

Anti-hate speech on social media: insights from a survey of trans content creators across Europe

BRIEFING NOTE

Summary

Recently adopted standards like the EU's Digital Services Act and the EU Revised Code of Conduct on Hate Speech are meant to offer protection against hate speech online – but are they working in practice? In 2025, TGEU – Trans Europe and Central Asia and the Institute for Journalism and Social Change conducted a multi-lingual online survey of trans content creators from across Europe to understand their experiences of hateful and discriminatory content on social media. This document, after a brief introduction and background section, summarises the methods and presents the results of this project. The headline results include that trans content creators in 16 countries described experiencing hateful and discriminