibility basically creates the illusion of intimacy. You can chat about your daily life, your sexual preferences, or anything else really because the person that you're subscribing to has to create this intimacy to keep you subscribing every month. Then you have the pay-per-strip. Pay-per-strip is a new form in which the creator does a live video, and as tips come in during the live video, they will keep stripping their clothes off, and that keeps people engaged. it's usually published ahead on other social media platforms like « I'm going to be doing a pay-per-strip » on this day, please log in, and then people and subscribers can pay to see that. There's also pay-per-view, in which people must pay extra after subscribing to access to some content that's exclusive and usually more sexually explicit and more violent. There's some pictures and videos that have extra value that you can pay to see. It's usually very explicit. I remember there was a girl from OnlyFans that used this pay-per-view way of advertising her content. And her content was her

pretending to be raped in a garage. So this is the kind of things that you pay extra to see and she made a lot of money from it.

Then you have the requests, which usually is the biggest form of revenue that comes from OnlyFans. Content creators receive requests from people who subscribe due to the possibility to text them and these requests that are received through direct messages are usually the most dehumanizing. I heard from one girl that said she had to perform a set and I purposely used had because this is not a choice that she made. She had to pay the bills by the end of the month and she had to perform a set of pictures in which she was masturbating with a dildo pretending to be a little girl. And this made basically what she needed to pay the bills that month. So just so you're informed on OnlyFans in these types of ways that you can interact with the platform.

I would also like to address, relating to the question itself, three things. Sex trafficking that's prevalent on OnlyFans isn't something new. BBC in 2021 made a big research about sex trafficking and it was already prevalent in the UK but there's more information now that I can talk to you about. And the biggest investigation that there is about sex trafficking was made by the Anti-Human Trafficking Intelligence Initiative and the awareness is prevention. They spent a thousand, more than that, I don't know how much money, they don't specify, but a lot of money subscribing to OnlyFans accounts to have access to the content that's being produced and in just two hours, they found numerous cases of potential victims of sex trafficking but also of sexual violence, including non-consensual sexual relationships, or rape.

Of course, these cases were then reported to the police but just so you know, it takes a lot of money to subscribe to these accounts and to have access to it. As Alyssa said in the beginning, we don't really have the funds to understand what's really going on behind this because if you're not subscribing to this platform, then you don't have access to the whole of the content and even if you are subscribing to the platform, you don't have access to the requests or maybe you cannot have access to the pay-per-view requests. So it keeps adding up and that's a way for the platform to protect itself from being scrutinized by researchers and specifically by the police. I would like to add it's very difficult for us to understand it.

And then there's also agencies that recruit women supposedly legally to get them to the platform. There's also leaked content which is one of the most searched themes on mainstream pornography websites such as Pornhub. If you search it, there's a lot of leaked content also on Telegram groups, it's very prevalent there and all of this makes

OnlyFans not only got bigger and bigger over time but it became prevalent in our culture and our discourse online. I can specify some things later on.

## **ALYSSA AHRABARE**

### **President of the French Coordination for the European Women's Lobby (CLEF)**

Thank you. Thank you so much Mariana. That's extremely interesting especially because we have so little information about it and I think I want to pinpoint also what you said in the end about the leaked content, because it gives me a perfect transition to introduce the next speaker as there is a continuum of these different forms of sexual exploitation, and during the preliminary session Céline Piques highlighted how the common traits between all of this is pornography, and really with pornography and now the inclusion of some tag categories that relates to non-consensual sharing of pictures and leaked content, there is entire categories for leaked content from OnlyFans on pornography platforms but also for creep shots, upskirting, all of these kinds of images that are taken without the knowledge or consent of the person who is concerned. All of this is really normalized by pornography platforms which then irrigates all of the other platforms. So the abuse happens across the board. And so we have the example for instance of a recent report from the UK that highlights a 200% increase of the non-consensual content on Instagram which is a mainstream platform that is not supposed to be related to sexual exploitation but now we can find this type of content also on these platforms.

Ruth you work at the Sexual Exploitation Research Policy Institute and you have issued several reports specifically on how commercial sexual exploitation is increasing thanks to facilitated because of technology and digital platforms. You have worked to understand how the industry operates in terms of production but also in terms of business model and marketing strategy so I think this is something we are very interested in today, the floor is yours.

# RUTH BRESLIN

## Director of the Institute for Policy Research on Sexual Exploitation at Dublin (SERP)

Thanks Alyssa and thank you to all our hosts. The focus of our research at the SERP Institute in Ireland is three different aspects of the commercial sex trade : which are all very integrally linked. So, prostitution, trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation and pornography, here we have it here. And you can see, of course, at the intersection of these three are, of course, the vulnerable women and girls who are being exploited and the consumers and I use the term « consumers » here, what we're really talking about is the sex buyers but also the consumers of pornography as the special rapporteur mentioned earlier, and of course all of those who profit. So it is very clear from all the evidence we've gathered, from everything that we can see that's happening in the world and being discussed here today. That what oils the wheels in all of these aspects of the sex trade is of course technology. In fact, the evidence now demonstrates that in terms of cases of trafficking for sexual exploitation, actually cases that have not been facilitated by technology at some point in the process are increasingly hard to find.

So I want you to imagine a vulnerable teenage girl who is contacted by a predator via her Instagram because the predator has spotted the vulnerability in the content of her posts. The grooming starts there and then reverts to a private messaging app like Snapchat or WhatsApp. The girl is offered an opportunity she cannot refuse and she may even believe this man has fallen in love with her. He uses a money transfer app to send her funds so that she can travel to be with him. She arrives at the pimp's location and is photographed almost immediately, and advertised online. She will see her first sex buyer within a matter of hours. She is of course advertised as an « independent escort », creating the illusion of freedom and consent but it is merely an illusion. From then on, her phone is used by the pimp to track and control her. From then on, her phone is used by the pimp to track and control her. He threatens to share her profile on the advertising website with her family members. Sometimes she is filmed. The pimp sets up an account on a camming website where her filmed abuse is shared and sometimes live streamed. The content eventually ends up in Pornhub. Meanwhile, the money made by her pimp is laundered online through banking apps and the use of cryptocurrency. Even when she eventually escapes from his control, the recordings of her being violated remain online, probably forever.

This is a fictionalized case of course but it really reflects the evidence

that is emerging from the sex trade and what victims and survivors of sexual exploitation are telling us. That technology has been used to identify, to target, to recruit victims, to organise their travel and logistics, to control them, to advertise them, to generate pornography of their abuse and then to launder the profits online.

One of our most recent studies in Ireland explores particularly the advertising of prostitution. Women are displayed on these dedicated advertising websites in Ireland in a very public way, using explicit photos that rarely conceal their identity. Alongside a list of 15, 16 or more sex acts, many of them that are very harmful and degrading that are supposedly the women's « favourites » to provide to sex buyers. It is notable that women are advertised in this very explicit public way, while, of course, the sex buyers and the pimps and the traffickers who drive the trade use the online environment to remain anonymous and therefore protect it.

In our recent study, we applied a matrix of indicators of trafficking and sexual exploitation to the largest prostitution advertising website in Ireland. In just a short four week period, we found 19 out of a possible 28 indicators of sexual exploitation. These were plain to see and related to the age, the young age of the girls advertised, the risky sex acts they were said to provide, and the multiple indicators of organisation and control by pimps. We invite you to read this study on our website, and apply the same matrix of indicators to advertising websites in your own jurisdiction. It's not rocket science, I'm not a tech expert, you know, there's ways to do this, to even gain snapshots of what's going on in those websites, and they can be very revealing.

I want to conclude by considering what is at the heart of online sexual exploitation. One very serious consequence of the way the sex trade takes advantage of all these online technologies, the old, the new, the emerging, is that essentially women and girl's bodies have become public property in the online world as well as offline. Explicit imagery and videos of women and girls has become public property, through pornography production, through web-camming, through the non-consensual sharing of explicit photos and videos by angry or rejected former partners. Every minute of every day, such content is being sold, traded and shared, all facilitated and hugely amplified and mainstreamed by the technology itself. A clear symptom of this is the deepfake tools that have been specifically created to objectify, to humiliate and to violate women and girls by design. Further reinforcing the sense of male sexual entitlement already made pervasive by pornography. Essentially, if you search online and the image or video of a woman or girl you want to see naked or engaged in sex acts is not available to you right now, you can simply create it, own it and

distribute it, often with impunity.

So what can we do to address this issue and to make the online world a safer place for women and girls, if that is at all possible? At the end of last year, we published a study in Ireland on pornography and its links with violence against women and girls, this is the summary here. Again, you can find it on our website [serp.ie](http://serp.ie). And we concluded in that study that we need to take a kind of three-pronged approach, which we describe as « discuss, educate and bust ».

So the discussion is talking, as we're doing now, about these issues and really confronting them. I think really confronting the hold that the sex trade has on all our lives and how it's influencing intimate relationships and I think we can't shy away from these difficult discussions and we can't shy away from the painful reality for women and girls. We need to educate, the special rapporteur raised this earlier, and there's many ways to do that, sharing the evidence of the harms of the sex trade with young people and adults, with a focus on prevention to stop young girls being drawn in into the trade in the future. And of course, most importantly of all, and I think a real focus today is to bust the business model. We have to dismantle the business model of this massive global industry that's making billions of euros while millions of women and girls suffer and we have to, on top of all of that, of course, hold the perpetrators accountable. Thank you.

## **ALYSSA AHRABARE**

**President of the French Coordination for the European Women's Lobby (CLEF)**

Thank you Ruth. I think something that is clear from all of the testimonies that we've heard from this morning is that there is a little bit of a paradox with a lot of these platforms that rely on commercial sexual exploitation that is to say, that their models usually rely heavily on the privacy of the consumers, highlighting how any attempt to regulate these spaces would be a violation of their private life. However, they also rely on hyper visibility of, for the majority of them, women who are involved in these platforms rights, their images that are a little bit or totally escaping their control, and are very hard to take away from the internet, with the example of OnlyFans where the consumers have direct access to message the women, and so it can be extremely invasive. Do you have any thoughts about how to address this kind of paradox and ensure that the right to private life applies equally to the women and to the consumers ?

## EVIN INCIR

### Swedish MEP, rapporteur for Directive 2024/1385 on combating violence against girls and women

Well, first and foremost, a crime is a crime, as I said, regardless if it's online or offline. There is a freedom of speech, there are, there is a right to privacy, there is a right to integrity, but it's not a right to violate anybody else on, because of, and, how should I say it, it's, you don't have the right, as long as, when you start to violate somebody else's right, there, I think, goes the line. So, with this said, I think that it is quite important to ensure that we have the same regulations. We don't have the same discussions when it comes to offline, for example, that you cannot tell somebody the B word, or you cannot act in a certain way towards somebody because you want to. And the same should also be applied, I think, to the online world, and this is also what the legislation is targeting, both the gender based violence directive, as well as the DSA, that there is a line for where freedom of speech or where your right to act however you want, ends.

And it is, of course, always tricky to find where the balance goes but we cannot have it as it has been until now, and it still is, because even if there is a discussion right now that it is intrusive, we know that the legislation is always ten steps behind the reality, the consumers or everyday people's. So, I would say that we haven't even come to where, to the point where the discussion of that the legislation has gone too far should even be discussed. Of course, we always need to have it with us, that regardless of which legislation that we produce and we adopt that it shouldn't be intrusive into consumers or into people that move around on online platforms but at the same time, once again, I think that it is important to understand that your right to harm somebody is not unlimited. There are limitations on that, too. So, I think, actually, that this discussion is important. I don't think that it's a fair discussion for all the women and girls that are the target for this kind of violence.

## ALYSSA AHRAHABARE

### President of the French Coordination for the European Women's Lobby (CLEF)

Thank you very much. About the same wavelength, because it's a topic that comes back to the table when we speak about regulating the online platforms : what about freedom of expression ? You did say there is a balance to be found between different rights and liberties. No

liberty is absolute so, there is a proper way to proportionately limit some liberties to protect the rights of others. So, how would you respond to those who want to limit regulation of online violence in the name of freedom of expression ? What is your view regarding the paragraph in the violence against women Directive, in the article criminalizing the non-consensual sharing of intimate pictures, with serious harm to the victim, which states that this criminalization « applies without prejudice to fundamental principles related to the freedom of expression and information and the freedom of the arts and sciences ». How would you respond to this narrative ?

## MARIANA BRANCO

### Researcher at the Portuguese Platform for Women's Rights

It's very interesting that you bring this up, because in Portugal, we just had a new court case regarding chatters on OnlyFans. For those who don't know, chatters are people that are paid by agencies to pretend to be the content creators themselves and interact with subscribers on the platform. Since many women on OnlyFans already have a big subscription base, they cannot handle every single one of them, because they're, of course, from all around the world : you can be from Australia subscribing to content in Portugal, for example, and want to chat during those hours.

And so in Portugal, there's a new case published by CNN, and it's very interesting when it comes to the chatters, because the news article reads : « They are chatting with a stranger that is paid to fool them. » And this happens because usually the subscribers want the girlfriend experience. Just so you know, when they are chatting with this person, they want the submissive woman, the girlfriend, the one that's sexual, when they want her to be sexual, when they want her to be submissive, and they want to talk about their day when they want to talk about their day. They have to really engage in this way. There's this case in which an organization is suing OnlyFans, because chatters have access to content of subscribers' daily lives when they chat on OnlyFans. people that subscribe can say where they work, where they live, and that's seen as something that cannot happen, because it's personal data that is being shared.

And what I find so interesting about this case, and I feel like it's related to the first question that you asked, is that it's easier to take OnlyFans to court when subscribers feel like they are being fooled, as the news article reads, than it is to take to court when a woman has experienced

sexual violence on this platform, has been sex trafficked, or has been the victim of any type of sexual violence, rape, etc. So the requests that these women can receive, as I already said, can go from pedophilic imagery to just selfies, so men can feel like they are interacting with their daily lives. So basically, OnlyFans and some organizations feel like the anonymity of the perpetrators of violence, is more important than the women who are doxxed, the women who are sexually violated, and the women who are trafficked. So this case was just put to court by this organization, and I feel it very much represents what we were talking about, the fact that the consumer's privacy is much more important when it comes to OnlyFans. And the women who are constantly doxxed, their images are constantly leaked, they cannot do anything about it.

## ALYSSA AHRABARE

President of the French Coordination for the European Women's Lobby (CLEF)

Thank you so much. And that really takes us further in the privacy arguments and so I will add an extra layer now, and you feel free to jump in on any of the topics that we mentioned, you can just go back and forth. I really wanted to speak about consent, because especially from what we heard from you, Mariana, and you, Ruth, there is a whole marketing strategy from this industry that relies on highlighting the so-called agency and empowerment of the women who are on these platforms. From the pornography perspective, there is a whole narrative around amateur porn and self-generated content, etc. In France, the investigation around the cases against the pornography industry highlights that amateur porn is also a front for some platforms that are using this label, but actually the functioning of the platform remains the same as other sexual exploitation platforms. And for OnlyFans, it's really about saying that you will get an income, there is a lot of myth about how rich you can get through OnlyFans. There is also a lot of advertisement around this. So when you go to social media, such as Meta you can get some ads. Also on TikTok, someone is interviewing a young woman in the street : « - How much money do you have in your bank account ? - She has a million. - Oh, how do you do that ? - OnlyFans. » and there's usually agencies behind that. So anyway, they build this narrative that is « super good, super nice, you will become rich, you will be free » but actually, the other hand of that is that, when women experience violence, they have almost no legal recourse, as you just highlighted, and when they want their pictures and image to be taken away from the internet, it is extremely challenging and basically

impossible. The images escape the control, there is an irreversible aspect. So how can we consider that consent is valid in a context where there may be economic necessity, there may be different contexts of lives, and you're consenting to something that you can never withdraw ?

## **RUTH BRESLIN**

**Director of the Institute for Policy Research on Sexual Exploitation at Dublin (SERP)**

Thank you. I'm going to respond in relation to privacy and also in relation to consent. So, as a sex buyer in Ireland, all you need is a mobile phone number. You can go online, you choose the woman that you want to purchase sexual access to, you contact her. Most of the sex buyers have a « burner phone », so a separate phone that they keep hidden from their partner, their wife, or whatever. Literally, that's all they need, and they give a fake name. Meanwhile, the women are being advertised in this incredibly explicit way with a long list of characteristics. So, you get things like their eye colour and their hair colour, but you also get their breast size, you get information about the size of their feet, their shoe size, information about whether their pubic area is shaved or not. So, the question here is what about that woman's right to privacy ? Where is the right to privacy there ? Again, this is about the technology hiding and protecting the perpetrators while totally exploiting the women, essentially. And I think, for me, it comes down to the power imbalance that exists in the online world between men and women, between boys and girls. And if we look at the internet essentially as a patriarchal structure, I really think that misogyny has been stitched into it from the very beginning, or certainly, at least, from the very beginning of social media. Because we can't forget that Mark Zuckerberg's predecessor to Facebook was all about rating girls on campus, who is « hot » and who is « not ». And that's been stitched into social media right from day one.

On the subject of consent, yes, and Alyssa, you were talking about the way women are advertised. Of course, it's all about creating this illusion that this woman is just very sexual and wants to have sex with loads of strangers, and this is what she's into and this is what she enjoys. So she is always, no matter what, particularly we can see it from our research in Ireland, no matter what her circumstances, no matter how heavily controlled she is, how pimped, how trafficked, she is advertised as an « independent escort » and it's always made to appear online that she is the person who's controlling her profile and inviting all these buyers to come and see her. And we have many documented cases of women

who've been pimped and trafficked, but advertised in that « independent » way. And survivors tell us, in this context, they are coerced into smiling in order to get paid, in order to generate the money either they desperately need or the money for their pimp trafficker. So consent really is meaningless in this situation without understanding the context in which consent is provided.

Every single day, vulnerable people consent to get on very unsafe small boats in the Mediterranean, but just because they « consented » to that does not mean that this situation is right. There are always very often desperate circumstances that have led or driven women to be in this place. So, for so many women that we've met in prostitution, the money in this context is a kind of coercive force. They desperately need the money. It's often for those simple but important things like feeding their kids, putting a roof over their head. So, money is the coercive force and poverty is the wider coercive context. And then just in relation to pornography, finally, I'd just like to say, we have to really question as well, consent to what ? Because in our study on pornography, we very much concluded that when it comes to girls, pornography has essentially groomed girls to quote unquote « consent » to acts that they do not want, that they do not enjoy, including acts they find very painful, degrading, and acts that are downright dangerous like strangulation. And we heard through our research, and we're talking to people at the front line, that there are girls now who are afraid to have sex, who are afraid to ever have heterosexual sex, because of what they've seen in pornography. So I think we really need to get a hold of that and make sure we have a very clear understanding of what we're talking about. Because I think consent is thrown out around a little bit too easily : « Oh, she consented, so there you go. » I think we need to have a deeper analysis, perhaps.

## **ALYSSA AHRABARE**

**President of the French Coordination for the European Women's Lobby (CLEF)**

Thank you so much, Ruth. We are going to give the floor to you, because we want to hear a little bit about your thoughts and any questions you may have for our speakers. So we will take about maybe three interventions and questions, and then I will give the floor to each of the speakers for their last comments and responses, and maybe key recommendations as well, so we can end on a note that is also proactive, let's say. But I wanted to mention right before that, as you remember, we have a graphic facilitator with us, so she's been busy

during our exchange. We'll just see what she came up with through our discussion. And while you are speaking and taking the floor, she will continue to create, to work on this and at the end, she will just say a few words about her reasoning behind drawing this. So who would like to intervene ?

## **SOMEONE IN THE AUDIENCE**

Thank you very much. I want to thank the speakers for this fantastic contribution. I thought I knew something, but there's still a lot. My question is very brief. It's with regard to another player in all of this, and that's the payment platforms. What role and responsibility do you think they also hold in all of this ? I mean, they seem to, in my view, facilitate this also. So what do you think about that ? Thank you.

## **SOMEONE IN THE AUDIENCE**

Hello. I wanted to point out that the European Union has a very strong relationship with itself, because one of you, a member of the European Parliament, said that the directive of 2024 is a huge progression. But I, when I read it, of course, see the part that relates to, but I also see the set-back because in this directive, which is supposed to protect women, there are several dispositions that actually, in my opinion, are setbacks with regard to the protection of fundamental rights to women, and notably those who put into balance, of course, freedom of speech of men, of course, because it's not freedom of speech of women, and make them prime over the fundamental rights of women. So it's a setback with regards to the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights. I mean, it's a real setback. It's not, and I mean, as for now, the level of protection of women and of human dignity and of the rights of women was maybe not as high as we would expect but it was still high.

But this directive, which would have huge power, because it's like binding, in the considerant 20, for instance, that I could read, actually protects men, and protects the power of men to harm women, because it's written like this. The dissemination of images, videos, or other materials depicting sexually explicit activities or intimate parts of a person without that person's consent to the public. ICT, should not be criminalized where such non-criminalization is necessary to safeguard the fundamental rights protected by the Charter, in particular, the freedom of expression, including the freedom of receiving the input information and ideas open to democracy, democratic societies,

science, etc. I mean, this is a huge setback, because the freedom of speech protected by the Charter is protected by the freedom of speech. The freedom of speech protected by the European Court of Human Rights is not absolute. It is nothing but, I mean, the level of protection stops when it starts harming people.

And there's an abuse of right. Article 17 of the Convention on Human Rights says, « The European Convention on Human Rights says that no right should be abused. » And when it starts harming people, then it's not protected. This directive protects something which is not protected. It's crazy. I mean, for us, it's a huge betrayal. And people are saying « Oh, this directive is huge for women ! » But it's not true. It gives something but it takes back so much.

## **SOMEONE IN THE AUDIENCE**

I wanted to say that the best exposition of consent is in that book by Rachel Moran called Paid For but I don't want to talk about consent. I wanted to say something about this emphasis on pornography, and of course it's vital, but you see if we go too far down this track of just actually focusing on the pornographic aspect of it, and pornography has existed for centuries, I mean that case the hustler case is preceded by other cases and other instances where women did try there's Linda Marciano who was Linda Lovelace in Deep Throat, there's Behind the Green Door, all this stuff has been around for centuries, but you see what we have to ask is why are men doing this and they're not doing it because of pornography, they're doing it because of the right to own women, the right to exploit women, and the right to be supported in this by other men who are in positions of power. And the final thing I want to say about this is another book. There's a book by Lucia Crowley, I forgot her middle name, it's called The Lasting Harm. And we all should read it. It's about Ghislaine Maxwell and her trial in relation to her involvement with Jack F Epstein. And what comes out of that book is that Ghislaine Maxwell was rightly prosecuted. There's no doubt about that. But all those little girls had aspirations. They were like 12, 13, 14. They wanted to be artists, they wanted to be actors, they wanted to be singers, they wanted to be dancers, they wanted to go to university.

Men do not think that we too are equally human with them. And that's what we really have to look for. I need to actually estimate, no, when people are coming to a conclusion and they know that they've said enough. Thank you.

## Swedish MEP, rapporteur for Directive 2024/1385 on combating violence against girls and women

First and foremost, about the directive. One thing that we need to have with it is the directive is a minimum standard, which means that the member state can be better but not worse. And we can, as I, coming from Sweden, I can say that while my country has fulfilled most of the things that are in the directive, but many other member states have not. So this is to ensure that this is a minimum standard for all women in the whole European Union. But it doesn't set the maximum standards. The maximum standards, of course, the member states are putting themselves in, so this is important to bring with us that this legislation is not a minimum standard. And I'm not saying that this is how it should be. But this is how the worst situation in the member state should look like. Nevertheless, with this said, as I said, also me and many other colleagues in the European Parliament fought even more but we had the member states who were constantly blocking more progress. So taking this with us with minimum standards and what we had to deal with, I would not say that this is a disaster because I think that would be very rude towards all the women who are living in member states who actually are not even coming close to the directive. So this is something I think especially we coming from member states who have strong legislations already, not strong enough. Because if we had, if there was any one member state who had strong enough legislation, we would not have impunity for rape situations. Only 0.5% of rapes in the European Union leads to convictions, 0.5%. The other day there was a report presented in my country, Sweden, that showed that 25% of the girls were victims of rape but far away, even a few percentage of those dared to act on it and report it.

Then I also wanted just to answer the question on serious harms in the legislation. Also in here, why it says serious harm is we didn't want to have serious harm as the European Parliament's rapporteurs, but the EU legislation is formed in that way that it needs to be a serious harm in order for it to be a EU crime. And that's what the member states used. We tried several times to tell them that you can actually make an exception from it. But they refused. That's why the serious harm is there. And this is not excuses, this is just for you to also see the processes and why some of the terms are there where they are.

And then finally, on the consent base. As I said in the beginning, we tried to include a paragraph on prostitution also. But it was not prostitution directly, it was that consent can not be used. That means it would include prostitution, it would include OnlyFans, it would include

all of that. But once again here, the member states put themselves as a hindrance in order for it to be included. So this just shows one thing that is quite important, that we need to continue to roll our sleeves and we need to continue to put our fists together and conduct this struggle because it's not an easy struggle as it hasn't been for the generation of women before us, it's not an easy struggle, unfortunately, especially during this time for us either. So I count on you in this joint struggle to ensure that we create change and ensure that we conduct impunity to the dustbin of history. Thank you.

## **ALYSSA AHRABARE**

**President of the French Coordination for the European Women's Lobby (CLEF)**

Thank you so much Evin for being with us, it was a pleasure to have you. Thank you for your input with all of the conclusions and future steps as well because we really want as a collective, as I said, we have here partners from all across Europe and we are aiming to bring these issues forward also with the EU institutions. And I do believe that you are one of our allies inside of the European Parliament so thank you so much again.

Ruth, do you want to give your final words of conclusions and responses to the different comments ?

## **RUTH BRESLIN**

**Director of the Institute for Policy Research on Sexual Exploitation at Dublin (SERP)**

Thank you. So in response, I think thinking about the payment platforms is a really important strategy. The first time they actually got involved in a very kind of high-profile way was when there was an investigation of content on Pornhub, and people suddenly got concerned about Pornhub when they found child sexual abuse on there. It was questioned that it was the likes of big companies like Mastercard and Visa that were processing payments. That did not lead, unfortunately, to the downfall of the website but overnight, an enormous amount of its content was removed because they were threatening to pull the ability to use Visa and Mastercard. So it's like big companies, like those big corporates that I think we still need to hold accountable in the oiling of the wheels of trade, for sure, there's no question.

And I don't feel qualified enough to comment on the specific text of the directive, but I would just say that I think if you think about the playbook of the sex trade and the strategies they use, they use this freedom of expression « art » and « creativity » and also « work ». So they're a bit confused « Is it work, is it art ? What is it ? » But it's all of the tactics of mainstream prostitution and pornography businesses to make it really « acceptable » in all aspects of the word.

Around the issue of dehumanisation, there's some really interesting research, quite recently from the University of Edinburgh, that looked at men who had perpetrated sexual violence against women and it examined their attitudes and behaviors. And one of the things they determined is that these men did not think that women or girls were quite as human as they are. They literally dehumanized them; they did not see them as fully human. The conclusion of that research is that men need to be educated that « women are people too ». So, I absolutely agree on the dehumanization point, but I would say that if you look at pornography and young boys who are coming to pornography, we're now seeing boys who have consumed years of pornography before having ever even kissed somebody, and pornography is their sexual template. There's no question that pornography is shaping the sexual scripts of these boys. It is teaching them and telling them how to behave in sexual relationships, and that is by strangling women, strangling girls, slapping them, hitting them, pulling their hair, spitting on them, making them gag on their penis, etc. This is what boys are learning. That evidence is becoming clearer and clearer. So pornography has a role that is very clear in terms of the onward perpetration of violence against women and girls.

## MARIANA BRANCO

### Researcher at the Portuguese Platform for Women's Rights

I would like to speak a little on the directive because I was also very disappointed with the fact that subscription-based sites like OnlyFans, MyCams, etc, are not there. I know that there is a fight to be fought but I do believe this is very important to be taken into consideration because OnlyFans represents now a cultural phenomenon. Just so you know, the online discourse around OnlyFans by men. When a woman is on Twitter or Instagram or whatever and she has an opinion that is different from some men online, they already have a phrase that they usually comment which is « OnlyFans detected, opinion rejected » and this is on all platforms, even if the woman herself does not have an OnlyFans, it's just to silence their voices and to make other people think

that if they have an OnlyFans, they have no voice behind it so we should also combat that by giving voice to women who have been victims of OnlyFans. I know that it's very difficult to do. I've tried to do so myself. Women that have been victims, they don't always want to speak on this issue. I understand why. It's a continuum of violence. It's a perpetuation of violence when you're facing it. If we can, we should have these women on the board as well. And I would also like to add that to have more about OnlyFans, there needs, really, to be funding, there needs to be studies and there needs to be an interest outside of the activism sphere, which is also very important of course.

I've tried to analyze sexual violence specifically, and then I had to change my thesis to speaking on statistics and stuff like that because it's very difficult to do what other organizations have made, which is subscribing to the platforms. So it's very complicated and it's very different from Pornhub, you enter Pornhub and you see the violence just on the front page. It's very difficult on OnlyFans and then specifically in the question « Why are men doing it ? » I would also say it's obviously the right to own women and you've talked about education, but I believe men also have to want to be educated because if you do not want to be educated, and if women are humans too, and I cannot believe this is even a discussion, then we can try and educate anyone and men won't listen. And that's why I believe it's so important to also speak on the fact that pornography creates the illusion of choice and then that illusion of choice creates BDSM and other sexual practices that are very dangerous to women and girls.  
Thank you so much.

# SECOND PANEL

## **Pornocriminality and pedocriminality : a concern for equality, public health, and child protection**



**MIÉ KOHIYAMA**

Co-founder of the french branch  
of the Brave Movement



**ALIÉNOR LAURENT** 

Président of Osez le Féminisme



**MARÍA HERNÁNDEZ-MORA** 

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and Psychotherapist



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French Senator



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# MIÉ KOHIYAMA

## Co-founder of the french branch of the Brave Movement

I will speak in English because I'm speaking as a Brave Movement executive member. And this is a documentary, not my documentary, but the progress of Brave Movement's documentary. Two minutes seems very short to present this documentary, but two minutes is 360 images. In two minutes, 360 images will be shared online because every second, three images and videos are shared online so this is a major global issue that the Brave Movement has taken as a priority since a couple of years, to make a safer internet for children.

I will say a few words about the Brave Movement for people who don't know it. It's a special initiative of Together for Girls, which is an NGO that is fighting against sexual violence in women and girls for 10 years now. And the Brave Movement's specificity is that it centers survivors' voices. This is the reason why we have made this documentary about survivors of online sexual violence and exploitation. And I wanted to say also for Brave, it's very important to let survivors' voices be empowered and be at the center of the speech because survivors have the lived experience. And one another priority we have this year at the Brave Movement is to create national survivor counseling in every country of the world on the German model. So I won't speak further and will let you discover this documentary. Please bear in mind that this documentary was written by the survivors themselves. They wrote the script so these are their voices and they will explain how you will see how online sexual exploitation and abuse causes as much trauma in real life. Thank you very much.

**[SHOWING THE  
DOCUMENTARY BE BRAVE  
FRANCE]**

# ALIÉNOR LAURENT

## Président of Osez le Féminisme

I am honoured to be here today to moderate this round table on « Pornocriminality and pedocriminality : a concern for equality, public health and child protection ». The aim of this round table, as presented in the video a moment ago, is to explore the way in which the distribution and consumption of pornographic content has an impact on the mental health of consumers and on children and young people, who are victims in many ways, while at the same time being at the root of our patriarchal, fundamentally unequal, misogynist, racist and capitalist society. The pornography industry is now a global trade. It is a system based on social, cultural and economic exploitation, whose growth has been accelerated by the digital revolution and the rise of so-called « tube » distribution platforms such as Pornhub and Xvideo. These sites, often domiciled in tax havens, make billions of euros by offering free and unlimited access to content that overwhelmingly trivialises sexual violence, racism, misogyny and rape culture. Behind these platforms, which accumulate billions of views and therefore as many consumers, the reality is an organised system of pimping, trafficking in human beings, particularly women, and filming involving extreme sexual violence. Some of the videos hosted on these platforms reveal serious crimes involving filmed rape, acts of torture and barbarism and, in a lot of cases, the mass distribution of paedophile content.

One of the most worrying impacts of this industry is its influence on social norms. Today, pornography is omnipresent and has become a reference point for sexuality, particularly for the younger generation. From the age of 10, on average, children are exposed to this content, and half of 12-year-old boys consume it every month. What they see is extremely serious and worrying, and it can contribute to their long-term trauma. Almost all of the most watched videos contain acts of domination and physical and verbal violence against women. And the consequences are well documented : a loss of sensibility to violence, the development of unrealistic expectations in terms of sexuality, the trivialisation of relationships of domination and a direct influence on aggressive sexual behaviour.

Minors are doubly exposed : on the one hand, they are precocious

consumers of content that forms their vision of the relationship between the sexes. On the other, they are also victims because the porn industry exploits children directly or indirectly. Platforms such as Pornhub, for example, have hosted thousands of videos showing child rape and child abuse. Young girls are also particularly vulnerable to hypersexualisation, the illicit distribution of non-consensual intimate content and the digital violence induced by pornography and child pornography. Pornography feeds an imaginary world that leads some teenage girls to conform to stereotypes to the point of being exploited themselves. In this situation, regulation remains largely ineffective. In France, access by minors to pornography is prohibited by law, but no effective measures have been put in place to force platforms to enforce this ban. At European level, progress is being made - as we saw earlier in the round table discussion moderated by Alyssa - notably with the revision of the directive on combating the sexual abuse of children and the introduction of the European regulation on the moderation of online content. However, these initiatives are meeting with resistance and are still struggling to impose strong obligations on the digital giants.

Pornocriminality and pedocriminality are systemic realities that require urgent political and societal mobilisation. Fighting this industry means first and foremost protecting the victims, first and foremost women and children. Fighting this industry also means firmly tackling gender inequality in our society. It means putting an end to a society where sexuality is based on domination, violence and the exploitation of women in a continuum of violence. To set out these issues, I am privileged to be joined by a number of experts in the field who will help us to understand the impact of pornography and its links with paedophile crime, as well as looking at practical solutions to reduce the impact of this industry and its deleterious systemic effects.

Hélène Fritzon, you are a Swedish politician belonging to the Social Democrats, a Member of the European Parliament and Vice-President of the Socialists and Democrats, responsible for gender equality and children's rights. Ms Fritzon, you were Minister for Migration from 2017 to 2019, and before that you were Mayor of the municipality of Kristianstad.

Laurence Rossignol, you are a feminist activist, Socialist Senator for Val-de-Marne, President of the Assemblée des Femmes, and you have been Minister for Families, Children and Women's Rights. Céline Piques,

I'm not going to pretend to be polite to her, as we speak every day. Céline Piques, you are the rapporteur for the report « PORNOCRIMINALITY : Putting an end to impunity in the pornography industry » the High Council for Equality, which came out in September 2023. You are also a board member of Osez le Féminisme and coordinator of the fight against pornocriminality and online sexual exploitation. You are an expert on issues of sexist and sexual violence.

María Hernández-Mora, you are a clinical psychologist and psychotherapist specialising in addictions, in particular sexual addiction to pornography, and founder of the CSA-PA Imagine95 pornography addiction unit and the CAPS Réseau des cliniciens de l'addiction pornographique et sexuelle. You also have a doctorate in psychology and wrote the first thesis in France on addiction to pornography. In France and Spain, you are developing a clinical and research activity around the impact of pornography on health and human relationships. Maria, I'm going to start with you, I'm going to ask a first question on the subject we're discussing this morning : early exposure to pornography has a profound influence on the psychological and sexual development of young people who will become adults, particularly by forming unrealistic expectations and trivialising violence in sexual relationships. Let me remind you of the figures I gave : in France, almost 50% of 12-year-old boys consume pornography every month, and the average age of first exposure to pornography is 10. What do you think are the most worrying effects of this consumption on the cognitive and emotional development of adolescents ? And how will this affect the adults they grow up to be ? How can these effects be better prevented ?

## MARÍA HERNÁNDEZ-MORA

PhD in Psychology, Clinical Psychologist, and Psychotherapist

I'm delighted to be here with you today to talk about the use of pornography and the mental health of today's children and tomorrow's adults. Whether it's in the sexual addiction and pornography unit I run at the Simone Veil hospital (CSAPA Imagine, Val d'Oise), or in the association Déclic-Sortir de la Pornosphère that I created in 2019, I see people with serious sexual compulsions every day, both children and adults, and what I find is that 90% of the adults who come to see me

started watching porn when they were pre-pubescent or pubescent. This means that contact with pornography in childhood is one of the first risk factors for the development of an addiction later on, and also a fundamental risk factor for developing sexual violence, in particular through desensitisation and learning processes. So let's take a more precise view of the dangers of this pornographic contact. I'll start by giving you a very worrying figure : according to Arcom, one boy in two aged 12 visits pornographic sites at least once a month.

In Spain, sociology and psychology researchers are more advanced on the issue of pornography than in France. One very worrying statistic, based on very robust studies in Spain, is that a large number of young teenagers between the ages of 12 and 17 have consumed pornography during adolescence, which is the age when identity and psychosexuality are fundamentally constructed. This takes place between the ages of 12 and 18, and I would even say up to the age of 25, because the brain finishes maturing at 25, and this is our foundation, our psychological, emotional and relational backbone for the future. So, during this critical period of adolescence, many teenagers in Spain - and I believe we can assume that the situation is similar in France, as our countries are culturally comparable - have consumed more than 1 000 hours of pornography. Imagine a teenager exposed to 1 000 hours of English lessons, they would be perfectly bilingual. If they were exposed to 1 000 hours of history lessons, they would have the knowledge of a history PhD. So, you can imagine that if a teenager is exposed to 1 000 hours of pornography, we are looking at a future adult facing serious psychopathological and relational risks. As you have understood, pornography consumption is widespread. I was asked to focus primarily on teenagers, so I will talk about them, but unfortunately, its use is clearly widespread among adults as well. Just as a side note, you know that in France, there are 5 million daily alcohol users. Imagine the number of prevention and awareness campaigns we have for alcohol consumption. Well, 1 in 4 French people regularly consumes pornography. Yet, I have not seen any prevention campaigns on the subject. But let's get back to teenagers.

Exposure starts at around age 9, with the standardization of technology at 7-8. This means that children already know how to use smartphones and tablets, and will easily come across pornographic content. This first contact is going to be traumatic. At that age, it can't be any other way. A brain that is not sexualised, because it has not reached puberty, cannot integrate the content it is seeing. Already for

a fairly well-configured adult, mainstream pornography can, in certain respects, be disgusting and embarrassing. But imagine a child who is not sexualised, for whom the psychosexual construct is not yet complete, who has not yet experienced the first signs of puberty, the first erections, who has not seen a developed female body. So that's it. So this first trauma, this shock, provokes what we call « psychic disorientation ». The child, the teenager, remains stunned, remains shocked by these images that he or she can't integrate, and at the same time feels a great deal of pleasure. But at the same time as experiencing this amazement, they feel a great deal of pleasure and fascination ! Because pornography is designed and produced to excite our pleasure system, the dopaminergic reward system, directly and quickly.

So the teenager, the child, will have a very confusing experience of disgust, fear, pleasure and excitement. And this mixture, this completely paradoxical emotional cocktail, he'll try to understand it, to integrate it, and so he'll come back, re-view these contents. He'll revisit the content, and some of them - those with the most vulnerabilities, the least emotional and sexual education at home, impulsive tendencies or other psychological or psychosocial difficulties - may take action. They'll test it out. They'll do it with buddies, or with their girlfriends or partners. Or with a girl they met on Snapchat, or things like that. So there's a traumatic impact of early use of pornography, and psychic disorientation. And there are neurobiological correlates to this. Research shows neurobiological and functional alterations in the brain. As I said, the brain is built up from childhood until the age of 25. So everything we give the brain during this period will modify the brain and encourage its construction, or at least its development, in one direction or another. Current scientific studies are clear on this. Pornography consumption, particularly in adolescence, alters the brain's control and willpower circuits - in the prefrontal cortex, at the front of our brain - and can facilitate impulsivity. In other words, the child will have less and less control and willpower over his or her sexual desires/pulses or pleasure-seeking. Regular exposure to (highly stimulating) pornography can alter these circuits, leading to compulsive use and compulsive pleasure-seeking through sexuality.

After this brief introduction to the mechanisms at play in the massive use of pornography, let's return to the subject at hand : the link between pornography consumption and violence. Since the 1980s, numerous scientific studies have examined the link between

pornography and violence. As you can imagine, back in the 80s, online pornography was a far cry from what it is today. I'm going to quickly summarize the results of the 55 most methodologically robust studies, the latest of which are due in 2022-2023.

First point : more pornography, more risk of developing sexual aggression and coercion. This link exists among regular male users. In adolescence, young boys are 2.5 times more likely to develop sexual aggression than boys who don't use pornography. Girls who consume pornography, another little-explored subject, are 4 times more likely to become victims. Why ? Because there's an apprenticeship in pornography, and a normalization, an eroticization of violence. You know, I work closely with a lot of associations involved in prevention in childhood, and in particular with the association Agir contre la Prostitution des Enfants. The team at this association observes that many of the minors who come to them with compulsive sexual behavior are compulsive pornography users. The girls have either consumed pornography on a massive scale as a compulsive result of abuse, or they watch it to learn sexual behaviors they imagine boys need, by imitating pornographic content. As a result, we have 12-13 year-old girls who put themselves in sodomy situations, for example. This creates real sexual trauma, which in turn can lead to psychopathological symptoms and mental health alterations you can imagine, which are very, very serious.

We're also talking about cyberviolence. Girls today are developing their self-esteem online. Sexting is on the rise among young people, and is also having an impact on the behavior and identity of young girls and boys. Cyberesteem is a concept used in scientific literature, and has been studied extensively in connection with video games. And in fact, we see that girls think they'll be desirable if they send photos in sexual positions or videos to the person or boy who asks them. And it's through this that their self-esteem and femininity can be built.

Second point : the use of pornography encourages the internalization of rape myths and desensitization to pain, both one's own pain and the pain of others. And as I said, frequent use of pornography in adolescence affects the brain and can lead to sexual impulsivity. This means difficulty channeling sexual impulses, waiting, adapting to the other person's rhythm, listening, getting frustrated. It's also very important to be able to get frustrated with sexuality! So, habituation to pornography can encourage sexual impulsivity, the search for

something new and increasingly exciting, which can lead young people to experience increasingly trashy sexuality, and as I say, to victimize themselves, to become violent themselves. Excessive use of pornography, including all forms of unprotected intercourse, encourages risky sexual behavior.

We know it, we've said it a lot, Céline Piques said it a lot this morning, pornography models female sexuality on male interests and sexual patterns attributed to male desire by the porn industry. What's more, pornographic patterns propose highly altered scripts and visions of healthy sexuality. So women are undoubtedly victims of this industry and of the societal pornification that is taking place. Nonetheless, I congratulate Mariana and Ruth for stating this this morning: Man is also a victim of this industry, because he has been made to believe a very big lie. They've been made to believe that pornographic pleasure is part of their natural sexuality and an imperative need in their sex lives.

Today, boys are convinced that pornography is part of the natural behavioral palette of human sexuality. My answer to them is, I don't think the Romans had pornography, there was no such thing as online pornography, it wasn't possible to be exposed to such constant sexual novelty, unlimited, everywhere and at any time. So I think man has existed for millennia with a sexuality that doesn't involve pornography mainstream. Without even realising it, regular male users of pornography become imbued with distorted sexual beliefs. As a result, his erotic potential becomes less and less autonomous. In other words, we all have the capacity to desire, to construct, imagine and desire the sexuality we want to experience. Except that when the brain has been imbued with pornography since the age of 12, 15 or 20, this capacity to imagine independently - and therefore to experience sexuality as a function of who we are and what our relationships allow us to experience - the person constructs a sexuality based on pornographic images. Some psychologists speak of the « psychic persistence of images ». Pornographic images are so powerful, and pornographic violence is so well filmed, that it leaves traces in the memory circuit. So, in fact, these images remain vivid and lasting in people's memories. When they're in a sexual situation, they're no longer able to construct an autonomous sexuality; their sexuality is based on pornography. So people who use drugs on a massive scale can develop a sexuality that is dissociated from themselves and from others, with consequences for their mental and sexual health. We've talked about addiction, for example, but from a sexological point of view, they have a lot of sexual

dysfunctions. People believe that the more porn, the more pleasure; the more porn, the more damaged sexuality, and the consequences for relationships, including many break-ups, emotional instability, a tendency to infidelity, etc. We've talked about addiction, for example. From a sexological point of view, they have a lot of sexual dysfunctions. People believe that more porn means more pleasure. It's quite the opposite ! More porn means more damaged sexuality, and there can be other consequences in terms of relationships, including a lot of break-ups, emotional instability, a tendency to be unfaithful, and so on.

So, obviously, not every consumer is an aggressor, fortunately. But the risk factors for becoming an aggressor are impulsivity, emotional dysregulation, insecure attachment, inhibition difficulties, intolerance to frustration, and sometimes a history of trauma. In other words, adolescence is in itself a risk ground for learning about and developing sexual violence. And who can tell if the consumer is fragile or not ? Who can tell if the consumer is a child or an adult? And who filters out whether the user has risk factors for becoming violent or not? No one does. Keep in mind that all these studies also show that the internalization of rape myths, the vision of the woman as object, and the detachment between sexuality and affectivity are mediating variables between use and violence. In other words, if a person uses pornography and becomes imbued with all these rape myths, and detaches sexuality from fertility, there may be an increased tendency to develop sexual violence. This means that if a person uses pornography and becomes imbued with all these rape myths, and detaches sexuality from affectivity, they may have an increased tendency to develop sexual violence.

I conclude : as long as pornography remains a massively consumed cultural product (which models our representations), as long as the human is an object and not a subject, and sex is a consumer product and not a relational experience, we will see the prevalence of sexual violence grow without limit, both online and offline. In addition to the introduction of effective child protection legislation, of course, and drastic legislation on the content consumed by adults, I encourage the development of awareness-raising programmes for the general population, as well as prevention in the field of education. I stress the importance of a sexually sensitive and responsible education, based on empathy, communication, intimacy, respect and responsibility. Thank you very much.

# ALIÉNOR LAURENT

## Président of Osez le Féminisme

María Hernández-Mora, you spoke of pornography as a cultural object. It's a cultural object that's produced on an industrial scale. And this is in fact what the report you co-wrote, Ms Rossignol, for the French Senate, « Porno : l'enfer du décor », shows us. This report sheds light on the pornography industry, a system based on the commodification of bodies, the trivialization of sexual violence, misogyny, racism and exploitation, often directly linked to pimping and human trafficking. You've shown that this industry is based on an opaque economic model, largely dominated by digital platforms that are completely beyond our control.

You also show how this is shaping the way people think and behave, particularly among the youngest members of society. Yet, as you also point out in your report, this is a complete blind spot for public policy. These platforms benefit from a legal vacuum that allows them to flourish without supervision. Could you explain how this persistent impunity can be explained and translated, and what in your view are the most urgent measures to bring the regulation of this industry into line with the principles of criminal law for the protection of victims ?

# LAURENCE ROSSIGNOL

## French Senator

Thank you for inviting me to talk about the Senate report, the conditions under which we produced it, the conclusions we drew from it and, finally, where we are today.

This report, which is available on the Senate website, « Porno, l'enfer du décor », is a report by the Women's Rights Delegation. When a few colleagues and I decided to work on this subject, we met with a rather unkind reaction from our colleagues, particularly those on the right. The French Senate is a predominantly right-wing chamber. And not only is it right-wing, it is even a form of « enhanced right-wing », the Retailleau right-wing. So you can imagine the reaction we got : « Why are you interested in this ? It's not a political issue, it's not a public policy issue.

Pornography is a private matter, whether we're talking about the conditions under which it is produced or the conditions under which people access it ». This report is therefore important because, for the first time, a public institution has raised the issue of pornography as a matter of public policy. Later came the report by the High Council for Equality, followed by the law on the regulation of the digital space, which transposed the Digital Service Act into French law.

As the report is available online, I'm going to tell you about the obstacles we encountered after the report was published. In 2020, we had already voted in the Senate for a reform of the Penal Code banning minors from accessing pornographic platforms. But when we drew up the report, we realised that this law was completely ineffective, because no one had really provided the tools needed to apply it, and above all because the world of the porn industry had assumed that it could not apply the law if it was not given the turnkey tools to do so. Can you imagine the same thing happening, for example, in terms of public health ? You're a restaurant owner, your fridges aren't up to standard, and you say : « In fact, you have to give me fridges if you want them to be up to standard, otherwise I'll carry on doing business ». That's pretty much what the porn industry did after the 2020 law.

In 2023, when we were working on the law to regulate the digital space, following two reports by the Senate and the High Council for Equality, we got the government to introduce measures to regulate minors' access to the porn industry. Perhaps Céline will talk about these measures in more detail later.

As far as I'm concerned, I'd rather talk about what we weren't able to do in this law. First of all, we were opposed to a principle that was obviously much stronger and much more important than child protection: the principle of consumer data protection. In fact, in order to check the age of access to a pornographic site, we need to provide identity details. We have been criticised for wanting to allow pornographic sites to compile files on people's sexuality. We retorted that no one is obliged to visit a porn site. On the other hand, we opposed this principle of protecting the data of porn consumers with another principle, infinitely more important, which is that of the State's duty to protect children. The solution that has been put in place is a flawed one, in my view.

We are faced with libertarian circles who believe that the digital space

is a space of total freedom. And these libertarian ideas can be found among people who claim to be from virtually the same political camp as me. That makes it difficult to defend our position. That's the first thing.

The second obstacle we encountered concerned the protection of children in pornographic content itself. We tried to take advantage of the examination of this text to enshrine in law what we felt was necessary for the real protection of children. Let's take the example of videos showing sexual scenes between an adult and a minor: Europol's position, which is also that of the French services, is to say that the scene is child pornography and child criminality only if it really involves a minor who is under 18, or even 15. However, to estimate the age of the minor, they base themselves on his or her physical appearance: they consider that a minor is a child who has not reached puberty. If there's no hair or breasts, it's a child. We proposed that the requirement that the minor actually be a minor should be abolished, and that a scene, including one involving an adult, should be considered to be an apology for child pornography or child criminality if that person is disguised or dressed in such a way as to evoke a child. We have not succeeded. I'm giving you this example because it's quite interesting to see how the government didn't want to go beyond simple age control and banning access. And since we had to deal with consumer freedom, the process was quite complicated.

Where do we stand today on these issues? First of all, we have entered a new global phase, one of total deregulation of the net. And here we are, explaining that we need to regulate... I think we're going to lose out, at both European and global level, especially as the new capitalism is that of the GAFAMs. This type of capitalism is going to be stronger than the European Union, whose real desire to regulate is also questionable. I therefore believe that the idea of regulation is going to become very difficult to defend and that the future lies - it's terrible to say this - in force. We too need to think in terms of force about what we need to do and what we need to achieve. Everything that María Hernández-Mora, whom I know and who is remarkable on these issues, has told you about the toxicity of porn for minors, she could also tell you for adults. So why do we accept the idea that porn should be regulated differently for minors and adults? When we drew up the report, the rapporteurs exchanged views. With my colleague Laurence Cohen, we were both already heavily involved in the 2016 law on prostitution, and we wanted to defend an abolitionist position on the porn industry. Our colleagues didn't want us to, but with hindsight, I

think we were right. In other words, if we stay with regulation and a ban on minors, we're going to lose. We have to fight a battle that is equal to the power and violence of our adversaries.

I've looked in the 1946 preamble, in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen and in the 1958 Constitution, and I can't find any reference to the right of human beings to consume pornography. As soon as there is no right and there is toxicity, the situation is clear. As far as the European Union is concerned, there is a battle to be fought to ensure that the issue of the pornographic industry is considered as a matter of public health rather than freedom of enterprise. If the pornography industry is a matter of public health, then the Member States will be able to regain control and will no longer be subject to European law. We will then be able to say that we, in France, are banning access to pornography for public health reasons. When it comes to public health, each State can do what it wants. The battle at European level is to bring the issue of pornography back into the realm of public health.

There's another thing I'd like to point out: we're probably going to have to go back to the drawing board. If we don't manage to regulate directly as we would like, we will have to turn around the subject. I think that the French education system is complicit in the consumption of porn by young people. Why do I say this ? Because I've seen the gradual dematerialisation of relations between lower and upper secondary schools, pupils and families. Nowadays, one of the good reasons to equip a child with a smartphone is that all communications with the school are digitised: notebooks, instructions, homework. At the same time, I'm seeing a new trend in public schools, which is to say : « With us, everything is on paper. With us, children don't need a smartphone to communicate with the school ». And a whole range of families have realised the dangers and seen this as another reason to send their children to private schools. We have to be careful about public-private competition when the competition is in favour of the private sector. So we have to fight with the Ministry of Education to go back to paper, to denumerate students.

There is also a global battle to be waged against the hypersexualisation of children, not just through pornography, but many other channels. Finally, a new definition of pimping is essential today. The current definition is totally unsuited to the development of digital pornography. Pimping should be defined as making a profit from the

sexual activity of others. We'll have to work on this and guard against any side effects, but talking about the sexual activity of others would make it possible, for example, to include cams, OnlyFans and so on. I would like to say one last thing.

Concerning child protection, we need to be much clearer about the criminal offence of exposing children to pornographic images. It should be a criminal offence to expose children to pornographic images.

And finally, I'd like to conclude on a point of vigilance in this fight to protect children: the fight against paedophile criminals has been totally infiltrated by conspiracy theorists, who are always saying that paedophile crime is organised at the highest level by a sort of deep state that brings together journalists, politicians and others, these people who are supposedly running the world and organising paedophile networks. So we have to fight against pedocriminality and at the same time keep our distance from the conspiracy-mongers of the fascist sphere who have taken over this area. We ourselves need to be very clear about how we approach and combat the issue of child pornography. Thank you very much.

## **ALIÉNOR LAURENT**

**Président of Osez le Féminisme**

Ms Rossignol, you spoke earlier of the apology of child pornography, which consists in the staging of a pedocriminal act. And Céline, in the High Council for Equality report that you co-authored, you highlight the extremely strong porosity between pornography, then pornography, then pedocriminality. So, as I was saying, these online pornography platforms host and distribute child pornography on a massive scale, while enjoying almost total impunity. And on the other hand, we have this pornography that has now become mainstream, which relies on mechanisms for staging the sexualization of minors. And this normalizes them completely. And it can also serve as a kind of gateway to criminal practices. Faced with this reality, how can we analyze the responsibilities of the pornographic industry in the perpetuation of pedocriminality, and what political and legal action is needed to effectively combat this continuum of violence ?

# CÉLINE PIQUES

## Writer of the High Council for Equality's report on pornocriminality, representative of Osez le Féminisme

Thank you very much for giving me the floor. I'm going to add a little to what Laurence Rossignol said, as we often work together. Laurence Rossignol wrote the report on the Senate and I was co-rapporteur of the report by the High Council for Equality, there are also a few copies at the entrance, « PORNOCRIMINALITY : Putting an end to impunity in the pornography industry ».

By way of introduction, I'd like to come back to a distinction between - since the two words are used a lot - pedopornography and pedocriminality, because I think it's important and there's some confusion, even in the minds of Pharos, the French Ministry of the Interior's department responsible for blocking pedopornography content. We'll come back to this. Let me remind you that pedopornography is defined by European Directive 93-2011, which specifies that pedopornography is « any material that visually depicts a person appearing to be a child, engaged in real or simulated sexually explicit conduct ». So the definition is very broad, and you don't need proof that the person is a minor to qualify the content as pedopornography. This 2011 directive has been translated into French law, and here too it's perfectly clear - I'm re-reading the High Council for Equality report - in French law, it's article 227-23, child pornography is defined as the act of, with a view to its dissemination, « fixing, recording or transmitting the image or representation of a minor. » The image, that's it : « the provisions of this article shall also apply to pornographic images of a person whose physical appearance is that of a minor. »

So it's a very broad definition that doesn't require us to prove the age of the person represented. And what shocked me enormously, and I think we should be really outraged, was that we heard Pharos, which is the service of the Ministry of the Interior, which has the possibility of blocking - so it's called an administrative block - two types of content, terrorism and child pornography. As far as terrorism is concerned, we know that there have been episodes such as the murder of Samuel Paty, which means that terrorist content is highly reactive. For child pornography, it doesn't work. And I found myself with the commissioner

in charge of Pharos, who explained to me straight in the eyes that they went to pornographic sites and looked at puberty first. It's been said, but I'll say it again, because I want to make it clear: we don't need to prove age for child pornography.

From the moment there's a staging, and I'll give you the figures I gave this morning: « teen », i.e. the staging of adolescent girls, we have 1 million 297,000 videos on the 4 pornographic platforms, and « daddy », i.e. incest videos, we have 138,750. All these videos show children having sex with their fathers, grandfathers, uncles or brothers, and all the family configurations on pornographic sites, which are lumped together under the heading of family fantasy, are child pornography according to the 2011 European directive and French law. And yet, Pharos, straight in the eyes, told us : « From the moment puberty arrives, which today is around 10 years old, we don't really know if it's really child pornography, so we don't block it. » It's written in the report. I thought it would shake things up a bit more, but unfortunately, Pharos' practices haven't changed since then, and there are still « daddy », « incest », « family fantasy » videos on porn platforms, even though there's nothing in the law preventing them from blocking, since they have the power to block, i.e. they order the URL to be blocked, without even going through the pornographic sites, they don't need the pornographic sites to cooperate, they block the content, it's direct, it's fast, and it could be done today. And I don't know why it hasn't been done, and I'd love one day to have an understanding of this hearing, which had a huge impact on the High Council for Equality. So that's the question of child pornography, which is a very broad definition, involving the image or appearance of a child. There are millions of these on pornographic platforms, and there's a difference with child sexual abuse, which is online child pornography, where the rape of a child is filmed and broadcast, which is another, more restrictive definition.

So that's the first point, we'd have the capacity today to block a lot of content. Secondly, I wanted to come back to what was said about the pornification of young people. The exposure of minors, in fact, has been the subject of many initiatives in many countries for years now, so it's a very specific legal and technical issue, and I'll leave it to others to talk about it better than I can, but there are a huge number of countries - the UK, Australia and France - that are trying to introduce effective age controls for other types of site, such as online betting in France, where there haven't been too many difficulties. But for pornographic

sites, since the 2020 law, and then the new law in 2024, it hasn't worked. We are promised that it will work, but it never does, and so there really must be criminal liability for the managers of the platforms. There are real issues at stake, and we need to mobilise all the organisations and associations. And there are several ways of doing this. I think we have to consider that the exposure of minors to pornography, from the age when they have a mobile phone, 10 and 11, is violence in itself. As María said in one of her reports, it's psychic rape. From the moment we qualify this act as « psychic rape », we have to consider this exposure as something criminally reprehensible, a violence in itself, for minors, who are not protected today, and so we really have issues at stake. It's a highly technical issue, particularly at the CJEU, the Court of Justice of the European Union, and I think we'll ask others to talk about it better than me, but we really need to make progress on this subject.

Why is this ? Because exposure to pornography, as the report also shows, makes a difference between girls and boys. In fact, right from the playground, in junior high school, exposure to pornography is often forced on girls, meaning that it's young boys who are exposed to pornography as a form of socialization.

You're part of the boys club, you're a big guy, you look at pornography, and you've found a way to flabbergast the girls, in the playground. It's a form of violence, and girls often talk about being forced to watch pornography, i.e., a little boy saying « Well look at that, there you go, look at the girls ». Girls are the despicable beings we see on these screens being violated, and this is absolutely a form, indeed, of the first violence committed by boys on girls as early as middle school, and I'm in a good position to know, since it happened in my children's middle school, quite simply. Boys force girls to watch pornography. This too must be considered violence.

Then, in relation to the impact of this consumption, I'd like to talk about something we don't talk about very much, which is the difference in exposure to pornography between boys and girls. For boys, pornography is the rape culture manual, so you learn that it's sexually exciting to rape a woman, to humiliate her, to treat her as an object, to dehumanise her. That's what pornography models for boys. For girls, it's a little different, and it's about time we talked about a phenomenon we don't talk much about, which is traumatic arousal. It's a phenomenon that needs to be prevented, because we also realise that girls who are

victims of paedophile crime - and this too has been fully documented - and childhood rape, have extremely serious post-traumatic symptoms. These extremely severe post-traumatic symptoms include traumatic amnesia - which you may have heard of - and the need to return to states of traumatic dissociation, which are a form of emotional anaesthesia. And these states of emotional anaesthesia make it possible to deal with the psychotrauma linked to the violence experienced in childhood. How do you get into a dissociative state? You consume pornography. You watch extremely violent pornography, and you get back into this dissociative state. And I think we need to talk about that too. And then the porn industry and its allies use it to say : « Look, women have a masochistic side, they like violence. They like to be violated ». All the BDSM and hardcore scenarios sold to us by the porn industry, for example, enable some survivors of child abuse to return to states of dissociation, and this isn't sexuality, it's a reactivation of traumas. And that's something that doesn't get talked about very much. And I was furious again this week, in Psychologie Magazine, there's an article that says « Why do women like violence ? ». We have to understand these psychotraumatic mechanisms which mean that women can have the impression, because it's not really sexual pleasure, but they can have the impression of taking pleasure in reliving sexual violence by viewing pornography.

And so this impact on children is multifactorial, multimodal. We talked about pornification, it's everywhere. This self-objectification of girls is everywhere. You only have to look at the music videos of a certain number of stars today, who really do reproduce the exact codes of pornography. And what do children and young girls do as soon as they get a TikTok account ? They put themselves back on stage, I'm going to finish, and they put themselves back on stage in phenomena of self-objectification. The report also talks about the explosion in cosmetic surgery and vaginoplasty, so there's a new form of excision, for example. We're talking about excision in a number of countries, and it exists in France. Today, children and teenagers have their labia removed in response to the visual codes of pornography.

And finally, on the link, I'll finish at this point, on paedocriminality, you need to see that pornography is used as a grooming tool, so we discussed yesterday that we needed to find another word, but exposure to pornography is used by paedocriminals to coerce children too, so incest fathers, for example, will make children view pornography, that's also something that's possible. And finally, this

child pornography or child criminality that is present on the sites is overflowing everywhere, and today we have incest fathers who post, since it is essentially someone in the family who commits child rape, and who records and distributes these images. I'm going to quote an investigation by OFMIN, the French Office for Minors, which carried out an incredible investigation into incestuous fathers who were raping their children live on Skype. Véronique Béchu, head of OFMIN, the French Office for Minors, is investigating these paedophile rapes, I quote: « Not all live streamers or consumers of child pornography videos and photos go through with the act, but all those who do have looked at these images at least once. In around 15% of cases, they become producers, aggressors or accomplices. » So there is indeed an extremely clear continuum between the content that is colonizing young people's imaginations and the explosion in pedo-crime I mentioned in my introduction. We're at 105 million images and videos of child pornography, and we have an emergency today - well, several, we're going to talk about the directive - but an emergency : the European regulation on online child pornography, which, in its initial version, was supposed to be able to proactively detect child pornography videos and remove them. And without this systematic and compulsory treatment by the platforms, we won't be able to put an end to this explosion of child abuse images. 105 million, this regulation is crucial, and there's a lot to be said for the directive too, but that's something I think we'll be discussing with Hélène Fritzson. Thank you for your time.

## **ALIÉNOR LAURENT**

**Président of Osez le Féminisme**

In the actual context, there is a link between pornocriminality and pedocriminality, as we have seen. Can you tell us how the European legislation are made to protect the victim, to protect children and how can this reglamentation and directive can, with efficacy, fight against this crime, fight against the aggressor and protect the victim ?

# HÉLÈNE FRITZON

## Swedish MEP, Rapporteur of the FEMM Committee

Thank you. Thank you so much for the invitation and let me say also thank you so much for the movie, because it still emotionally affects me and I think we feel the same. These voices from the young girls are really important for us when we will continue the hard work to protect them. So, thank you for that. As mentioned in the beginning, I have had the privilege to work as a politician on both the local level, the national level, and now also on the international level. As a mayor, as a minister, and now in the European Parliament. And it is really the same issue we are discussing. And we need to have good cooperation between the different political levels to build a strong society. Especially, of course, for children, what we are discussing here today. I am also Vice President in the Social Democratic Group in the European Parliament and in this position, I am responsible for gender equality and children's rights. So, let me say, I am also very happy to have my colleague here today, Maria Noichl, from Germany. And also, when Evin Incir spoke, I hope you can feel that we have this good cooperation and that we need each other because we have a very special situation in the Parliament now after the latest election. One third are from the right parties.

In my work, I am a member of the Committee on Gender Equality and Women's rights, but also in the committee for environment, climate and food safety. The issue related to sustainability and gender equality must go hand in hand because that's the way forward and how we build a strong society.

Regarding the concrete issue about protecting children. These past couple of months, I have served as the rapporteur on the directive for sexual abuse against children. We had a proposal from our former commissioner from Sweden, Ylva Johansson, regarding this. It wasn't possible to finalize it during her mandate. Now it's even more important that we'll finish this so we have strong legislation to protect children. I'm very happy to continue to work with this opinion from our committee. We are negotiating and the issues are of course fundamental to ensuring the safety and rights of children in the digital age because we know that children use a lot of their time in the digital world. We must follow it. I always say as a mother and grandmother when the son is playing football, I will be there. I am with him and I can

look at the match and I can say something when we go home. But when they are playing in the digital world, are we there? Are we there? No, it is harder for us to be there. I think that all of us are not there. And for child sexual abuse, of course, it has been mentioned here before, it's a form of gender-based violence, and it is a growing issue both online and offline. And of course, we need to have the same rules. So we must ensure that whatever is illegal offline is also illegal online.

We have a lot of reports - and we can say that, also you have said a lot about this, 9 out of 10 victims are young girls while the overwhelming majority of perpetrators are men. So this is a very big societal problem about values and how we are in our relationships related to each other. So it's unacceptable. It is of utmost importance that we in Parliament adopt this gender specific approach to combat this horrific crime effectively. And, as we are just now discussing it, we will have our meeting next week. So, I really hope that we can have the gender perspective because, as we know, this is the reason behind it.

So, to be concrete when working on these files, I prioritize prevention, SRHR, and that includes of course the right to legal and safe abortion. Also, gender mainstreaming, because we need to have this broader perspective; and, of course, consent, because only « yes » means « yes ». So we need stronger laws, we need that platforms have a mandatory detection responsibility, we need to criminalize the AI generated child abuse content and we need of course a lot of prevention as education and campaigns and so on. Just a little picture from Sweden : there was a campaign in our schools with children at a very early age. And it's very nice in Sweden to say « Stopp min kropp », and it means « Stop, it's my body ». So small children always can say it and they know it when there is a situation where you perhaps will give them a hug they are used to say « Stop, it's my body » if they do not want to hug. That's very good because you teach them from the beginning to be proud and to decide for themselves. To continue, of course we have also seen that we have a gender equality backlash and we must go further, very rapidly. We have a report in the European Union about gender equality. In total, it will take at least 60 years before Europe achieves gender equality. And one of my granddaughters, she is in school now, and I will not tell her that she will be retired before she will live in a Europe with gender equality. It's not fair. So we need to act and to act very fast. So I think we can continue the discussion here. We also work very hard to recognize men's violence against women as an EU crime. So this is about action. This is why Maria, me and a lot of other colleagues fight

every day to make Europe a place where equality, justice and human rights are protected and especially of course for children, small children.

## ALIÉNOR LAURENT

Président of Osez le Féminisme

Thank you very much, Ms Fritzon. I'm now going to ask you a few cross-cutting questions to make the link between the different presentations and the first one I'd like to ask, which is also linked to the previous panel, where we talked a great deal about regulating platforms, the weight of platforms, whatever they may be, is the question of consumers and the general public, because there is also a form of responsibility on the part of those who visit pornographic sites, of these consumers. Just as there is for the abolition law of 2016, where consumers of prostitution are now penalized. So now I'd like to talk a little about this issue. Finally, what solutions can we come up with to fight against mainstream pornography, but also with regard to the general public, firstly to raise awareness, since we've seen that it's mass consumption, but also to make this consumption a crime ? Should we go that far ?

## LAURENCE ROSSIGNOL

French Senator

Thank you. The first condition for any regulation is political will. At the moment, the political will doesn't exist either in France or in the European Union. That's my first comment.

The second point I wanted to make, which is very disturbing to me, is that no State, in the times to come, will have the means to regulate the delinquency that the digital space opens up and produces. We need to think differently. We work with the Office des Mineurs, the Office de répression des violences aux personnes, the Office de répression de la traite des êtres humains: none of these bodies of the French police force has the means to implement the laws we pass. We only talk about

sexual offences, but it's not just sexual offences on the Internet, there are many other types of offence.

I therefore believe that regulation is a mirage. It's a mirage on an area that is totally beyond our control. So how do we go about it ? I'm not far from arguing that we should give some thought to isolationism, since this is a new geopolitical reality and we can't always be dependent on others. As a French Member of Parliament, my job is to protect French men and women, children and adults alike. We need to find ways - I mentioned public health earlier. We need to regain control of these issues. European directives are all very well, but time is taking too long. In the meantime, children are being victimised. Especially as the results are highly uncertain at European level too. So that's what I'm thinking about today.

It's also a question of political will. The Minister of the Interior now loves to make cannabis users feel guilty by telling them : « If a driver is killed in the northern districts of Marseille, it's your fault ». At the very least, we could do the same thing with porn users, because the dissociation major-minor doesn't work. As long as a product is accessible to adults, I don't see how we could organise a ban on minors. We've seen it with alcohol, we've seen it with cigarettes, we know it doesn't work. Why would it work for porn ? And there's another thing to bear in mind when making the distinction between child pornography and pornography between adults : people start with adult pornography and then, as the level of sexual excitement needs to be perpetually replenished by new transgressions, they often gradually move on to more violence, and then to child pornography. So all these distinctions, -18 or +18 for consumers, for the scenes that are shown, seem to me to be extremely fragile in terms of effective protection solutions. So yes, this is a public health issue, and we need to get back on track. What's more, at European level, when one country moves forward, it helps other countries to move forward too.

**ALIÉNOR LAURENT**

**Président of Osez le Féminisme**

What you're saying reminds me of the European most-favored clause, which consists of taking inspiration from the most advanced legislation

in terms of women's rights and strengthening it even further through legislation.

## HÉLÈNE FRITZON

### Swedish MEP, Rapporteur of the FEMM Committee

Let me start by saying that we know, as I mentioned earlier, that children are spending more and more time online. And what we've heard here about this platform, OnlyFans, is a picture of what has happened and what we need, I think the key word is criminalisation because we need to criminalise this. You will see it in society as a normal thing. So we need laws and strong laws. Concerning Sweden, we really have - it took a lot of years - I think it was more than 25 years ago that we had the first legislation on men's violence against women. Today, we have the issue of consent, and that has changed over time. We also have strong legislation against prostitution and that makes a difference because, of course, there is prostitution in Sweden, but there are fewer prostitutes than in other European countries. Maria will perhaps say more about this, about how the European Union can work with prostitution, because it is very different in our country. We can also see how our values are linked to the witch laws we have in different countries. We had a very specific debate about what to call this phenomenon. In some countries, we talk about 'sex workers ». This is a signal.

Do we have a system in our schools where we can learn to be a « sex worker » ? What does this word mean ? That's why I'll be very clear that we need to have a better word, we need to have our values, we need to have a good education to prevent this and of course we also need to have very strong legislation. Because, for example, in Sweden, it's not possible to sell sex on the street or in a shop. The prostitution today in Sweden is in hiding. It's not normalized in Sweden. If you do that, buy sexual services, you will be in prison. That's sending out a sign. And it's really important for girls to know that it's not right. It's wrong if you have to pay for sex and you have to sell your body. So these platforms, we have to deal with it and I would also say that in the digital world, everything that's happening in the digital world has no borders. That's why it's not enough that we have strong legislation that's different in different countries. That's why we need common legislation. That's why we're working at the European level, because we have something in

common. Then we can manage it better if we have a thin common system. Thank you.

## ALIÉNOR LAURENT

Président of Osez le Féminisme

Thank you very much. Céline, would you like to comment?

## CÉLINE PIQUES

Writer of the High Council for Equality's report on pornocriminality, representative of Osez le Féminisme

Very quickly, on the question of targeting to stop sexist and sexual violence. I mentioned OFMIN because there are two investigations that were reported in Le Monde that really touched me and echo the documentary we saw at the beginning on the issue of pedocriminality. There's a case of online rape orders in the Philippines, because the Philippines has always been a place where minors were pimped. And since the confinement, in fact, the French have been ordering rapes of very young children in the Philippines, committed by their own parents in the Philippines.

And then there's another case, which I mentioned earlier, of incest fathers who set up a Skype so that, when they rape their child, the other incest father can follow the rape live. OFMIN, on the other hand, aims to arrest rapists, prosecute those who order rapes, and prosecute incest fathers. Thanks to digital tools, they can trace rapists. On the other hand, what is never asked - as I said in my introduction - is the responsibility of the platforms. Skype's responsibility, today we're in the age of AI and extremely powerful technological tools. It would be possible to do a great deal to block this content. And so, I think that beyond the question of consumers - as I also said in my introduction, Coco.fr had 23,051 procedures declared by the Ministry of the Interior before it was closed - it's too much. And we'll also be having this discussion, I think, this afternoon on the issue of prostitution sites : we have a 2016 law that prohibits the purchase of sexual acts for a fee and

penalizes prostituted clients, but on the other hand, we have prostitution sites with ads. What's the logic here ? And so I think that those who should be liable today are the platforms. As for the good news, I think that when you have the political will, you can get things done.

Let me give you just one example: Telegram. Telegram had this specificity of not collaborating with the judicial authorities, even in the event of an investigation of any kind and then the CEO of Telegram landed in France a few months ago and was picked up on arrival in France and taken into custody. And since then, there has been better judicial cooperation between Telegram and the judicial authorities. It's a bit more complex than, of course, the Telegram affair, but at some point, effectively, platforms have to be held accountable for what they tolerate on their site when it comes to online pedocriminality or sexual exploitation.

## MARÍA HERNÁNDEZ—MORA

PhD in Psychology, Clinical Psychologist, and Psychotherapist

Let me answer as a psychologist. I absolutely agree with Ms Rossignol that this fight must be waged from a public health perspective, because the consumption of pornography is an absolutely major public health issue, and I'd say one of public order. We know today - I don't know if you've been following the DPJJ report : 1 in 2 rapes of minors is committed by another minor, and child protection judges in several European countries are very worried, because they see that since the advent of the smartphone in 2007, group rapes and rapes between minors are exploding, so one of the hypotheses that could explain this is obviously the massive consumption of pornography.

I absolutely agree that it's a mistake to distinguish between protection - of course we have to protect children, but we also have to protect adults from what harms them. That's why we run prevention campaigns on drugs and gambling, for example. That's why we try to prevent adults from drinking in the car, to avoid accidents. We also know that adults can be irresponsible, we also know that adults can take actions that are not good for them or for society, so prevention of pornography and pornography consumption by adults seems to me to

be fundamental, particularly on the symbolic aspect. In other words, if we say « Don't worry about porn, it's for when you're 18 », we're saying to the child or teenager : « When you're 18, it's okay to enjoy strangulation videos ». Because today in France, the most watched categories on ARCOM are « strangulation », « family fantasy » and « slut ». So, in fact, we're in the process of telling children, on a very educational level : « It's ok when you grow up, it's possible. » And I have a lot of patients who discovered porn on their parents' cell phones, especially their father's, and they say, they can say today, as adults, how much it may have hurt them, because in fact, they normalized and accepted this content, saying to themselves, « If dad looks at this, it means it's good, it means it's okay, it means I can use it as inspiration ». So this question of distinguishing between minors and adults, and saying that porn for adults is acceptable and corresponds to a freedom (which I think is misunderstood), means that we haven't yet understood the public order issues surrounding pornography. I also agree with this error, I think we have - and this is a little more philosophical - a poor understanding of freedom and sexual freedom.

As I was saying in the Senate, I was part of the report published by the commission of Ms. Rossignol, and there was a senator who asked me « What do you think of ethical pornography ? » And I replied, « What kind of society do you want ? ». Basically, it's this : Do you agree that we should put the term « ethical » about consuming humans behind a screen, and that sexuality should be experienced outside the bond, outside the sensitive experience, I'm not saying outside the real, because the virtual is also real. As Céline said : it's not cinema, it's the real thing. And it's true, it's real. But what do we think, in fact, that adults today, that teenagers, but also adults, can allow themselves a sexuality outside the bond, outside the sensitive and outside intimacy ? In other words, that it's okay to live a sexuality that goes beyond the natural dimension of intimacy, of modesty, which has been there for millennia to protect us from being violated, and so on. So in fact, taking sexuality out of all these dimensions poses problems for health and public order. So for me, there are obviously initiatives to be taken, laws to be put in place, and the legal field obviously needs to change. But I think there's also a lot to be done in the field of education and mental health. Thank you very much.

## SOMEONE IN THE AUDIENCE

Very quickly, I wanted to come back to the notion of escalating violence, traumatic dissociation and psychotrauma. You said, María Hernández-Mora, that at the age of 9, when a child looks at a pornographic image, a pornographic video, it represents a trauma. Can you explain the neurological link between trauma, dissociation and addiction ? First question. And finally, to give a little hope, how do you get out of this addiction ? And what I wanted to tell you, I'm also asking you this question, because we know that online child abuse content is increasingly violent and affects more and more very, very young children, so it's good that there's a form of addiction and also the escalation of this violence. Thank you very much.

## SOMEONE IN THE AUDIENCE

This is also a question for you, María Hernández-Mora. I'm part of a feminist collective, and we worked with sixteen complainants from the « French Bukkake » and « Jackie et Michel » affair. Something that stunned us, and stunned all of us in their common story, is the fact that they are recognized all the time. They can't take public transport, they can't go to a shopping mall. One of them has moved 18 times. How is it possible that people who watch hundreds of videos a month, in which their faces are barely present, recognize them wherever they go ? This psychic persistence you're talking about, can you explain how it works ? I just don't get it.

## MARÍA HERNÁNDEZ-MORA

PhD in Psychology, Clinical Psychologist, and Psychotherapist

Thank you very much for your questions. You know, it takes me three days to train professionals on the link between addiction, trauma and dissociation, and now I'm asked for a two-minute answer ! I'd like to say - Céline Piques described the dissociative mechanism in relation to trauma very well - that trauma is a situation of psychological shock in which the brain and body remain frozen in the impressions and affects of the traumatic experience because they cannot digest it. This means that unless therapy is put in place to deal with the trauma, the person

will have to face the present, anchored psychically and physically in a past trauma that is still active in their being. So in order to cope with this major anxiety and avoid a depressive collapse, she will try to find mechanisms to regulate herself and to cope with and calm the traumatic impact of a trauma that may have been very far in the past. And one of the strategies, let's say the most important strategy, the most common strategy for people who have suffered sexual violence, is sexual compulsivity: it's about putting yourself back in a situation of violence so that the brain switches off again and the body can calm down.

So the use of dissociation (through exposure to violence) acts as an anaesthetic. If used regularly, it can become compulsive and addiction can set in. Addiction is often an emotional regulation strategy for traumatised people. Massive pornography use deregulates the reward system, which is the dopamine network: you can become insensitive to the initial doses of dopamine, then gradually to the dose released with each viewing. At some point, use is no longer enough, the brain is desensitised and so the compulsion is no longer sufficiently regulating, there is no excitement, so beyond the search for pleasure, for traumatised people, use no longer calms them down enough. In people who have experienced sexual trauma, the addiction is often not so much a quest for sexual pleasure, but rather for emotional regulation. The person is going to escalate, quite simply because their body is no longer reacting to the content they are seeing, and so they are no longer able to soothe their state of anguish, their state of post-traumatic anxiety. I work in the field of addictions, and most of our patients are people who have experienced trauma. So, addiction is really the psychopathological mechanism for dealing with traumatic dissociation. Our teenagers who consume pornography are already in very serious escalation processes, because they can't achieve an erection or arousal. There are sexologists who say : « Since when has a 14-year-old not had an erection, systematically ? », it's not because of anxiety. It's because they're so imbued with a sexual intensity that doesn't exist in the real world, that they increasingly need to go into pornography and increasingly trashy content in order to access sexual arousal and therefore be able to reach orgasm. I've summarized a lot, but anyway.

As for the second question, the answer I've already given is that it's really a question of images that remain sealed in the memory. Many of my patients who compulsively consume pornography can describe to

me what they're watching, and know a lot of the details. They even have the sounds that stick in their memory. And these sounds, for example, the voices, etc., come back during the day like that, in an impromptu way, well, not decided, you know, obsessively, but really in a sensory form. It looks like paranoia, it looks like hallucinations, and in fact, it's just that there's such an invasion of the psyche by these contents that are really thought out in terms of the planes, the sounds, the way they're recorded to activate the brain in a bestial way, that as a result the body is extremely solicited and the sensory experience, when it's very intense, remains engraved in the memory.

It's the same as with trauma : when we experience a very intense physical trauma, our body remains frozen in that sensation because it's so intense that it can't digest it. With pornography, there's something like that too. That's why I talk about « psychic rape », because there's this invasion of the mind and body by pornographic content that remains, that persists. That's why, when my patients say, « Madame, do you think I'll have these images for the rest of my life ? », I say, « Well, of course there are images that can stay with you for the rest of your life. What's important is that they become bad memories. That is to say, that it adjusts to the images of your past and that you stop feeding this imagination with pornography and that you can make a return to reality. and get your body used to reconnecting to reality, to the present and to bodily sensations ». So it doesn't surprise me that people who regularly consume pornography can pass on images of women, many of whom are victims rather than actors, without any problem, because these images are unfortunately sealed in their memory. Thank you very much.

## CHRISTEL HAN

### Graphic facilitator

I'm going to go very quickly. In my images, I've emphasized the contrast each time between the influence that technology can have on human beings, on their brains, and obviously all the violence that this entails for the adults who consume or portray themselves in these images, and the children who are endangered by these images too. Thank you for your kind words.

# KEYNOTE SPEECHES



**ALYSSA AHRABARE**



President of the French Coordination  
for the European Women's Lobby (CLEF)



**AURORE BERGÉ**



Minister Delegate for Equality between  
Women and Men and  
the Fight against Discrimination



**ALEXANDRA LOUIS**



Interministerial Delegate for Victim Support



**DELPHINE O**



Ambassador, Secretary General of the  
Generation Equality Forum (Beijing+25)



**MARIA JOÃO FAUSTINO**



Member of the executive committee  
of the European Women's Lobby

# ALYSSA AHRABARE

## President of the French Coordination for the European Women's Lobby (CLEF)

I'd like to come back to some of the points we covered this morning. First of all, I'd like to ask you to think back to the worst humiliation you've ever experienced in your life, the worst moment, the moment when you felt the most ashamed, and now to imagine that this moment has been filmed and that this moment is online, on the Internet, accessible forever to everyone you know and don't know. This is the reality of the women we talked about this morning, women who are victims of the porno-crime industry, women who have seen intimate images and content shared without their consent, women who have also been victims of pornographic deepfakes, for example. As we've said, this is a reality from which these women have no means of escape. It's a tool of silencing, it's a tool of control, it's a social death sentence and it's a humiliation, a permanent retraumatization, which is repeated and which gives rise to other forms of violence : harassment in the street, discrimination in hiring, violence within the couple and within the family, sexual violence and so on. This is a reality, as I said this morning, that the legal frameworks, whether state or transnational, have not yet sufficiently - and far from it - included to provide better protection for victims.

We talked about pornographic platforms this morning : what's really fascinating about pornographic platforms, in my opinion at least, is that they are areas where the law doesn't apply. This morning, we talked a lot about new legal frameworks and the importance of defining new offenses and having specific, relevant provisions - but the reality is that the provisions that already exist don't apply when it comes to pornography. Earlier, Céline Piques gave the example of pedocriminality : we have legal frameworks which state that the representation of a child in a sexual context, regardless of age or puberty, is prohibited. However, when it comes to pornographic sites, we have Pharos, a body of the Ministry of the Interior, which can tell us, and officially say at a hearing before the High Council for Equality, that no, what is considered is only prepubescent children. Osez le Féminisme has reported a certain amount of content on pornographic platforms featuring people who can be identified as children, with explicit titles on incest and paedocriminality. This content is still online.

Pornography creates confusion between sexuality and violence. This is a very important point, because everything we've heard this morning about the impact on society can be summed up in this way. In other words, when, in a society, we no longer know how to recognize what is sexuality, what is violence, what is freedom, what is domination, since the most absolute subordination is ultimately passed off as emancipation and freedom, that's when we lose track of things and perhaps need to put a certain number of elements back in their place.

This notion of freedom and confusion between sexuality and violence, in my opinion, is rooted in a very tricky concept : the concept of consent. From the moment violence is defined in terms of consent - so, for example - we talked a lot this morning about this famous article 5 in the directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence - this article 5 was abandoned on the definition of rape because there was a debate on the word consent within this definition, The MEPs who were present expressed their regret that rape was not mentioned in the Directive - a regret I fully share - however, concerning this notion of consent, it is, in my opinion, totally unsuited to defining sexual violence. Violence does not cease to be violence from the moment of consent. The point of a definition based on consent is that the same act may or may not be violence, depending on what the victim may have said or done to suggest possible consent. Without equality, there can be no freedom. And we live in a society where structural inequalities mean that women are often in situations of economic, administrative or other dependence on men. And in a context of dependence, economic insecurity, coercion, in a broader context of violence, such as domestic violence, the intervention of consent is often ultimately the act of giving in, the act of accepting an inevitability and not a full and complete decision that would erase all the traumatic character and all the negative consequences that an act of torture, rape, humiliation or even misogynistic, racist insults might have, as we can see on pornographic videos. I'm going to follow Céline Piques' example this morning and give you a quote from Muriel Fabre-Magnan, a law professor we'll be hearing from on the final panel, who explains that, « In law, consent doesn't liberate, it obliges. » I think that says it all. It's something that's fairly easy to understand in a contractual relationship, and it's something that, when transposed to sexuality, obviously poses a problem.

This morning, we also talked about privacy, and I think it's very important to mention that in the Directive on combating violence

against women and domestic violence, in addition to the limitations we've already touched on this morning and which Lorraine Questiaux quoted to us in the room, there's another recital which defines what constitutes public distribution. Because the measures on cyberviolence we listed this morning, notably on the sharing of images without consent, concern public distribution only. And the directive defines « public sharing » content located in a space that does not require human intervention to access. So this excludes all closed groups, for example a private Facebook group, a closed WhatsApp chat, sites that require subscriptions to access content, such as OnlyFans. We were talking this morning about OnlyFans and the extent to which it is a breeding ground for violence, which is also hidden, because, while on pornographic platforms, violence is exposed for all to see, on OnlyFans, it is something that is hidden. All these areas, which are in fact those where sexist and sexual violence and cyberviolence have developed most in recent years, are therefore excluded from the scope of the Directive. We had the example by Céline Piques this morning of forums such as « A ton insu », all the controversies that explode little by little where we suddenly realise that there was a forum where men had been sharing pornographic or intimate content, sometimes for years. In fact, these are closed groups. So none of this is covered by the Directive. Once again, as Evin Incir explained this morning, it's a minimum framework, the Directive, and I really think that in our advocacy work as organisations, because there are a lot of civil society organisations in the room, and also as government representatives or members of parliament, it is extremely important to push for France to implement the Directive in a way that goes beyond these excessive limitations, which are the result of compromise between 27 Member States with different realities, but which, for France in any case, are not commensurate with the issues at stake.

On the question of freedom of expression, I'm going to be very brief because we've talked a lot about it this morning, but once again, no freedom is absolute, existing legal frameworks in terms of freedom of expression state, expressly, that freedom of expression can be limited in a democratic society to pursue a legitimate aim in a proportionate manner. And the European Convention on Human Rights explicitly cites among legitimate aims that merit, in a proportionate manner, once again, limiting freedom of expression, the rights and reputation of others. So, here we come squarely within the framework of a legitimate limitation of freedom of expression, of so-called « freedom of speech » : protect women, girls, children, vulnerable groups, online.

On the regulation, there's a big question to be asked, which we may be able to answer in part this afternoon. We've talked a lot this morning about regulating platforms, and that's because it's also what the existing legal framework requires us to do, but what we're talking about is pimping. We're talking about platforms that profit from the sexual exploitation of others, and profit directly from it. In the case of OnlyFans, which was mentioned this morning, it's 20% of all profits made on OnlyFans that are recouped by the platform. So, we're talking about pimping, and we're in the process of saying that we're going to regulate pimping, and we've got a European Commission that's taking a collaborative approach with porn platforms, with, for example, work currently underway on a voluntary code of conduct for the porn industry. Given the findings and the state of play presented this morning, are we at the stage where voluntary codes of conduct will enable us to make significant progress ? I doubt it. Especially as all these arguments about freedom of expression, privacy and « public dissemination » that have been cited since this morning and which are found in legal texts, are the arguments of the pornographic industry : consent, as we said in the first panel, this image of empowerment, of agency of the people who find themselves on these platforms, is something which is fed by the pornographic industry, which collaborates with European decision-makers and which can therefore put forward a certain number of ideas on the best way to deal with the threats posed by this economic model. The European Commission recently came close to participating in a pornography festival organized by the pornography industry. Thanks to the mobilisation of feminist associations, notably on the initiative of the Portuguese Platform for Women's Rights, participation was withdrawn. This collaborative approach, which normalises an industry that profits from the distribution of illegal content, does not seem to me to be adapted to the reality we are living through.

I wanted to come back to what was said about serious harm, still in the context of this Directive on violence against girls and women : as I explained to you this morning, in the definition of the criminalization of the sharing of images without consent, the notion of serious harm is specified. In the recitals, there is a further clarification to explain that the scope of the Directive concerns only the most serious forms of cyberviolence. Now, and this is more or less what Evin Incir also explained this morning : for there to be a legal basis, a legal basis for a Directive, for the European Union to have the power to define offences in a given field, this field must correspond to what are known as

eurocrimes. Eurocrimes are exhaustively listed in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. These include cybercrimes, which are the legal basis for these articles in the violence directive. The essence of a Eurocrime is that it is serious and transnational in nature. So we take a Eurocrime which, by definition, is already serious; we specify in the recitals that it must still be serious, we specify in the recitals that it must still be serious. So we're really in a bidding war of precautions taken by States to limit the scope of the Directive, in a context where the seriousness of online violence is already in doubt, because that's what we often hear: « Is it real ? Is it not enough for victims to disconnect ? ». We answered this question this morning : yes, it is.

And so, this afternoon, we're all going to be thinking about how we can improve things and fight together. We'll tell you all about it at the end, but we're working collectively with a number of European associations, on a series of recommendations concerning reporting, effective removal of content, blocking of sites, clear and harmonized definitions of offences, protection of minors and judicial cooperation. So, these are all fields that we need to invest in in a serious and demanding way. It's urgent. The urgency is now. So inaction is no longer an option. Thank you for listening.

We're now going to watch a short video presentation by Aurore Berger. Aurore Berger, Minister for Equality between Women and Men, who couldn't be with us today. She has recorded a speech, which we will now listen to. After that, I'll give the floor to Madame Alexandra Louis, who is the Interministerial Delegate for Victim Support, and to Delphine O, ambassador for the Forum Génération Égalité. And I'd like to thank all the speakers for being with us.

## AURORE BERGÉ

### Minister Delegate for Equality between Women and Men and the Fight against Discrimination

Hello everyone. I wanted to speak to you today on the occasion of our symposium, this international symposium dedicated to online sexual exploitation and the fight we're obviously waging. And I'd like to thank Osez le Féminisme and the French Coordination for the European

Women's Lobby, because you organized this important event. Important for making our voices heard in the face of online sexual exploitation and violence. I thank you all the more because your voice is tireless and your commitment tireless. And without your voices, without your mobilization and your demands, many battles would neither have been fought nor won. Online sexual exploitation, pornocriminality and pedocriminality are scourges. Scourges that are eating away at our society and threatening the safety of millions and millions of women and children around the world. As you know better than anyone, this is an absolute emergency. We cannot allow platforms to thrive on the exploitation of the most vulnerable and on violence. It is their responsibility that we must engage. The portrayal of sexuality in the millions of pornographic contents accessible with just a few clicks conveys unbearable stereotypes of submission and violence against women. Violence is not sexuality. Too many pornographic productions portray women as mere objects, passive objects of desire whose pleasure can be summed up in submitting to violent, humiliating and degrading scenarios. This situation demands a strong, unanimous and, above all, coordinated response. Our priority must be the protection of victims, which must take precedence over the interests of the porn industry, streaming sites and deepfake porn sites that thrive on online sexual exploitation.

We also need to protect our youngest children and teenagers, who are exposed to extremely violent content and risks of exploitation, such as online grooming. The Internet is not and must never be a lawless zone. Like me, when you talk about it around you, some people invoke so-called freedom of expression or even the right to privacy to justify the impunity of platforms in these highly lucrative industries. Their response is simply to protect the guilty and not to support the victims. We know that freedom of expression has its limits in our law. Disseminating sexual content without consent, promoting hate speech, disseminating violent content with sexist and sexual violence are in no way part of either freedom of expression or commercial freedom. These are acts, and acts that are criminally reprehensible. It is therefore our duty to fight them relentlessly. Our government, our governments, the European Union and the platforms have a shared responsibility, and we must guarantee age control for access to pornographic sites and immediate measures for the removal of violent content, without allowing the protection of consumers of such content to be used as a pretext - as is currently the case - for passivity.

Victims of online sexual exploitation must be protected.

## **ALYSSA AHRABARE**

**President of the French Coordination for the European Women's Lobby (CLEF)**

We'd like to thank the Minister for recording this video, and without further ado, I'd like to invite Alexandra Louis to take her place at the lectern and present the elements she wishes to bring to our attention.

## **ALEXANDRA LOUIS**

**Interministerial Delegate for Victim Support**

Hello everyone, I'd like to start by quoting a few phrases : « Online violence is less serious than physical violence », « Behind a screen, it's still less serious. Even the virtual isn't the real thing ». So I've heard these phrases, as I'm sure you have, because as we've seen this morning, there's still this idea that online violence is less serious. In any case, there are plenty of reasons to justify or at least tolerate it. We live in a world where it's impossible today to totally dissociate our digital life, our « virtual » life, if I can use that expression, from our real life. We all talk about the digital revolution, its advantages and the benefits it brings us, but all too often we overlook the dark side that has been very well described in the various speeches, and I think it's really the challenge of the century to adapt to this digital world, and above all to protect ourselves and others.

This is a collective battle we must wage. The response must be national, of course, but it must also be European, all the more so when we consider that more than one in two of the child abuse content circulating on the Internet is hosted within the European Union. However, I would like to say that there is at least one reason for optimism. It's the mobilization generated by this event in particular - because on all societal issues, it's the mobilization that starts with a few - that means we can make progress. And I'd like to thank you for organizing this event, for putting the spotlight on this subject and highlighting a number of realities.

So, as you know, I'm the Interministerial Delegate for Victim Support and our mission is to coordinate victim support throughout the country, and to improve support systems. The idea is that all victims in France should be able to benefit from support. To achieve this, I work with specialists from several ministries, because the idea of victim support is that all ministries are involved, whether it's health, justice, the interior, foreign affairs or others.

The first point that I think is important to emphasize is that to combat online sexual exploitation, there needs to be a real collective and individual awareness. We know today that online sexual and gender-based violence can be extremely serious, and I'm thinking in particular of the videos we saw earlier. Just 4 years ago, I was confronted with this kind of resistance. I thought it was common sense that online sexual violence was serious, but I realized that it was far from being a given.

At the time, I was rapporteur for the law of April 21, 2021, which made it possible to take into account a certain number of forms of sexual violence against minors, in particular by criminalizing the fact of an adult soliciting pornographic images of a minor, inciting a minor by electronic means of communication to commit any act of a sexual nature on himself or on a third party. and also criminalizing the use of prostitution for minors under the age of 15. At the time, we had a lot of convincing to do, and it was a pretty tedious job. And I think what helped us a lot was that we met with the Paris juvenile brigade, who had alerted us to a particularly sordid case: a young schoolgirl had been contacted by another child her own age on social networks, with whom she had built up a relationship of trust, over a period of weeks, some even months, she shared a passion for fashion and then this dream of becoming a model. After several exchanges of messages and images, the second person asked this young girl for topless photos. Feeling confident, she sent them. It was then, of course, that the trap closed on her, and the young schoolgirl in front of her was finally a 22-year-old predator, a student, who no one could have suspected was engaged in this type of activity. Once he had her photos, he blackmailed her, asking for videos and other things, asking her to perform acts of self-penetration and acts of particular barbarity, humiliating acts that I won't go into here.

It turned out that this individual had already victimized over fifty people in France and abroad. And we came up against this difficulty :

there was no offence that fitted the bill exactly, because we weren't aware of it, and we attributed offences to a misdemeanor level, even though these offences were particularly serious. This even led to another difficulty, which was that because the offence was a misdemeanour, the individual in question was released after six months in pre-trial detention, and he immediately repeated the offence. That's why it's so important to keep our law enforcement staff moving forward.

Another double punishment for these victims is that, after that, their images were monetized on the Darknet, and even today, some of them live with the sword of Damocles hanging over their heads, knowing that these images could resurface at any moment. So this drama dates back to around 2017, and imagine today, with advances in AI, the development of pornographic deepfakes, algorithms that target minors or the most vulnerable people; what this dark individual could have done, what others are doing as we speak. This digital revolution, now also embodied by AI, must not become our Achilles heel, but a transparent, responsible and above all regulated force, as far as it is possible to do so. AI should also be at the service of humanity, enabling us to track down our predators more effectively in the future. It is essential that the repressive response adapts, but also that our society takes the full measure. And, of course, we need to make platforms more accountable.

Formation is also crucial, for our police officers, magistrates, lawyers and all other professionals, so that they are fully aware of the digital challenge. Within the Ministry of Justice, the DACG has undertaken a training program, particularly for magistrates, to raise their awareness of digital issues. The other important aspect is to develop the « go on », i.e. to identify victims and not wait for them to come to us. The reality is that victims are often asked to be courageous and dignified, and even when a victim speaks out publicly, they are praised for their courage and dignity. The reason I draw your attention to this is that sometimes, for certain victims, there is also this injunction to testify, or even almost to be dignified, as if, in some way, they were not. But I think it's important to say it: all victims are worthy, all victims are courageous. And I'm thinking in particular of two memories I have, of a very, very young high school girl whose boyfriend, ex-boyfriend, had published photos on the Internet to his own friends, and who found herself in an extremely complicated psychological state, unable to speak. I'm also thinking of the 16-year-old girl who was, so to speak,

sold into pimping by her boyfriend. She couldn't, wouldn't file a complaint, and it's easy to see why when you consider the mechanism of psychotrauma and bondage. In the end, it was her mother who picked her up from a hospital bed, completely swollen, in a state of dissociation, the only kind that would be difficult to describe.

Obviously, these victims are courageous, because I think it takes a lot of courage to put up with this, and I don't think it's up to the victims to be courageous, in fact it's up to society to be courageous, it's up to each and every one of us to fight effectively against this violence. We can all, for example, report when we see unsuitable content, when we see offensive content, when we see illegal content. It's also clear that it's important to highlight victims by reporting. There is the [arretonslesviolences.gouv.fr](https://arretonslesviolences.gouv.fr) chat (which means « stop violences »), which is a good tool, and it would be interesting to develop others at another level too, which would enable a victim or witness to connect anonymously and be put in touch with a police officer or gendarme specifically trained to accompany the person and, if they so wish, get the help they need. There are also a number of important numbers, 119, but I'm also thinking that 116 and 006 from France Victime can help victims.

Beyond the identification process, what's important is to support victims with a conviction that I've held for the two years I've been with the Delegation for Victim Support, and that is that no-one is condemned to be a victim all their life, or should be. Support must not be limited to the legal aspect. I'm thinking in particular of employment: when you've lived through the unthinkable, finding a job is extremely complicated. I'm also thinking of parenthood: a victim of sexual violence may have great difficulty in his or her role as a parent, and it's important to provide significant support to these people, and sometimes to their close ones too.

I'd like to draw your attention to two figures that seem fundamental to me. The first is that only 1 victim in 10 is assisted by a victim support association. Nearly 1 in 2 women say they don't know who to call if they need help. Victim support associations do an extraordinary job, and I'd like to pay tribute to them for their work, which is often overlooked. We don't see them, but they can be a great help to victims, and many of them help you to push forward legislation to protect victims. But beyond these figures and what I've told you, I think we need to go further in terms of support. I believe we need a genuine public victim

support service to enable victims, even before they are victims, to know who to turn to, where to go for comprehensive support that takes into account all the dimensions I've mentioned. The idea would also be to make it easier for victims to obtain information, particularly online. We are also committed to ensuring that the treatment of psychotrauma and knowledge of psychotrauma are better disseminated, because it's important that both professionals and the general public are aware of the implications of psychotrauma, and in particular of the fact that, yes, a victim can't testify easily; that a victim can have long-term difficulties; that no, a victim can't return to a normal life just by wanting to; it's not always just a question of wanting to. It's not always just a question of willpower. There's also still this cliché in society of this injunction at some point to get better. Our knowledge of psychotrauma enables us to understand that what makes the difference is above all the support given to the victim and those close to him or her - I'm thinking in particular of children - over the long term.

I'd like to conclude by saying, after listening to this morning's debates, that there is indeed still a lot to build, but my conviction is that, in any democratic society, what must take precedence is support for victims, respect for human dignity above all else. The right to dignity of victims, their right to lead a normal life, even if it's not an inspired right as such, is obviously fundamental for me.

Finally, I'd like to thank once again all the organizers of this event, and all those who fight day in, day out to improve support for victims, to ensure that they are better identified and better supported. I would also like to share an important conviction: that none of this battle will be won if we don't win the battle of prevention with children, of course, but even with adults, and I think there is a real campaign to be waged to encourage education at school. I'm obviously thinking of the sex and emotional life education sessions that need to be developed, where it's precisely the place to talk about what consent really is, to teach children to protect themselves, but these are also sessions that can detect victims, and I think it's important to remember that. Thank you, I hope we can hold a conference in a few years' time and say that all this will have been improved.

## Ambassador, Secretary General of the Generation Equality Forum (Beijing+25)

Thank you very much. Hello everyone. My name is Delphine O, and I'm an ambassador for women's rights at the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs. I'm going to share with you some thoughts and ideas on the international framework for combating sexual and gender-based cyberviolence, as well as some information on what France is doing in this area. First of all, I'd like to come back to the question of lexicon, and I'll deliberately use the term « cyberviolence » in my speech today. I obviously mean « sexist and sexual cyberviolence », but you need to be aware that in the international legal framework, we use a term which is much more complicated and much longer, but which in fact reflects and captures a more complex reality. The term is « online and technology facilitated gender based violence ». It's a bit long, as you can see. This term covers a great many realities, a great many types of violence that predominantly target women and girls. I'm going to mention them. I'm sorry, because there are a lot of Anglicisms here : « flaming », which is a series of deliberately hostile and insulting messages directed at a victim; « fichas accounts » - you may have heard of them - which are fake profiles designed to humiliate a person online; « revenge porn », which we no longer wish to use as a term, since we're talking about the non-consensual dissemination of intimate images. « Digital raids », « slut shaming », « body shaming », « sextortion », « doxing » (the disclosure of personal data) and so on. These are all forms of violence that take place online, mainly against women and girls.

But there is also violence that takes place offline, in real life, but which is facilitated by new technologies. I'm thinking, for example, of the « airtag », little instruments created by Apple to help people find their phone. In some cases, we've also seen the use of new technologies to remotely control a fridge, a door or a car in order to track or commit violence against women. That's all there is to it. It's just a technical point, but it's important to understand the scope and perimeter of what we call cyberviolence.

In the multilateral framework, and I'll be talking mainly about the UN framework, since you've already heard a lot this morning about the

European framework. So I won't go back over the European directive on violence against women or the European regulation on digital services. In an international context, we don't have two references to cyberviolence in the founding international legal texts on women's rights. There's a very simple reason for this: at the time, such violence didn't exist, as I'm thinking in particular of the CEDAW or CEDF from 1979. I'm thinking, of course, of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action declaration, where the issue of online violence didn't even exist. So we have a multilateral international legal vacuum when it comes to addressing cyberviolence.

Things are slowly beginning to change. In 2022, the Commission on the Status of Women, the United Nations' annual negotiating body on women's rights issues, chose technology as its theme. We've talked a lot about women's unequal access to technology and technology-related professions, but it's also the first time that we, the 193 UN member states, have been able to negotiate on the issue of language concerning cyberviolence. Last year was particularly rich in 2024, in terms of the adoption of texts on the issue of cyberviolence: I'm thinking in particular of the pact for the future and the global digital pact. This is the first time since the Sustainable Development Goals that all UN member states have agreed on a global text. And in the global digital pact, we succeeded in including a reference to cyberviolence, or more precisely to sexual and gender-based violence, which is perpetrated, enabled or amplified by the use of technology. So it's not a normative text, i.e. legally binding, but it was nonetheless the result of a battle with many progressive states who pushed for the inclusion of this cyberviolence. At the same time, in September last year, France presented a resolution to the United Nations General Assembly for the first time: a resolution entitled « The elimination of violence against women and girls in the digital environment. » The subject was specifically the issue of cyberviolence. It's a biannual resolution on the issue of violence, sponsored by France and the Netherlands, and every two years we change the theme. And it's interesting because, for the first time, this text has been adopted with the support of 170 States. And that's an historic first, because we usually have more opposition. In particular, the text mentions the fight against online hate speech, the need to require platforms to remove violent content, encouraging platforms to remove content that sexualizes or exploits women and girls, and the need to fight impunity.

Once again, this is a non-binding resolution, but in international law,

particularly on the rights of women and girls, we take things one step at a time, starting with non-binding resolutions. I'm also thinking of a multilateral initiative launched in 2022 quite recently by the United States. It's called the « Global Partnership for Action Against Online Gender-Based Violence ». This partnership is the first international coalition of states to take coordinated action against sexual and gender-based cyberviolence. It's a coalition that today comprises just twenty or so states - it may not seem like much, but it's already a good start - states from the North and South, and France joined in 2023. This coalition is very important because it enables all these States, precisely in the run-up to major international negotiations such as the Pact for the Future and the United Nations General Assembly, to coordinate and push for the recognition of sexist and sexual cyberviolence. France joined not long ago.

I'd also like to mention an initiative that's dear to me, since I was behind it at the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, which we launched in 2023, called the « Laboratoire pour les Droits des Femmes en ligne » (Laboratory for Women's Rights Online). So, once again, it's a title I had to fight hard against my colleagues who thought it wasn't a very sexy title, but I absolutely wanted it to be called « Women's Rights » and not just « Women's Protection ». It's not just a scientific laboratory, it's the world's leading platform for exchange and coordination in the fight against cyberviolence, and it's also an incubator for international projects to combat cyberviolence. And it just so happens that this very week, on Tuesday of this week, we organized the presentation of the first 5 international projects led by feminist grassroots associations from countries of the South, supported by the French Foreign Affairs Minister, to combat cyberviolence. These are feminist associations, South African associations, NGOs if you like, from South Africa, Nigeria, Palestine and the Dominican Republic. And what do we do? We put out a worldwide call for projects last year, receiving 140 applications from all over the world, and we're funding them for a year to deploy and develop innovative technological solutions to combat cyberviolence. We already have several examples of this in France, applications that give women victims of cyberviolence access to the necessary resources, but they are very rare in the countries of the South. We've also seen applications, chatbots, awareness-raising and education programs, particularly among young people, so this is an initiative launched by France.

Now I'd like to talk more specifically about the issue of artificial

intelligence - and I'll end on this note, I think it's already been mentioned a little today - which is to some extent the new frontier of cyberviolence. Here again, the multilateral landscape is under construction. It's not empty; I'll mention UNESCO in particular, which was the first multilateral agency to produce recommendations on the ethics of artificial intelligence in November 2021, so it's already been almost 5 years. These recommendations explicitly mention the risk of discrimination and gender-based violence brought about by artificial intelligence. These recommendations have been endorsed by all UN member states. Very soon, the Council of Europe, whose leadership in the fight against violence against women is well known, will also be producing its own recommendation on the impact of artificial intelligence systems, their potential for promoting gender equality, and the risks of discrimination, which will also be very important within the framework of this Council of Europe. I'd like to talk about artificial intelligence because, unfortunately, like all new technologies, AI is today mainly used, in the subject that interests us, to amplify, exacerbate and multiply cyberviolence, particularly sexual violence, against women.

It's worth noting that the very first time the term deepfakes was used was in 2017, on the social network Reddit, and it was already, the very first time, to designate a pornographic deepfake. There's been a lot of talk about deepfakes in the context of disinformation, election campaigns, but today 96% of deepfakes are pornographic in nature, 99% of these pornographic deepfakes target women and girls. And it goes much further, and this is where I'm going to terrify you: in the metaverse, this universe both online and offline, which is also one of tomorrow's realities, 3D avatars of real people are created, who are then staged in pornographic situations. I don't know if I've dumped you here, but that's how far we've gone.

I'd like to quote Clare McGlynn, who is the world's leading expert on non-consensual distribution of intimate images and pornographic deepfakes, and a professor of law at Durham University in the UK. She was one of our speakers at the Laboratoire pour les droits des femmes en ligne event this week in Paris, as part of the Artificial Intelligence Summit. She says two things about deepfakes. There are two preconceived ideas, two misconceptions. The first is that these images aren't real, because they're actually created by artificial intelligence. But in fact, these images are just as real for the victims. And the second misconception is that the harm caused is less because the images

aren't real. But in fact, for the victims of pornographic deepfakes, it's exactly the same thing. They describe the dissemination of these deepfakes as sexual assault, or even rape. It's important to remember that pornographic deepfakes don't just concern actresses, singers and jet-set stars, and it's already a problem if it concerns them. Anybody - and that's probably all the people in this room - who has at some point in their life posted more than fifty photos of themselves on the Internet, on Google, could be a victim of pornographic deepfakes. All you have to do is gather fifty or so photos of the person, go to a pornographic deepfakes creation site, and for a few dozen euros, you create a pornographic deepfake and once it's on the Internet, it's almost impossible to remove it.

Now, what's the latest on the fight against pornographic deepfakes? In France, there are currently no regulations on the subject. But we are beginning to see the beginnings of multilateral cooperation. I'd like to mention two examples, and I'll end there. Firstly, the United Kingdom is at the forefront of this issue, and the question of criminalization is an important one, because when the British government announced its intention some time ago to initiate a bill to criminalize deepfakes, particularly of a pornographic nature, it should be noted that the world's biggest pornographic deepfakes site itself blocked access to all British users to its own site, for fear of legal repercussions. So it works.

Second example - which was mentioned earlier by Alyssa - Telegram. In South Korea, a few months ago, there was a huge pornographic deepfakes scandal and a judicial crackdown on dozens and dozens of private Telegram loops, but in fact with thousands of people, even tens of thousands of people, where pornographic deepfakes were circulating, which gave rise to a massive mobilization of society, particularly feminist civil society, and to the passing of a law imposing a sentence of up to 10 years in prison on anyone who either disseminates or creates pornographic deepfakes.

It's worth noting that one of the students, who was sentenced to prison, also a young boy, just over 20, had created thousands of pornographic deepfakes of female university students. They weren't actresses, they were his girlfriends or non-girlfriends, basically women, young female students he knew at university. So it was a huge scandal, and in this context, Pavel Durov, Telegram's CEO, was arrested in Paris. Today, the South Korean regulator enjoys extremely close cooperation with Telegram, which, since the scandal, systematically removes

deepfakes reported to it within 48 hours. This was never the case before.

I'll stop here. I didn't want to frighten you. Just to let you know that we're starting to work on this subject at multilateral level. We're facing the same backlash we face on other women's rights issues, on sexual and reproductive rights, on the right to control one's own body, on the right to abortion, and when we push for recognition of sexist and sexual cyberviolence, we face the same opposition from a number of States, notably because it's also States or governments that sometimes use cyberviolence themselves to silence feminist voices in particular. But I can assure you that France is very committed to this issue, and we are continuing our work at the intersection of gender and digital issues, particularly on the question of cyberviolence. Thank you very much.

## **ALYSSA AHRABARE**

**President of the French Coordination for the European Women's Lobby (CLEF)**

We have with us a representative of the European Women's Lobby who was due to speak this morning, but unfortunately, after a series of setbacks in terms of missed, missed and delayed flights, she is now arriving with us. So I'd like to give her the floor for a short speech on artificial intelligence, which is the subject she was supposed to address, and which will therefore echo Delphine O's speech that we've just heard. So let me introduce Maria João Faustino, who has just arrived from Portugal and is a member of the executive committee of the European Women's Lobby, a feminist organization that brings together 2 000 women's rights organizations across Europe.

## **MARIA JOÃO FAUSTINO**

**Member of the executive committee of the European Women's Lobby**

Thank you, Alyssa. I'm going to be very quick, especially because Delphine O. mentioned a lot of things that I really wanted to say. I'd like to start by saying that I'm Maria João Faustino, I'm a researcher and I'm

also a member of the executive of the European Women's Lobby. We did an event with Clare McGlynn, which is online : I organised it with her and with Microsoft to push for a debate and to finally make big technology accountable. We didn't succeed, but we tried. Delphine, you said something that's really important, and it basically sums up what I really wanted to say here: artificial intelligence is the new frontier of sexual violence, and generative artificial intelligence is here, we're living in a time where our lives are shaped by it, and it's opening another Pandora's box in terms of violence against women. Who has heard about « deepfakes » before ? Everyone ? Okay. That's a good sign. Most of the people I talk to about deepfakes didn't even know the term. They've probably heard something about Taylor Swift, but this goes way beyond celebrities, like you said.

And I just wanted to start with a very brief question about terminology. The concept of « deepfake » was created by a perpetrator, so it's really not a term that I feel comfortable with. There are some alternative terms. Personally, I like Mary-Anne Franks' proposal. She talks about « sexual digital forgeries », to underline the idea that it's a forgery, it's a violation. Clare McGlynn talks about « deepfakes sexual abuse », to underline the idea that we're talking about sexual abuse and that we are referring to sex crimes and not a joke. Personally, I talk about « pornified abuse » or « pornified violence ». I think it's important not to talk about pornography; I don't think it's pornography. I like the image based sexual abuse framework created by Clare McGlynn and Erika Rackley because pornography - as we've all heard - is a very abusive industry - but I think that talking about pornography induces a lesser approach. And most victims say that the term « revenge porn » is not a fair term to describe the violation and abuse. I personally talk about « deep fake sexual abuse » or « pornified violence ». I think it's important to express the pornographic aspect, because it's an aspect and a result of society's pornification. It's not just a violation, it's a pornographic manifestation of violation of sexual integrity. And that's a very short note on terminology.

Delphine, you mentioned it, and it's very important. Most people don't think or have the idea that this is already a global problem. We already have a huge problem on our hands. South Korea is only the most expressive. It's the tip of the iceberg but it really is a global problem. It's happening everywhere. In schools, teenagers receive nudified images of themselves, by their colleagues, and it's very understandable why. There is a proliferation of nudify applications, many of them are

free, the proliferation of platforms which on the whole we look at as a niche, a niche phenomenon. The most expressive and biggest platform for the creation and solicitation of deepfakes has millions of viewers and participants per month. So it's a big thing, this is a big industry. We're talking about a very structural problem. So how do we fight it ? How do we dismantle it ? How do we approach it ? Obviously, there is no simple remedy. The democratisation of technology brought at the same time the democratisation of abuse. So we need a holistic approach, we really need to improve a feminist approach to sexuality that goes further than consent. The concept of consent has become a tool of patriarchy, not something that liberates us. And we really need, first of all, to recognise the impact of deepfake or pornified abuse.

We already tend to approach sexual abuse and online violence as something that has less impact and it's this minimisation that is even greater when we're talking about fake images, we tend to say « oh but why does she care, the images aren't even real » and we know that we already have data and scientific empirical studies that show that the impact is exactly the same as if the images were so-called real, so our standards and our commitment has to be victim centred. Real is the pain, real is the impact. We know that even fake images have the potential to cause psychological trauma, reputational damage, all sorts of social and psychological damage. We need to recognise that, we need to have a victim-centred approach.

We need, as you said and I think this is the right way to go, we need to follow the UK [legal approach]. We really need to criminalise the production [of « deepfakes »], not just the distribution (of manipulated images), because if we allow the production of deepfakes to continue, we know that they will be found through Google, they will be promoted on Facebook and Instagram. So big tech has a lot to respond for. They have more power and more money than many European countries. So this is the only answer we have at the moment. Thank you very much.

# ALYSSA AHRABARE

## Présidente de la Coordination française pour le Lobby Européen des Femmes (CLEF)

Merci beaucoup, Maria. Merci encore à Delphine O, Alexandra Louis d'être venues ici aujourd'hui et d'avoir pris la parole. Je voudrais donner la parole à Héma Sibi, qui est directrice de Cap International et qui sera la modératrice du prochain panel. J'invite les intervenants de ce panel, Adama-Sira Le Blay du Réseau européen des femmes migrantes, Stéphanie Caradec du Mouvement Du Nid, Françoise Brié de l'Amical Du Nid, et Maria Noichl qui est une eurodéputée allemande, et qui a également été rapporteur de la résolution du Parlement Européen sur la prostitution transfrontalière. La parole est donc à vous. Je vous remercie de votre attention.

# THIRD PANEL

## Addressing prostitution : the impact of different policy models in europe



**HÉMA SIBI**   
Director of CAP International



**MARIA NOICHL**   
German MEP, rapporteur of the  
European Parliament's September 2023  
resolution on prostitution



**ADAMA-SIRA LE BLAY**   
President of the European Network  
of Migrant Women



**FRANÇOISE BRIÉ**   
Representative of Amicale du Nid,  
Vice-President of CLEF,  
and former GREVIO member



**STÉPHANIE CARADEC**



Director of Mouvement du Nid

Hi to everyone . I'm going to speak in French because I have a majority of French women on my panel. My name is Héma Sibi, and I'm the director of the Coalition for the Abolition of Prostitution International. We're a coalition of 35 grassroots associations, most of them founded by survivors of prostitution, from 28 countries. Together, these associations help some 19 000 prostitutes around the world who have been trafficked for sexual exploitation. Together, we are campaigning for the adoption of the abolitionist model of prostitution, which recognizes prostitution as violence. This panel will talk about the different legislative models that exist on prostitution in the digital age and their impact, and I'm honored to share this panel with these great experts.

Prostitution is therefore a form of violence that forms part of the continuum of violence against women, and a form of violence that is fully in line with sexist and sexual cyberviolence. Around the world, there are several legislative models governing prostitution. There are three main ones. The first is the prohibitionist model, which, as its name suggests, is a pure and simple ban on prostitution, and which penalizes all those involved in the prostitutional system by equating prostitutes and aggressors, whether pimps or purchasers of sexual acts. This model has amply demonstrated its ineffectiveness, and represents a real step backwards for women's rights and the rights of prostituted women, in that it treats them as delinquent, criminal offenders.

The second model, which has been adopted in Germany and the Netherlands for example, is the regulatory model of prostitution, which considers prostitution as work, often called « sex work », and decriminalizes not only prostitutes, but also pimps and purchasers of sexual acts. This model has produced absolutely disastrous consequences in terms of the human rights of prostitutes. We're going to explore the ins and outs with Maria Noichl, an MEP from Germany, and the latest model to emerge is obviously abolitionist, which recognizes prostitution as violence and is based on four main pillars : the decriminalisation of all prostitutes, the guarantee of a pathway out of prostitution and comprehensive and holistic support services for prostitutes and which will tackle demand, by banning the purchase of sexual acts and tackle pimping in all its forms, by penalising all forms of

pimping, including brothel ownership.

This abolitionist model has been adopted in nine countries, including Sweden in 1999, which pioneered the adoption of this legislation. It's no coincidence that Sweden is also one of the countries with the highest gender equality indexes in the world. And it's a model that was also adopted in France in 2016. In recent years, the abolitionist model has truly emerged as the way forward. In September 2023, the European Parliament adopted the Noichl resolution, which calls on all EU member states to adopt the pillars of the abolitionist model, be it the criminalization of pimping, the criminalization of the purchase of sexual acts or the decriminalization of prostitutes. Last year, in her report on prostitution, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Reem Alsalem, issued an unequivocal call for states to adopt the five pillars of the abolitionist model, describing prostitution as « aggravated violence » against women, affecting the most marginalized populations. Recently - we're in the home of the European Court of Human Rights, so it's worth noting - last year, in July, the European Court of Human Rights handed down a judgment that hailed the French model as protective of people in prostitution. It reaffirmed that criminalizing the purchase of sexual acts is compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights, and also reaffirmed that French law aims to deprive pimps of all kinds of profits by drying up demand.

So we have this path, which is a bit like the path of the future, but which, in the digital age, poses many questions and challenges. Today, we're obviously seeing an upsurge in prostitution on the Internet. One of the main platforms for prostitution ads in France, called « Sexmodel », sees 35 000 prostitution ads published every day. Most of the people prostituted on this platform are under the yoke of a pimp, according to the police. This challenge is everywhere. We've seen it with the emergence of new pimping platforms like OnlyFans or Mym, which, under the guise of glamorizing prostitution, will in reality perpetrate the exploitation of the prostitution of the most vulnerable. And new challenges are also posed by all those pornographic platforms teeming with dehumanizing content for women, as well as prostitution.

So I'm delighted to share this panel with these speakers, and we're going to start with MEP Maria Noichl, who is rapporteur for the European Parliament resolution on prostitution in the EU, its cross-border impact and gender equality. She's a German MEP from the S&D group (Social Democrats), who will present the content of the Noichl

resolution, and tell us a little about the German context, the results of the legislation that has regulated prostitution in Germany, and the various current trends concerning online prostitution in the country. Thank you for your interest.

## MARIA NOICHL

### German MEP, rapporteur of the European Parliament's September 2023 resolution on prostitution

Thank you very much for your time. My name is Maria Noichl, I'm from Germany and yes, I was the rapporteur of the report, the situation of prostitution in the different Member States, on the one hand, and what could be a good plan for Europe. And I think that how is it possible to make this report, how is it possible to bring this report on a desk ? The first step for me is to say, to work, that these issues are too high priority in S&D, in my political party. I think a lot of women understand the system.

The system is first of all that you have to fight within your own political party. Then you have to fight with the other parties. I did it two years ago and I always say : « We need a paper on prostitution » and they say : « Yes, Maria, but we need a paper on COVID, we need a paper on this, we need a paper on that. » There are always so many ideas on the table and the first step is to make the paper on prostitution the number one issue. That is important. If you do that, then I was able to do it in my own group, yes, it wasn't so hot, I was the coordinator. Then we take the idea to the Committee on Budgets, and the Committee on Budgets says : « Ok, the Greens have this idea, the Christian-Democrats have this idea, the Liberals have this idea, and the S&Ds have this idea... » Okay, so we do that ? We do all the different reports and that was the situation where I got my own report, my idea, I got my own report in my hand.

Yes, what is it, what is the situation ? We have in the report of Mary Honeyball, she was a social democrat and in 2014, there was a report of Mary Honeyball, and this Honeyball report was the first sentence that prostitution is violated against women. And this was, I think, I'm Marie, the same as Mary Honeyball, yes, it was great, and we thought, we have to do this now, and we need a position, a position in the European

Parliament. This paper, this European Union report, is not a binding paper. This paper is just a paper to show the different situation in the member states and to say what is the idea of the European Parliament. And I think this is a good basis to have a paper for the idea of the European Parliament.

What was the biggest problem from my side ? The biggest problem was the extreme lobby from the « sex workers »' side. And this lobby has, I would say, five points. First of all, they do not want you to say that prostitution is violence against women. They don't like that one sentence : « Prostitution and violence against women ». And they're doing everything.

The next point was, as I said, they don't like the word « prostitution », they always like to say « sex work ». We do this in one place in the report, in one place in the report is the verb « sex workers », as the women themselves say. Then we say « It's ok. It's their own phrase. » But we never said « sex workers ». The « sex workers » lobby would like to always have to say « forced prostitution ». Then they can split it and say « there's good one and there is a bad one prostitution. », « It was always prostitution. » No, prostitution is prostitution ! And this was one point. The next point was to mix prostitution with migration. And this is very hard. We put the issue of migration out of the report, if we had put it in, then we lost. We would lose. Sorry, yes.

And then, I think there is one of the biggest problems, also in Germany, is that if you say these are all victims, what is the status of these women ? If you say « No, they are workers ! », then you can say « Goodbye, go back to your country. » But if you say that prostitution is a kind of violence against women, then they are all victims, then it's the idea that they could be a possibility to be in the member states. And this wasn't possible for us. We split the report up into all the migration issues out of the report.

And the third point is that the extreme regrouping of « sex workers » has always fought for « My body, my right. » They've put this sentence from abortion issue to the prostitution issue and say « It is my body, and it is my right to sell my body. » and if you're against that, you're not a feminist. And this is the idea in Germany as well. Yes you're not a feminist if you say it's not allowed.

What's in the report ? Before, how was the situation with the political

parties ? We have a strong coalition with the EPP, the Conservatives and the S&D, and parts of the left but the Greens group has always fought for the « sex workers. » It wasn't to be understood among liberals. But it was possible, there were two big groups. The EPP and the S&D fought together. What's in the report ? The report says that women or people in prostitution should never be criminalised. This is always the first point : against stigmatisation, against discrimination, for access to health services and so on, for socio-economic help and so on. And women's safety must be the focus, this is the first point.

The second point is that we would like to stop the demand, to have less demand. This is clear ? How can we do it ? For example, it's forbidden to advertise. Yes, that could be a point. But the last point is the biggest point, is that we criminalise men who would like to buy and this is in this paper. And we make it clear, and it's also in the book *Last Girls First*. We make it clear in this report that the most vulnerable women in society are always the first women into prostitution. And in Europe, we have countries who give more money and countries who get more money from Europe and we have countries who give to women and countries who get women. For example, Romania gives women for prostitution, Germany receives women for prostitution. To understand, this is a European problem. It's not a German problem. In Berlin, there are no German women on the street. There are no German women with passports on the street. No, there are women from Romania, and in Romania, the most vulnerable, for example, is a Roma woman. So you can see that this is a European problem: some countries give women away and other countries take women and then, five years later, they distribute them. It's Europe's responsibility to take care of this. And then, we have a clear position that making a distinction between « normal prostitution » and « good prostitution » contributes to forced prostitution.

There is a link between normal prostitution and forced prostitution. It was clear that this is a shame and that we need to do something against that. So I think that in the report, there are many points against poverty, the lack of alternatives and so on. How is the situation in Germany ? In Germany, we have over 500 000 people in prostitution, but we only have 30 000 registered. And only these 30 000 registered have access to healthcare, health care, or other, without a legal status, without the possibility of going to a castle, without the possibility of getting money from the State, it's really a misfortune. This is really a shame. We know that this is absolutely normal for men, but it's never

the case for women.

During the COVID period, we found that the only activity for which no justification was required was visiting prostitutes. In restaurants, you had to sign in, but when a man visited a prostitute, he never had to put his behalf down. This is what we have seen in Germany. This could be the next step in Germany ? I hope so. I hope we're learning. Now we have time to evolve, this year, we have the evolution for the rules, for the « sex workers » or prostitution rules in Germany. We have now an evolution and in this evolution we could see that the liberal system in Germany does not work. It doesn't work. The system, the idea of the system, is to bring the women out of the dark situation, and bring it in a normal « work situation », but we see that this is not possible. And we see men making money, and we see young people in Germany, a young man of 16 said « I'm only waiting two years and I'm going to buy. » And this is a shame. Thank you so much.

**HÉMA SIBI**

**Director of CAP International**

Thank you for your amazing presentation and your work, we know that we can count on you also in the European Parliament, and it's really important for the feminist movement to have someone like you in the hemicycle. Now, moving on to Adama-Sira Le Blay, who is the president of the European Network of Migrant Women.

So, Adama-Sira is the president of the European Migrant Women's Network and that allows me to make a transition, because 81% of people in prostitution in legal brothels in Germany are migrant women. Which allows me to ask you how prostitution specifically targets migrant women and what are the digital trends that also target migrant women's prostitution ? Thank you.

# ADAMA-SIRA LE BLAY

## President of the European Network of Migrant Women

Thank you Héma. Thank you to all the organizers of this event, who are shedding light on an important subject. My name is Adama-Sira Le Blay, I'm co-president of the European Network of Migrant Women, and at the same time, I'm a lawyer and specialist in women's rights with the Olympe association.

It's true that when it comes to violence against women and, above all, prostitution, migrant women are in the majority. As you just mentioned, in Germany, for example, it's 80%, but they also represent 70% within the European Union and over 80% in France. So it's a real scourge. Why are migrant women over-represented, given that they are a minority of the total population ? There are many reasons.

So, for women, there are reasons that are already external, that originate in the countries of origin, but there are also reasons that can be explained once they arrive, but also in the course of their migration. The first external reason is poverty. There's a big discrepancy between poor countries and countries in the South, where the majority of these women are victims of violence. In particular, these are mainly countries in the South, such as Nigeria, Latin America and South-East Asia, where there is extreme poverty. This poverty is also multiple, and is created by climatic conditions, war conditions, but also economic and social instability. The factors are multiple. That's one of them.

The other factor is gender discrimination, which mainly affects women. We can see, for example, in Afghanistan, the status of women today, how they are reduced. But this is a universal issue. There are other factors, too : climatic factors. These days, women can't make it, they don't have access to resources or they're poor, so they have to move around too. These displacements can be internal or external to their country of origin. And these factors are also exploited, I would say, in collusion with coercive European policies on legal immigration. Because today, to get a VISA, it's very complicated. I don't know if you're aware of the current conditions for obtaining a VISA in France. Whether in France or in Europe, almost all European countries have outsourced this part of the VISA process to private companies. And these private companies are already digitalized. This requires a lot of money and a lot of restrictive criteria, which are managed by men. Even if women have

access or the means to answer these questions, they are victims of sexual violence to access this service. So prostitution can also start from there.

Now, I'm going to talk in general terms about the external reasons and the coercive migration policy at European level. It's almost impossible to get an appointment or apply for a VISA, so women are vulnerable. Criminal companies and organizations such as human traffickers exploit these very favorable situations, which make women vulnerable and fragile. As a result, these companies also use these means to recruit more easily, by saying « If you want to go there, for all these reasons, I can find you a paying job or a better life ». And all these questions based on lies, with all the difficulties associated with them, lead to human trafficking, and women are brought in by groups and become vulnerable groups.

At this level, there's another internal factor: supply and demand. On the demand side, there's overconsumption, as we've been hearing all morning. There are other factors too: what is overconsumption ? We've also talked about the consumption of sexual acts and pornography, the trivialization. In fact, these are also facts of society. There's a question of price. The people who come from these countries are vulnerable and cheap in relation to demand. So there's an abundant supply at a low price, because they're totally unprotected. They lack internal protection, for example, and also traceability. Internal protection because they're isolated, they don't know the laws, sometimes they don't speak the language, and the obstacles are multiple, diverse and complex. For example, if you manage to exploit or sell a woman, you can even go as far as murder, almost with impunity, because there's no traceability. Internal protection because they are isolated, they don't know the laws, sometimes they don't speak the language, and the obstacles are multiple, diverse and complex, not to mention the ease with which the perpetrators can go unpunished. For example, if you manage to exploit or sell a woman, you can even go as far as murder, almost with impunity, because there's no traceability. Most of these people arrive illegally. And as a result, in the event of disappearance, there is no one to make a search, neither the police nor the family, who are far away. All these factors combined mean that there is an over-representation of women - I mean migrant women, not just those from the South, as we've just seen with the German example of the exhibition or the representation of women from Eastern Europe, particularly Roman and Ukrainian women. With the outbreak of war in

Ukraine, we saw a 600% increase in searches for escort services, pornography and so on. - As a result, the majority of victims or prostitutes in Germany today are also Ukrainian women. So we're exploiting this vulnerability which is already there.

We can also add other factors that are human, as we say, we're human, we're conditioned. There are also clichés that we keep within us, colonial clichés too, because these people are objects, they're animals, and we can act, react, interact, even share information about how to achieve even more advantageous violence, so there are certain fantasies about this category of population and this category of women. That's why it's so dramatic to think today at European level that we can talk about « sex work » when we think that 80%, I'd even say 90% of victims are people who are already victims of violence and vulnerability, and it's not a question of glamour and it's not the 0, 1% who are going to talk about « sex work » to normalize, beyond all the questions of handing over the human condition which is dignity, the right to life, the right to respect, the right to freedom, the right to movement because all these rights are hindered for these people who are victims. It's not just prostitution, it's the sum total of the violence these people experience.

And we also see the impunity of the perpetrators, but it is also organized and the responsibility of the State and public policies are there. This morning, Alyssa described the inadequacy of this directive, which we've stopped talking about since this morning. We were talking, for example, about liability and the fact that you can't sue authors if the broadcast is not public. So, the definition of public access is that you don't need human intervention. This means that we can share information with tens of thousands of people, intimate non-consensual content being given. I wonder who makes the laws ? But I'm sure it's men who make laws for women. So, as long as that's still the majority, and as long as it's men who do as Mandela would say : « Those who speak for us without us are against us », it's time for women to speak up and speak out, and for us to speak for ourselves. Hence the involvement, I'm doing a political thing so that women also get involved at the political level for more reaction, responsiveness and reality on the ground.

## HÉMA SIBI

Director of CAP International

Thank you very much. Thank you very much Adama-Sira Le Blay for your presentation. We'll now move on to Françoise Brié, who is a member of the board of Amicale du Nid, one of the biggest associations in the field in France that supports people in prostitution. Françoise, France adopted abolitionist legislation in 2016, and it's an abolitionist legislation that's been much talked about. In particular, it has been hailed internationally by the various institutions we spoke about earlier. Today, we can see that the legislation also poses a number of challenges, especially in terms of implementation. Could you tell us about the progress that the legislation has made, but also about its challenges and the action taken in the field to meet the digital challenge to prostitution ?

## FRANÇOISE BRIÉ

Representative of Amicale du Nid, Vice-President of CLEF, and former GREVIO member

Yes, thank you very much and thank you to the organisers for this symposium. So just to remind you, the Amicale du Nid, a feminist association that abolishes the prostitution system, meets over 10 000 people every year. These teams support more than a thousand victims, the vast majority of whom are women and girls, in 15 départements, either by reaching out to them (in the public or digital space), or by helping them to leave prostitution and become emancipated. L'Amicale du Nid has helped 1/3 of the victims benefiting from a (Pathway out of Prostitution or PSP in France). It also runs accommodation centres and 9 programmes for minors in or at risk of prostitution.

We heard the figures this morning: at least 30 000 to 40 000 people are victims of the prostitution system, as well as 10 000 to 15 000 minors. 97% of those exploited are women and girls. The prostitutional system is part of a system of multiple forms of domination and is at the intersection of sexist, economic and racist oppression: domination by men over women, children and certain men, domination by prostitute clients, who have money, over people who need it. The first link in the

prostitution system is the buyer of sexual services. 99% of them are men who believe they have sexual urges that need to be satisfied.

Before talking about the 2016 law, I just wanted to remind you, on the basis of previous discussions, that prostitution is part of the continuum of gender-based and sexual violence and that there is a continuum between victims who are minors and victims who are adults. And yet this is an analysis that we must constantly repeat. Hence the importance of including it in any plan to combat gender-based violence, drawn up and steered by the Ministry for Equality between Women and Men via an inter-ministerial body. The purchase of the use of the human body for a sexual act desired solely by the « prostitute client » constitutes violence. Prostitution is paid rape and should therefore be criminalised. Having it recognised as such in legislation would be a definite step forward after the 2016 law.

We also note that legislative changes are still needed to criminalise the use of prostitution by minors aged between 15 and 18, in the same way as for those aged 15 and under, and to clarify the existing law. L'Amicale du Nid, along with the Mouvement du Nid and other associations, played a major role in the drafting of the abolitionist law of 2016 in France, because we helped to ensure that the voices of victims and the problems they face were taken into account by observing them on a daily basis.

We are convinced that this law is a response to the scourge of the prostitution system and sexual exploitation. And its results are conclusive wherever it is applied. I don't want to go back over the 4 pillars because you've already talked about them, but simply to say that the exploiters benefit from it : pimps and networks trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation form a veritable mafia with links to other trafficking, particularly drugs. It's not just prostitution on the one hand and sexual exploitation on the other, and it's even less dangerous for those who exploit women.

The most positive aspect of the 2016 law is obviously the fight against pimping. In 2023, the OCRTEH dismantled 53 networks, and the police and gendarmerie seized criminal assets linked to pimping offences and trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation to the tune of 10 million euros. But these funds could grow even more and be used to support initiatives to help victims rebuild their lives, and in particular to help them exit prostitution.

However, Amicale du Nid would like to highlight some of the challenges encountered in applying the law : insufficient resources - and therefore investment - to deal with the large number of adult and minor victims. In 2021, associations were already estimating that it would cost €2.4 billion over ten years to enable 40 000 people to leave prostitution. We are a long way from these figures. For example, there is a shortage of specialised accommodation centres and too many women find themselves without a solution, on 115 (which is a national number that helps homeless people) or on the street, exposed to new forms of violence and therefore revictimised. And the AFIS, the allowance paid to victims under the PSP scheme, remains low. Prevention through sex and emotional education for children - to talk about equality between women and men, respect for the body and the freedom of others, sexist stereotypes and thus prevent entry into prostitution and the purchase of sexual acts - is still being misinformed by extremist groups, which is slowing down its implementation. This is all the more necessary in view of the « glamourisation » of prostitution, including in certain films, combined with the often unlimited use of social networks by minors, with an illusion of financial autonomy and no awareness of the risks and consequences. And online pornography has become mainstream, accessible to everyone, with underage girls declaring themselves to be adults.

To come back to the pathway out of prostitution, for those of you who don't know, they were set up when the 2016 law was passed. For 24 months, victims receive a temporary residence permit and financial assistance for social integration, which are therefore vectors for professional integration. The number of PSPs is constantly increasing, with 1 747 people from 2017 to 2023, 446 in 2021 and 845 in 2023, i.e. +400 in 2 years.

However, I would say that there is one « but », and that is that this number obviously falls far short of the needs and demands if we compare it with the number of victims, at least 40 000 victims of prostitution in France, and the number of migrant girls and women concerned, as you said Adama-Sira Le Blay. By 2021, the associations were already recommending a 10-fold increase in these PSPs. So there is huge scope for improvement.

Amicale du Nid would like to draw attention to the growing obstacles to obtaining Autorisations Provisoires de Séjour (APS) - which now take up to 24 months - and access to residence permits, in a particularly tense

context marked by the rise of the far right, the spread of populist rhetoric and heated debates on immigration. The women point out that without it, they can't work and remain in a state of permanent insecurity, even facing OQTFs. As a result, women return to the street or the 115, and are revictimised and exposed to new forms of violence. However, we have found that when women access the PSP and APS, 89% have a job and 100% have obtained stable accommodation or housing. In comparison, before the PSP, 81% had no resources or resources derived from prostitution, so the PSP works when all the measures are in place.

This system suffers from territorial inequalities and prefectural practices sometimes deviate sharply from it. The violence suffered is not recognised as a legitimate criterion for obtaining an APS, in contradiction with the spirit of the 2016 law and the principles of protection for women that it embodies. Some worrying examples :

- Despite two rulings by the Lyon administrative court in November 2024, the prefecture persists and still refuses to issue residence permits following PSPs.
- In Seine-Saint-Denis, some PSPs are being terminated without any regulatory basis, undermining the rights of the people concerned and seriously hindering their path to emancipation.

And the examples go on and on. Then I would say that the last missing link, which is both the first link in the prostitution system and the keystone, is the purchaser of sexual services. Penalising prostitute clients is a decisive factor in reducing the purchase of women's bodies. In 2023, 1,160 offences were recorded in 72 out of 100 départements, which means that some French départements are not applying the law. Penalising prostitute clients remains on the margins. We are faced with a lack of political will to prosecute and convict, and on the other hand impunity reigns, particularly online, when IP addresses would be so easy to trace and the State, as has been pointed out, needs money.

I'm going to talk about l'« aller vers » (which means « going digital »). By way of introduction, a few general observations At the time of the 2016 law, street prostitution accounted for 70% of the phenomenon, and by 2020, 90% of the demand for the purchase of sexual acts will have come via the Internet or social networks. In 2023, there will be between 35 000 and 40 000 ads per day for paid sexual services in mainland France via the main websites surveyed.

The teams at Amicale du Nid, whom I would like to salute for their commitment and professionalism, are also observing online advertisements (internet and social networks) :

- The resurgence and scale of exploitation of online prostitution
- The uberisation of prostitution : advertisements are posted in response to a request and an order from the prostitute client according to his or her criteria (with a multiple-choice questionnaire), and to organise a meeting (hotel, flat, Airbnb, etc.). It's worth pointing out the indecency of the online comments made by buyers, after 'consumption', as if they were rating lambda services (hotel, etc.).
- The rise of telephone switchboards/platforms with no direct contact between buyer and victim prior to the paid sexual act
- The organisation of pimping and human trafficking networks, particularly « by plan », using dematerialised operating methods.
- During sporting and other events, women are brought in and locked up in flats or hotels in towns and cities of all sizes. They are exploited for the duration of the event and then transported elsewhere. Small networks of pimps (4/5 people) organise transport, accommodation, food, drinks, alcohol and drugs. They capture underage girls who leave extremely traumatised, often with a continuum of violence into adulthood.

At the time of the 2024 Olympic Games, Amicale du Nid conducted a digital watch to compare the number of ads for paid sex acts in the 93 département and throughout France. A general and significant increase in the online « prostitution offer » between mid-February 2024 and mid-July 2024 :

- With 42 970 offers in February compared with 50 526 in July for the whole of France, an increase of 17.6% has been observed.
- In the 2 départements hosting the most events and the Olympic Village, the number of vacancies rose by 34.2% in Paris and 27% in Seine-Saint-Denis.
- There has also been a « rejuvenation » of the 'offers » (between 55% and 62% of people aged 18-25 in 3 towns in Seine-Saint-Denis) to meet the demand from buyers, some of whom are paedophiles .

So, to meet the challenge posed by changes in the prostitution of adults and minors through online exploitation, Amicale du Nid has set up a « aller vers » service based on the experience of teams in Bouches

du Rhône, Hérault and Brittany since 2013. We prefer to use this term rather than « digital marauding ». The idea is to contact people in prostitution using their online 'ad' and/or to disseminate information and prevention messages, including risk prevention messages. The aim is therefore to reach new people who have never been accompanied, by targeting the geographical diversity and mobility of victims displaced by pimps.

In 2023, 12 283 people were contacted through 1 100 maraudes, i.e. 4 times more than in the public space, via street outreach. We can see the evolution which is obviously linked to the increase; it's also an increase of more than 75% in one year. We also noted that 59% of the people declaring themselves to be between 18 and 25 years of age, and we know that the massive use of digital technology for prostitution purposes also affects minors. There are several objectives for these digital « aller vers » services : firstly, to generate encounters by offering a space for digital dialogue to people who are often very isolated, in precarious situations or in danger. The second is to transpose the digital encounter into a physical meeting in one of Amicale du Nid's services, or in another association by referral. After all, there's no such thing as a welcome by SMS or via social networks : as with other forms of violence. It's all about developing an online presence by creating profiles on different networks and platforms and disseminating relevant information (health, rights, the association's activities and missions...). This creates a bond of trust and encourages people to seek information on our sites or others.

Another objective of the digital « aller vers » is to observe a new space for prostitution. This is how we highlight the digital use of minors, the mobility of prostitutes via the Internet (sex tours, for example), and languages. Sometimes, situations of danger are identified for reporting (Pharos). In addition to the digital « aller vers », we also associate several communication actions, all of which are also articulated with all the actions of the associations : general communication for the public on our websites to raise awareness of the reality of the prostitution system, specific communication for young minors or adults with a dedicated account and website called « My body is not for sale » and targeted communication for victims on websites and social networks with specific publications on different themes, including health.

The various stages of digital « aller vers » involve identifying generalist platforms hacked for sexual exploitation purposes, or specialized

platforms such as escorting or classified ad sites, and/or via chat rooms or discussion forums, or by maintaining a presence on social networks. The next step is to identify the victims by means of their published profiles, and to establish direct contact with them by means of personalized messages, i.e. SMS or WhatsApp, followed by further exchanges with them until an eventual face-to-face meeting.

As for the principles of intervention: confidentiality and anonymity, of course. In exchanges, the regularity of our presence in different spaces is a factor of trust and legitimacy. Next, it's important to adapt to victims' timeframes, the language used, the means of communication, their changes and the written or oral format. Finally, you need to show that the contact has been made by someone with whom the victim can relate, and you need to make it clear from the outset who you are. In terms of resources, specific, dedicated resources are needed: without regularity, training and experience, there can be no tangible results, and the frequency must be sustained, with a minimum of 2 to 3 outreaches a week, to be effective. In addition, there has to be a rotation between the different platforms. Timetables are adjusted to enable us to respond to feedback several hours after contact has been made. The work is obviously carried out in pairs, with complementary skills, and within a team, to enable debriefing with supervision and analysis of practice, as well as protection of team identities. To limit exposure to violent images, it is estimated that a maximum of 2 hours should be set aside for each marauding activity.

The approach is complex for people who don't or can't recognize themselves in the notion of prostitution, or who are under its influence. Networks and pimps are present and control the various platforms and transactions, and prevent victims from communicating. Women and young women are under surveillance and afraid of being trapped when they initiate a conversation. And several people can share the same profile, the photograph doesn't always match the person, so it's hard to know who these teams are talking to. Underage girls are difficult to spot, as they are not declared as such. Clients, particularly paedocriminals, are specifically looking for very young girls and boys online, and we know that a good number of online ads at the declared ages of 18-20 are for minors. And unfortunately, the court-ordered closure of sites such as Coco.fr (with paedo-criminals), notorious for Mazan affair, is followed by the creation of others immediately afterwards.

In conclusion, we draw on data from Amicale du Nid and the survey on the role of socio-numerical networks and technologies in the prostitution experience of minors : « Ça accélère tout » (which means « It speeds everything up »), by Catherine Bourassa-Dansereau, Mélanie Millette and Martine B. côté (Canada), digital social networks and information and communication technologies (chats, e-mails, instant messaging, sms) play an important role in the experience of young people who have been involved in prostitution. We have thus classified their organization and impact into 3 parts : before entry/at recruitment, during experiences in prostitution and at exit.

Lastly, you can consult the guide for prostitution and outreach professionals. It can be downloaded from the Amicale du Nid website. <https://amicaledunid.org/>. We hope to translate it into several languages. Thank you for your attention.

## **HÉMA SIBI**

**Director of CAP International**

Thank you very much, Françoise Brié. And finally, the last panellist, Stéphanie Caradec, who is the director of Mouvement du Nid, another very large association that supports people in prostitution on the ground in France, and who is going to talk to us about the impact of digital technology on the prostitutional system, social action and also action on the ground.

## **STÉPHANIE CARADEC**

**Director of Mouvement du Nid**

Thank you very much. Thank you all. In particular, I'd like to thank Osez le Féminisme and French Coordination for the European Women's Lobby for organizing this wonderful symposium and launching a collective advocacy campaign. Mouvement du Nid is a feminist association that works in the field and towards society, for a prostitution-free society. We are active in 27 territories in France, including the Bas-Rhin. I salute our team who are here today. Mouvement du Nid represents some 5 000 to 6 000 out-reach contacts every year, 13 000 visits to our

premises, and 1 800 people accompanied individually. We also provide training for professionals. Half of them now ask us for training on the prostitution of minors. But if they apply to us for training, all of them will be trained in the issue of the prostitution system.

We take preventive action (I'll come back to this later) in terms of sex education : we work in schools, raising awareness through a magazine called « Prostitution et Société », and now a podcast that we support, which is produced by survivors of prostitution, called « La Vie en Rouge » (which means « Life in red »), if you want to listen to it, don't hesitate. Like the 90 000 persons who listened to season 1. Season 2, which brings together survivors who didn't know about the Mouvement du Nid or this action, but heard the podcast, is currently being recorded. It will be released in the spring. We also do local and national advocacy.

Our analysis is based on the testimony of people in prostitution. It's empirically what the Mouvement du Nid's action is based on. It's important to remember that, even if they're not physically at this table today. The 2016 law for which our association fought hard, like many associations that are here today, has considerably changed the situation. We can say that in France, we probably have legislation, the legislation that, in the world, gives us the most tools to fight, to abolish prostitution, to enable us to build an egalitarian society where a sexual act cannot be priced. It's important to point this out. But the challenge of digitalization means that we need to effectively guarantee the use of these tools, and probably go even further.

When we talk about the digitalization of pimping, the uberization of pimping, what are we talking about ? Today, all stages of prostitution and pimping are carried out, in the majority of cases, online : we're talking about recruiting victims, advertisements that are placed online, putting people in touch with customers via telephone platforms, renting apartments via well-known sites, transporting victims via VTCs, buying train tickets online, the control of victims, the grip that is even stronger with psychological pressure reinforced by digital technology, financial transfers that are online, now also with crypto-currencies, right up to the almost dematerialization of the sexual act via coming. I won't go back on the datas, they've already been given, but the vast majority of prostitution today is carried out via Internet ads. Today, according to the Office Central de Rédaction, la Pression de la Traite des Etres Humains, street prostitution accounts for just 8% of

prostitution in France.

This digitalization has an even greater impact on the younger generation, minors and young adults alike. Why is this ? The pimps' recipes are the same as before : identifying vulnerable young people, vulnerable young girls - and we know how many there are in our society - who are vulnerable because they are children, teenagers who often have the common denominator of having experienced sexual violence in childhood, which, as we know, concerns a huge proportion of our young people. Before digital technology, pimps used to go around train stations and child protection homes to identify young girls who were wandering. Today, they work in the same way - and they continue to do so - but they have access to the vulnerabilities of young people, who communicate a great deal via their social networks. So, behind their phones, they can identify a multiplicity of potential victims to pimp. And they work in the same way as before, creating false friendships, seeking out young girls who may already be cyber harassed. They identify them by saying « you deserve better than that, I'm going to help you, we're going to get in touch » and there begins the psychological hold and pressure, the aggressor's strategy, which will enable them to assert their power over this new victim.

On top of that - and this is explained very well in the study "it speeds everything up" - they find themselves online in algorithmic bubbles where their peers completely trivialise the fact of selling a sexual act, of being able to have sexual acts for a price, and violent acts. So, we have all the factors required for an exponential increase in the number of victims of prostitution. We also have a multiplicity of potential pimps, since digitization makes it much easier to act. Before, it was more complicated. I'll add to that the fact that criminal policy priorities have tended to focus on drug trafficking rather than pimping in recent years, it's much less risky to go down the pimping route. There are fewer financial investments involved. It's simpler. In the past, when you had to buy a sexual act from an underage girl, you had to get in touch with her. You'd have to go out on the street, see if you could find contact and be put in touch with her. Today, you go to an ad site, put in the right criteria to identify one, and you'll probably only come across her, because even if you're in a hotel or a rented apartment, you won't come across anyone else. So we're faced with a multiplicity of pedocriminals who may have access to children.

This question of the impact of digital technology on the prostitution of

those - especially those - who use digital technology most, i.e. minors and young adults, is very important. What do we do about it ? It forces us to adapt our actions in the field, as Françoise has explained in detail with regard to digital outreach, and it should force us to adapt our actions - I'm going to come back to prevention in particular. It also obliges the State - and I'll come back to this later - to effectively guarantee the implementation of the tools available to us and probably go further than the 2016 law proposes.

Regarding prevention, there's been a lot of talk, and rightly, about the problems of digital technology and its negative impacts. We're well aware that - as I was hearing this morning - 7 000 hours of pornography on our little tools is hardly a match for it. But at the same time, we're still trying, because if we don't occupy the digital terrain with a vision of emancipatory, feminist sexuality, no one else will. That's what we've tried to do with the « Dans ma banane » tool (which means « In my bag »), which reflects our approach to prevention among young people, based on popular education. The idea is to strengthen young people's psychosocial skills, so that they are able to identify a toxic relationship, know the aggressor's strategy, and know what they want from a friendly, emotional, relational and sexual relationship, which we hope will be joy, happiness, self-esteem and self-worth. In short, to have high ambitions for our emotional and sexual relationships.

That's what we're trying to do with this tool. There are several tools in the bag, and in particular this chatbot, which is quite innovative, and which we borrowed a bit from Quebec, which puts us in touch with Jo, a person who will try to establish a hold through various subjects. We can always tell Joe what we want. The idea is to show that it's not your answers that determine whether or not you're under control. Whatever your answers to Jo, he'll continue to try to impose violence on the victims. And at the end of each discussion, we refer them to platforms, telephone hotlines. We redirect young people, because the idea is both that they identify the aggressor's strategy, that they understand it. And also that they can be referred if they self-diagnose that they have witnessed or been victims of violence. We've created an animation guide for this tool. We're currently working on a video tutorial. The idea is really that we shouldn't use the bag alone, but that it should be recovered and disseminated everywhere and we have a project with CAP International to translate it and adapt it to countries, with CAP member organizations.

Two other very important levers for changing the face of prostitution. First, you won't be surprised to learn that we're talking about massive penalization of prostitute « clients ». Since 2016, I won't go back over the figures, but when we talk about 1960 « clients » fined over the year, I think we're close to a record. In other words, we're really talking about a huge minority of « clients » who are fined. Frankly, the customers who find themselves fined are really, really unlucky. In 2023, 72 départements did not penalize any customers. And the officer of OCRTEH., write : « The room for improvement is immense ». We agree...

Does the fact that most prostitution and contact takes place on the Internet make the client invisible ? You might think that you can't penalise the « client » because you don't see them on the street any more. And it's true : those who are penalised are the majority who continue to go out on the street. But even online, they are quite visible. In the files of the 53 networks dismantled in 2023, there are all the IP addresses and telephone numbers of these « clients » who have solicited, at the very least, a sexual act, which is enough to characterise the offence. So, if we estimate, according to what the public prosecutor's offices tell me, that 400 clients have been identified per network, if we multiply this by a few figures, we're talking about more than 21 000 offences per year. If we multiply 53 networks by 400 « clients », that's over 20 000 « clients » who could be arrested every year, if only the networks were dismantled.

The problem we hear from the public prosecutors' offices is the capacity of the criminal justice response. They tell us that they can't, that they don't have the resources to charge 400 customers. Let's give them the means ! The question is : is it admissible ? Is it considered acceptable to buy a sexual act from a minor or an adult ? Is it acceptable to the people who, today, have the power to decide, to allocate financial resources, to set penal policy priorities? I think we have a minister who is very committed to this issue. On the other hand, as far as the Ministries of the Interior, Justice and Finance are concerned, we're obviously a long way off. It's really problematic.

The final lever is the question of blocking sites. For the past few years, we've had a central office for the repression of human trafficking that's very committed, that's keen to implement the 2016 law, and that's important. But this office handles less than 5% of pimping cases in France each year. And the success indicator for public policy in the fight against the prostitution system, in terms of repression, is the

number of networks dismantled. My suggestion is that we should change the indicator, and that our indicator should be the number of victims of prostitution. I've been working on this subject for 15 years, and I keep hearing that there are 40 000 victims of prostitution. And yet, for almost 10 years now, we've had a law whose aim is really to reduce the number of victims, by penalizing clients and enabling victims to get out. At some point, I think we need to change this indicator. Police officers and prosecutors need to have the desire, the wish, the determination to reduce the number of victims, to protect them, and that must be the ambition. Not to be able to boast, « I've dismantled one hell of a network ».

Yes, we need to dismantle them, of course we do, but that's not our ultimate goal. Our ultimate goal is to ensure that no more girls and women are subjected on a daily basis to commercial sex acts, which traumatize them for the rest of their lives, whether it's for one week or 20 years of prostitution, the result is the same. With the legislation we currently have, we could penalize these websites.

Moreover, Mouvement du Nid, with the help of Lorraine Questiaux, our lawyer, filed a complaint in 2016 against the site that, at the time, was the biggest advertising site, Vivastreet-2016. The investigation is over. The trial has still not taken place. That's that. Our current legislation allows us to consider that these people take advantage of and organize the prostitution of others, but we don't penalize them. And we could go further. In fact, the first version of the law that was passed in 2016, the one that was presented before the first committee of the National Assembly, included an article for the administrative blocking of sites that broadcast pimping ads. There was an outcry from all the defenders of the pseudo freedom of expression that we've been talking about since this morning, which made the MPs back down. In the end, this law obliges websites to set up a reporting system on their sites so that people can report illegal content, but they find it too expensive to do so. So they don't do it.

We're at a point where we're releasing a few million euros, and that's good news for minors in prostitution. So we're managing to find funds to support them, and that's great, it's important, it's got to be done. On the other hand, we do almost nothing to combat the impunity of their abusers. If we carry on like this and fail to take action against our « clients » and the websites that sell these ads, we'll be having the same discussion again in ten or twenty years' time and, I'll end on this, victims

don't have the time.

**HÉMA SIBI**

**Director of CAP International**

Thank you very much Stéphanie Caradec for this presentation. To conclude this panel, we're going to watch a testimonial video from a survivor of prostitution named Blessim Okoedion, who founded her own association in Italy called Weavers of Hope, and who has a message for us.

**TESTIMONIA VIDEO FROM BLESSING OKOEDION,  
SURVIVOR OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND  
PROSTITUTION, FOUNDER OF WEAVERS OF HOPE**

# FOURTH PANEL

## Current legal challenges in France and Europe : using the law to end impunity



**FLORIANE VOLT**



Director of Public and Legal Affairs  
at Fondation des Femmes



**MIREIA CRESPO**



Director for isala asbl. field association



**NATASHA MALVIYA**



Volunteer jurist for isala asbl. field association



**MURIEL FABRE-MAGNAN**

Professor of Law at Sorbonne University,  
author of L'Institution de la liberté

# FLORIANE VOLT

Director of Public and Legal Affairs at Fondation des Femmes

I think it's all in this testimony and in our discussions throughout the day. We hear about the extreme financial fragility that is exploited and which is a really fertile breeding ground for extreme violence. My name is Floriane Volt, I work at the Fondation des Femmes. At the Fondation des Femmes, we have the honor of supporting the action against the pornographic industry and the lawsuits brought by Osez le Féminisme and the three associations. This panel, entitled « Current legal challenges in France and Europe : using the law to end impunity », will lead us to reflect on and discuss recourse and how to deal with the issue of online sexual exploitation.

I'm going to start by talking to Mireia Crespo, who is the director, and Natasha Malviya, who is the advocacy coordinator for the isala field association, a Belgian association, which is being closely watched by us feminists in France, since since 2022, there has been this legislation, which makes it possible to frame or extend the employment contract regime to « sex work », with an employment contract that knows a lot of exceptions. Can the two of you tell us more about this, and in particular how you, isala - which you can perhaps introduce on this occasion - have chosen to act with regard to this new legislation ?

# MIREIA CRESPO

Director for isala asbl. field association

Thank you for organizing the symposium and for the invitation. We're delighted to be here, because it's a real opportunity for us to talk about the situation in Belgium, which is much talked about now, in our media, but which doesn't often reflect the reality on the ground. For those of you who don't know isala, we're an association that has been reaching out to prostitutes, offering holistic support for all their needs, for about 10 years now. All the observations made earlier by our colleagues from Amicale du Nid and Mouvement du Nid, we also have them, so it's a direct echo of what we see on the street, with millions of people on the street who have been out on patrols. We know that many of them have gone online, because they tell us, because online ads are multiplying. So we're also going out to meet people via websites, Internet ads,

Internet prostitution sites.

This is clearly explained by the global context, but also by the changes in legislation that Belgium has implemented since 2022, which I'll try to explain in the simplest possible way. It's important to understand that the process took place in two stages. Initial legislation in 2022, when Belgium decriminalized pimping through a reform of the Penal Code. In this reform, pimping is decriminalized through the creation of several exceptional regimes to the offence of pimping. We won't be able to go into all these exceptional regimes today, but there's one we're particularly interested in, and that's the hiring of someone in the context of prostitution. Legislators call this the « organization of prostitution ». And so, in this reform of the Penal Code, it is marked that, in certain cases which will be provided for by future laws, the organization of prostitution is legal. At the time, there was no law defining these « certain cases ». So they needed a new law, which arrived in 2024. This was the sex work Contract Law, which created a salaried status in prostitution and therefore, an employer status for pimps. Since December 2024, pimps have been able to set up a company to hire prostitutes.

So, obviously, in order to go all the way with this notion of prostitution as a job like any other, they needed to diminish or attenuate the effects of the subordinate relationship, which is, after all, the basis of an employment contract. I'll give you a few examples of the provisions in the law that serve to attenuate these links of subordination. For example, the prostitute has the right to « refuse any act, at any time, without being able to be sanctioned in any way », in other words, no reduction in salary. She can refuse more than 10 acts in 6 months. So, if she refuses « 10 acts in 6 months, the pimp or prostitute will be able to call on a national service which will assess the conditions under which her work is carried out ». What happens if she refuses more than 10 acts in 6 months ? It's clear that this is completely out of touch with the reality of prostitution.

We mobilized enormously to prevent this law from being passed. With over 20 organizations, we did a lot of lobbying, but the law was passed in May and came into force in December. And so, as a last resort, and this is the big news for us today, we have lodged an appeal with the Belgian Constitutional Court, with 8 other associations, both Belgian and non-Belgian, and with the support of survivors of prostitution. So this was also a big first for us, because for the first time, the women

survivors accompanied by isala were able to testify, along with prostitution survivor Pascale Rouges.

We're here because we need the support of you, international associations. What is happening in Belgium will have a future impact in neighboring countries, in Europe, for countries that are not abolitionist, they will be able to rely on what is happening in Belgium to change these legal cases.

So, why do we need your help ? We're going to publish an opinion piece next week on the introduction of the appeal. We need your signatures, as many as possible. If your association might be interested in signing, please come and see us, because we need to take up this media space. Today, it's clearly not us who have it. And we know that there's a lot of interest in the international media on this question of Belgium. So we need as many signatures as possible. We also have a brochure which attacks the myth of this law and all the misconceptions that have been spread about it. So come and see us if you're interested. This brochure will help you answer these questions. It's a tool for us in Belgium, but it's also a tool for you in your own countries.

I'll hand over to Natasha, who will talk a little about the arguments we'd like to see introduced.

## **NATASHA MALVIYA**

**Volunteer jurist for isala asbl. field association**

Yes, thank you. I also wanted to clarify why we wrote these 8 myths, it's because in Belgium, there's really already an atmosphere that's not at all, shall we say, in our direction. There are a lot of associations, even trade unions, that aren't really aligned with us. And we know that they are lobbying the government in defense of the law, since we've just received their response briefs. There's a whole second part to this appeal that we'll be working on over the next 30 days. This will be our second opportunity to challenge the constitutionality of the law.

As far as the arguments are concerned, there are three main ones. The first is the violation of the protection of human dignity, the right to respect for physical integrity and individual autonomy. Knowing that the Belgian constitution protects the right to lead a life in keeping with

human dignity, and respect for private or family life, which includes the physical and moral integrity of the person, we initially, in the appeal, gave a lot of documentation showing that physical and moral integrity is affected by prostitution, and in particular by pimping.

The second argument is the violation of the right to work and to fair working conditions, because one of the declensions of the right to human dignity in the Belgian constitution is the right to fair working conditions. So we went to see how labor law, conceptually opposes the idea of prostitution as salaried work. There's the question of protection against sexual harassment, because Belgian law obviously protects all employees against sexual harassment, which is defined in particular as unwanted behavior with a sexual connotation which has the effect of undermining the dignity of the person. And so, obviously, this overlaps with the definition of sex work, which is defined as such in the law. As such, prostitutes cannot be protected against harassment.

The second point is the right of workers to safety and to the protection of their physical integrity, and it is an employer's obligation to guarantee the safety and integrity of employees. Obviously, as we demonstrated in our motion brief, this is clearly impossible. Next comes the right to equitable remuneration. In this case, our main concern was that wages should not depend on the activities undertaken by the employee - they should not be paid on a performance-by-performance basis. Otherwise, it's not salaried work. And so, we've said that, in practice, this will probably not be respected at all because a pimp isn't going to have someone on his premises for a period of time and pay him when no act of prostitution is being performed. So we also linked this to the possibility of refusing acts, because the question of refusal shows just how unrealistic the law is, because the law stipulates that the salaried person who would be the prostitute could refuse acts. We also explained that the 10 refusals are totally utopian, because it would have to be possible to refuse at any time, and so we would very quickly reach 10 refusals without really knowing what the consequences of these refusals would be, since this is not specified by the law which talk of a king's department intervening to ensure well-being in the workplace.

And then there's the question of subordination. If there is a subordinate relationship in prostitution, can we really talk about consent ? Clearly, we don't think so, as we've explained. And also, the work material : the employeur is supposed to provide the work material. In this case, it

would be the person's body. So we said it was contrary to human dignity.

Third major argument : violation of the right to equality between women and men and non-discrimination between women and men. In fact, the law does not refer to women and men at all, but rather to « sex workers » in the masculine form. The Belgian Constitutional Court has already ruled that you can't treat people in the same way who, because of their different characteristics, are in different situations. We've used this to say that since the overwhelming majority of prostitutes are women, it constitutes discrimination against women. We're going to go all the way with this, and we need your help and support.

## **FLORIANE VOLT**

**Director of Public and Legal Affairs at Fondation des Femmes**

Thank you very much. This link is interesting, because this argument - that of a text which, in reality, concerns almost exclusively women - reminds me of a thought Lorraine Questiaux had raised in a previous judicial action before the French Constitutional Supreme Court (Conseil constitutionnel).

# MURIEL FABRE—MAGNAN

Professor of Law at Sorbonne University, author of  
L'Institution de la liberté

Thank you very much for this invitation.

I'm really embarrassed that you've quoted me so much, because it's actually me who is admiring all the people we've heard from throughout the day who are fighting violence against women everyday. What I heard almost made me despair of the law, and I kept repeating to myself what I say to my first-year students, which is that the law may be weak, it may have its faults, but it is the only non-violent weapon available to the weak and the dominated.

I'm delighted to be with you, to be among people who see, who see what's going on, and therefore who look - because to see you must first look - and then who hear. You know what Simone Weil said about the cry of people who can no longer cry out because they are in « a state of dull, uninterrupted groaning, a silent cry that rings out only in the secret of the heart ». You all have the gift of seeing, hearing and listening, and it's not so widespread.

I'll concentrate here on a critique of some of the case law of the European Court of Human Rights, since the European Convention on Human Rights is one of the main legal instruments available after all,

and I'll also try to provide some tools, in my very modest and humble way, to try and deconstruct the rhetoric that constantly extols what leads to the servitude of women. In particular, to stop being trapped by words, especially those of « consent » and « freedom », which requires a certain theoretical effort.

The starting point was the « Pretty v United Kingdom » case in 2002, because it was in this case that the European Court of Human Rights, believing it was doing the right thing - I'm not going to get into psychology, though, I'm just trying to show the concrete theoretical flaws in its case law - established for the first time that a right to self-determination could be deduced from Article 8 of the Convention on the Protection of Private and Family Life, in a case involving assisted suicide. It then deduced, in the catastrophic 2005 case of « KA and AD », which was a case of torture and barbarism in a sexual context (and not at all of sadomasochism - sadomasochism is undoubtedly part of sexual freedom, but in this case it was torture and barbarism in a sexual context), that personal autonomy implies the « ability of each person to pursue his own life as he sees fit ». This assertion seems basic and obvious, but the problem arises from the fact that the Court identifies the right of each person to lead his or her life as he or she sees fit with the expression of the person's consent. It is this identification and confusion of the three concepts of « freedom », « personal autonomy » and « consent » that needs to be deconstructed. I will do this by setting out three theses.

First thesis : the traps or illusions of « consent ». I'm not going to repeat what has been said and said very well all day, but simply add a few points which I think would help to clarify the issue. It is easy to see why the European Court of Human Rights is uncomfortable in the prostitution case of 20 July 2024. It says : « All right, the Court has already emphasised that forced prostitution is not acceptable ». Then it wonders what « forced » means and refuses to give a ruling. Why did it refuse ? The Court says « the question of whether prostitution can be freely consented to or whether it is always the result of coercion, even if only as a result of socio-economic conditions, is controversial, but the Court decided not to enter into this debate because the outcome was not decisive ». Why is the Court uncomfortable ? It's because there's actually an important distinction to be made about consent that I don't think I've heard today. The difficulty is that, in cases where people say they consent, the law is at a loss. If the person says that they do not consent or that they regret having consented,

then the law has instruments through the requirements of free and informed consent, and these instruments have even been enhanced, since 2016, by the fact that the violence that compels consent can now be an abuse of dependence. However, these instruments cannot be used when the person says that they consent, for example because they are still in a state of dependency. This is why videotaping consent will be useless: it will in no way guarantee the freedom of consent and will even be counterproductive because it will be more difficult for the victim to argue afterwards that their consent was in fact vitiated. Someone said earlier : « Only yes means yes », but I believe that saying « yes » does not always mean that the person is genuinely consenting. The problem is that - and this is a limitation of the law - in a democratic and liberal society - and it is obviously desirable to remain in a democratic and liberal society - when a woman says she consents it is not possible to question her consent. This is why it is so important to convince women to dare to say that they have not consented or that they have consented under the influence of error, coercion or deception (fraud). But when they say they consent, the notion of « free and informed consent » will be useless, because in reality, everyone will interpret consent according to their own prejudices, and it will be prejudice against prejudice. Let me take a polemical example : the headscarf. Those who are against the headscarf will say that young women never consent and those who are for the headscarf will say that they always and always consent. The reality is somewhere in the middle, but it's impossible to know, so it's an undecidable question for which the law has no instrument : when a woman says « I consent », society isn't going to make her take a lie detector test. This is a limit of the law that must be accepted in a liberal and democratic society.

This is why - and this is my second thesis - consent is a necessary condition of freedom in a democratic and liberal society, but it cannot be a sufficient condition to characterise freedom and free choice.

This is precisely where what I call, in my book on L'institution de la liberté (which means « the institution of freedom », the « reversal of human rights » has occurred, because human rights are used in all these cases we have been talking about, no longer to defend the rights set out in the European Convention on Human Rights but, on the contrary, to justify infringing them. This is why a deconstruction effort is necessary. Article 8, which protects individual freedom and personal autonomy, is used to admit and justify torture, or humiliating and degrading acts against women. From then on, everything can

potentially be turned on its head, because people will always be found to consent to anything. It's important to emphasise this reversal produced by the identification of freedom with consent; those who consent are not just fragile or unconscious people. It's perfectly rational for a woman who doesn't have enough to feed her family to prostitute herself or agree to GPA. That's why it's important to show the impasses from a rhetorical and theoretical point of view. Because if consent erases the illegality of all acts, we need to quote Sade, who said that the most sexually pleasurable act is death. So should a death consented to in a sexual context be legitimised ? Since we accept, in « KA and AD », all the tortures and barbarities - I'm not going to go through the list again, but we're talking about cuts on a woman's body and her sex being sewn up - should we accept it because it's in a sexual context and because the woman hasn't protested ? And if it's in the domain of art, of pornography, we need to read Houellebecq who, in *La Carte et le Territoire*, portrays the death of the artist, which is dismembered in bits and pieces : death as a work of art. These borderline and radical cases clearly show that we cannot be satisfied with consent to validate acts. The law cannot simultaneously guarantee freedom and validate consent to its loss. If we call consent to the loss of freedom « freedom », then everything turns on its head and everything is lost.

The entire history of labour law and the entire history of consumer law have consisted, from a technical point of view, of saying that the employee's consent was not enough. The whole of labour law is built on this idea, and the whole contemporary deterioration of labour law has been achieved by giving more and more legal scope to the employee's consent. The European Court of Human Rights saw this clearly in 1971, in the so-called vagrancy case : vagrants had spontaneously come to take shelter in a prison and had been prosecuted for vagrancy. The Court said that « the right to liberty is of too great importance in a democratic society for a person to lose the benefit of its protection merely because he becomes a prisoner ». It should also be said that women's freedom is too important in a democratic society for their consent to lose that freedom to be validated ; this is exactly the same argument.

But here too, we have to be careful, because certain vocabulary can be turned, such as the contemporary disqualification of « paternalism » on the grounds that we are protecting people against themselves, and that protecting women against themselves is paternalism. But this is a

ruse, because it is not against themselves that we are protecting women, but against all those men who exploit and martyr them. It is truly perverse to claim that this is protecting women from themselves.

My third and final thesis concerns the need to draw up objective limits. On prostitution, for example, to pick up on the last debate. Prostitution is not work, and it does not fall within the definition of a contract of employment. In the Civil Code, an employment contract is a provision of service, in other words what is known as an « obligation to do ». There are three types of obligation in civil law : the obligation to do something, the obligation to give in the Latin sense of *dare*, i.e. the obligation to transfer ownership. And then, in the middle, there is what Romanists call *praestare*, i.e. conferring a right to use or enjoy something, as in a loan or lease, for example. Prostitution, however, is not an obligation to do, but a right of use and enjoyment over the body, and is therefore not a contract of employment. This objective analysis also applies, of course, to gestational surrogacy. The right conferred over women's bodies by these contracts is a right of use and enjoyment (*usus* and *fructus*) that traditionally could only be accorded over things. The resulting commodification of women is an objective analysis.

There are many possible objective limits. The main point on which the European Court of Human Rights should urgently reverse its case law is the rule laid down in the « KA and AD » case cited above. It stated that « criminal law cannot interfere in the area of consensual sexual practices, which are a matter for the free will of individuals ». Criminal law is thus excluded from this issue ! Criminal law, in other words the prohibition on assault and battery, torture, barbarity and murder. A right to physical and mental integrity should also be affirmed and protected much more seriously, as it is in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

I'll end by paraphrasing a quote from Jaurès, who asked himself : « Is man condemned to understand freedom only as the ability to exploit other men ? » Are we condemned to understand women's freedom only as the authorisation given to men to exploit them ?

## **ALYSSA AHRABARE**

**President of the French Coordination for the European Women's Lobby (CLEF)**

Thank you very much for your presentations. Very quickly, it's a question for Muriel and also with regard to the appeal. I work for the European Network of Migrant Women and we're co-applicants. And I'm interested in what you mentioned, this obligation to do something. How do you legally defend the fact that prostitution isn't an obligation of doing ? Because that's the spirit of the law : in fact, it's a service. The law doesn't recognize that, in the context of this employment contract, the woman is an object and therefore that it's an obligation of use. So, could you elaborate on this, perhaps, in a few words ?

## **MURIEL FABRE-MAGNAN**

**Professor of Law at Sorbonne University, author of L'Institution de la liberté**

There are two types of rights. Personal rights and real rights. A personal right is a right against a person. For example, if someone owes me 1 000 euros, I have a claim, which is a personal right. A real right, which comes from the Latin *res* meaning thing, is a direct right conferred on a thing: it may be a right of use (*usus*), of enjoyment, i.e. the right to obtain the fruits of the thing (*fructus*) or the right to dispose of the thing (*abusus*). In leasing, the lessor grants the lessee a real right to use and enjoy the property. In prostitution, however, the client acquires a direct right over the prostitute's body; he has the right to touch her, to penetrate her, and so on. Prostitution could therefore also fall within the definition of slavery. The Slavery Convention of 25 September 1926 defines slavery as « the status or condition of an individual over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised ». As use and enjoyment are attributes of the right of ownership, prostitution, which confers on clients this type of right over a woman's body, is a form of slavery : a woman's body becomes a thing over which one can acquire the same rights as in a lease or rental contract. The words of the law give a certain objectivity to the analysis of the situation. They need to be taken seriously and explored.

The difficulty with dignity is that if it is used as a human right, the result is what the Court of Justice of the EU did in the Viking and Laval cases, i.e. it has to be weighed against other fundamental rights. And the other fundamental rights of the EU are the free movement of capital and goods. That is why I prefer to stick to what the Constitutional Council has said, namely that this is a principle of constitutional value to be invoked only when no other principle can be. Having said that, when it's a question, as you have done, of explaining why certain practices are contrary to human dignity, that's fine.

## **NATASHA MALVIYA**

**Volunteer jurist for isala asbl. field association**

Yes, I wanted to comment on that. That's what we tried to say in the appeal by talking about the fact that the material of work is the human body, but we didn't talk about real rights as such. It's an argument I've often used in a personal capacity, but I think there are a lot of people who think that prostitution isn't just that the person is passive, it's more that there's an interaction, an activity on the part of the prostitute.

There's an imaginary world, in fact, that makes this an argument that's sometimes a little contested. And we say, yes, but we have the right to refuse certain things or even to choose. How do you answer that ?

## **MURIEL FABRE—MAGNAN**

**Professor of Law at Sorbonne University, author of L'Institution de la liberté**

The objective analysis of the contract consists in analysing the obligation to which the debtor is committed. Even if there is interaction, it is difficult to dispute that prostitution is a use of a woman's body. The client acquires this right to use and enjoy the body of another, even if the prostitute is a person and therefore has interactions (unless she is sedated).

## FLORIANE VOLT

Director of Public and Legal Affairs at Fondation des Femmes

I have one big flaw, which is that I'm originally a public law lawyer. As a result, when I listen to you, I can't stop thinking about this famous french case law Commune de Morsang sur orge regarding the interpretation of human dignity. The reality is that in French law, dignity has a value that is not the same in European law and at the ECHR. When I listen to you, I say to myself that dignity and public order are no longer relevant arguments when we're talking about sexual exploitation ?

## MURIEL FABRE—MAGNAN

Professor of Law at Sorbonne University, author of  
*L'Institution de la liberté*

Dignity is a good argument, especially as it actually permeates a whole series of fundamental human rights, including the prohibition of inhuman and degrading treatment. Regarding the dwarf-throwing case, it seems to me to have been very badly interpreted legally, because it has nothing to do with consent. The debate has been framed in terms of consent because today that has become the only legal criterion for the legitimacy of acts. I recall the dwarf-throwing case : in a discotheque, a game had been organised to throw a dwarf, and the mayor banned it on the behalf of public order resulting from this attack on human dignity. A lot of criticism was levelled at the fact that the dwarf's consent to be thrown in this way had not been respected, that dignity was being used as a liberticidal concept, especially as the dwarf maintained that he had no other way of earning a living. However, this case should not have been interpreted at all in terms of consent. Imagine that it had been a launch - forgive me because I'm from a generation where we're very reluctant to use these words as categories - of a « black », a « Jew », a « Muslim » or even a woman, and that of course people in these categories had been found to consent. The debate would never have been posed in terms of consent, but in terms of discrimination for which consent is irrelevant, in the same way that consent has never prevented a breach of the peace from being identified.

The concept of « dignity » can of course be used to mean a duty to respect others. This is what the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union does, enshrining it in the first article on dignity. But it goes on to explain that dignity has a special status because it is not just a fundamental right in itself, 'but constitutes the very basis of fundamental rights'. So we must insist on this dual qualification, and dignity can of course be used as a fundamental right within the meaning of the EU Charter.

## **FLORIANE VOLT**

**Director of Public and Legal Affairs at Fondation des Femmes**

I'm going to come back to the 2022 law you mentioned, which you opposed. What arguments did you put forward? Because when you listen to Lorraine, these are the same debates that are obviously running through French society. We know just how essential it is to adopt an international approach to these issues, as the victories of some can lead to others, and vice-versa. What arguments did you face in Belgium ? Can you tell us in a few words how the adoption of this law went from the point of view of feminist associations ?

## **MIREIA CRESPO**

**Director for isala asbl. field association**

The reform of the penal code in 2022 is a reform that touches on many different subjects, so it's the reform that introduces incest into the penal codes in Belgium, which also modified the provisions. They called it the reform of the sexual penal code, because it affected sexual offences, and so it was already very complicated for us, because we had a good number of feminist associations who had pleaded for this reform, so it wasn't easy. So the legislators used several arguments to push for these changes in the law, firstly that the penal codes needed to be dusted off, so the codes did in fact reflect the 1949 convention. But then there were some words, like « debauchery », which it was a bit of a consensus that these were words that needed to be removed. But then, their main argument was that a good proportion of prostitutes in Belgium were not allowed to work as prostitutes because prostitution was a criminal offence. This was a false argument, so they based

themselves on something that was false, and so it was really scandalous. The procedure was really scandalous because they based themselves on things that aren't true. Even before 2022, a prostitute who wanted to engage in this activity could do so legally via the statutes of independence. And so, obviously, not many did, just as not many do now either.

So those were the arguments, the beginnings of the discussions. We also mobilized a lot with associations. We managed to slow down the process because it all started, I think, at the beginning of 2021, so it took a year and a half in fact, thanks to the fact that we managed to slow down the process, in particular by asking that the Communist associations be heard, because this was already something that wasn't envisaged by the governments at the time. You should know that in the 2024 law, we weren't auditioned either, and there, too, it was a deliberate choice, explained in the same words, by the minister who, for the moment, has made the political choice not to consult the feminist associations opposed to the law. It's assumed that, when it comes to questions of prostitution, feminist associations are not legitimate.

I'd like to add something about this 2022 law, because we're focusing on the organization of prostitution, and we can talk about rigor here, because they've phrased it any way they like. But the organization of prostitution, they refer to hiring. This is just one of the exceptions to the offence of pimping. The second exception is abnormal advantage, a concept which is also extremely controversial in Belgium, but which they have decided to keep. So what is the abnormal advantage ? Basically, pimping is punishable only in cases of abnormal advantage, so it's a concept that already existed before. Before 2022, it only concerned pimping of real estate.

After 2022, they extended this more widely. In fact, you could even say that if we win these appeals, in fact the question of abnormal advantage remains in the Penal Code, and we had to do it. And so in 2022, this notion of abnormal advantage will be extended, we could in fact interpret in the Penal Code that it really does extend to all pimping offences.

In fact, with these appeals, we've tackled a very small part of the problems in Belgium. It's important to understand that, in fact, the situation is terrible.

We lodged the appeal on December 6 last year, so that left about 30 days to receive briefs.

## **NATASHA MALVIYA**

**Volunteer jurist for isala asbl. field association**

There are other associations that support this law, also with the government, and in fact, so it was more like 45 days than 30 days but anyway. For the second part of the procedure, the deadline hasn't yet started, if I'm not out of date with my emails, but we already have the documents we're going to have to contradict. So, in a few days' time, the 30-day period will start to run, and then we'll have 30 days to respond to these two briefs, which are already quite substantial, and after that, our opponents will be able to respond again, and after that there'll be a year to give a final decision, so we can wait for the decision in 2026, yes.

## **MIREIA CRESPO**

**Director for isala asbl. field association**

The brief from the associations, i.e. the regulatory associations that responded in coalition with other associations, 36 associations joined in. There are 9 of us. I wanted to say that there are associations of sex workers from several countries, including New Zealand, Australia, the Netherlands and Germany, as well as trans-European associations working on the fight for equality in Europe.

## **ALYSSA AHRABARE**

**President of the French Coordination for the European Women's Lobby (CLEF)**

The Fédération Internationale des Planning Familiaux (International Planned Parenthood Federation) defends the fact that prostitution can be carried out under an employment contract. I think it's worth pointing out, because here in France people don't know it too well, but IPPF, the

Fédération Internationale des Planning Familiaux, is one of the leading forces against abolitionism in Europe and also against the fight against pornography - all the things we've been talking about today, so it's perhaps good to know.

## **SOMEONE IN THE AUDIENCE**

As the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe rejected this famous report, which was based on Belgian law, I don't know if you can use it, because there must have been arguments between parliamentarians to bury this report ?

## **MIREIA CRESPO**

Director for isala asbl. field association

Well, maybe we can use it. It's true that it's a report to which we contributed, and there are some false quotes reflected from isala and the European Women's Lobby.

## **NATASHA MALVIYA**

Volunteer jurist for isala asbl. field association

Just to clarify, there are nine associations on our side, all Belgian, and we couldn't have associations that were in other countries, so that's why the others had the opportunity to join, but as applicants, we couldn't be associations that were registered in other countries.

## **MURIEL FABRE—MAGNAN**

Professor of Law at Sorbonne University, author of  
*L’Institution de la liberté*

Why don’t you use the New York Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is directly applicable in French law and which states that in all cases where a minor is concerned, the interests of the child take precedence ? There is no such balance here, the interests of the child must take priority. Would judges dare to argue and write that these practices are in the best interests of the child ?

## **ALYSSA AHRABARE**

President of the French Coordination for the European  
Women’s Lobby (CLEF)

We’d like to extend our warmest thanks to the Raja Foundation, which has co-financed this symposium and enabled us to be here together today. And so I’d like to give the floor to Alexandra to say a few words about the Foundation.

# CLOSING REMARKS AND CALL TO ACTION ▶



**CÉLINE PIQUES**

Writer of the High Council for Equality's report  
on pornocriminality,  
representative of Osez le Féminisme



**ALIÉNOR LAURENT**

Président of Osez le Féminisme



**MAÏNA CERNIAWSKY**

Spokeswoman of Osez le Féminisme



**ALEXANDRA DETHYRE**

Project Manager of the RAJA Foundation

# ALEXANDRA DETHYRE

## Project Manager of the RAJA Foundation

Hello everyone. First of all, congratulations to Osez le Féminisme and the French Coordination for the European Women's Lobby for organising this conference on behalf of the Foundation. I don't know if you're all familiar with the Foundation, which was set up in 2006 by Danièle Marcovici, who is CEO of the Raja Group, Europe's leading supplier of equipment and packaging to businesses.

So on paper, I admit, we're a long way from the theme that interests us today, but we have a CEO who is openly feminist, who declares herself as such in every interview, so it's worth noting because it's very rare. In fact, it was conducted in 2006, so it was 19 years ago in the long history of philanthropy. 19 years was yesterday, so it's absolutely nothing. In 2006, there was no foundation in France dedicated to women's rights, so she decided to lead the way and created the first foundation in France for women's rights. So things have changed since then, and we're delighted about that. Of course, Fondation des femmes, Chanel, L'Oréal and many other organisations have come on board and we're working with them, but the fact remains - and unfortunately this is the case in France as well as at European and international level - that women's rights are the poor cousins of philanthropy.

So I'm not talking about online sexual exploitation at all, but I do want to talk about why we funded this event and why it was essential for us to be here today. Apart from the fact that women's rights are the poor relations of philanthropy, there are ultra-conservative philanthropists who are billionaires and who finance actions in Europe against women's rights, against the rights of humanity.

I'm going to talk to you about the study by the Centre of the European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights, a Belgian association that studied 54 of these philanthropic organisations between 2009 and 2018, so we're talking about a 10-year period. And they managed to show that these 54 philanthropic organisations had invested 700 million dollars in Europe against women's rights. This is colossal, especially since 60% of this funding in 2019 and 2018 came from the European Union, a quarter from Russia and the rest from the United States. We, the Raja-Marcovici Foundation, are a partner in the re-release of this study, which will come out next month in March 2025,

covering the years 2018-2022. So we're looking at 5 years and the preliminary results over 5 years are that this ultraconservative funding amounts to 800 million dollars. This means that it has more than doubled, it has quadrupled with Viktor Orban at the helm, in Hungary and with Trump, and what is happening in Russia at the moment, we have no doubt that the 3rd edition of this study is going to be even more worrying.

So that's why we're here, we're really keen to support initiatives even more, when they're European, when they're multi-stakeholder, because we know that's how it works. We ourselves are part of coalitions at French level with other partners, we launched the coalition for feminist philanthropy at European level, we are part of AGE, the Alliance for Gender Equality in Europe, and we know that working in partnership, in collaboration, is the way to advance our fights. So it was very, very important to be here with you and with French Coordination for European Women's Lobby and Osez le Féminisme today. So thank you to everyone who was involved, and above all we're really looking forward to seeing the prospects for this Strasbourg appeal, and congratulations to you all.

## CÉLINE PIQUES

Writer of the High Council for Equality's report on  
pornocriminality, representative of Osez le Féminisme

Thank you all for coming in such large numbers. I hope this is just the beginning of a great collective adventure. The stakes are high. We've said the right things. Now we're going to have to take action and ensure that this Strasbourg appeal is just the starting point for a European mobilization that will, I hope, be a landmark in finally putting an end to the impunity of online violence.

## MAÏNA CERNIAWSKY

Spokeswoman of Osez le Féminisme

Just to let you know, we will be in New York for the Commission on the Status of Women and if your associations or if you are there, do not

hesitate to come and see so we can cheat about what we have done.

## **ALIÉNOR LAURENT**

### **Président of Osez le Féminisme**

Thank you all very much for being here. I'm also going to make a very brief concluding remark. Just to remind you that Osez le Féminisme is an advocacy association, as I think you'll have noticed by now, with some 1 500 members and 15 local branches in every département. Osez le Féminisme became Osez le Féminisme thanks to its campaigns to mobilize the general public. So today was more of a professional day on which we've been working hard, and our real vocation is to be able to change mentalities, work on consumer issues and carry out public campaigns that will be coming very soon. And I'd like to take this opportunity to invite you to our next Feminist Camp, which will take place in the autumn and will be based on the issue of sexuality. So come along if you'd like to continue discussing with us and also work in the field.

**We would like to extend our sincere thanks to all the teams who contributed directly or indirectly to the success of this event.**

**OSEZ  
LE FÉMINISME**



La Coordination Française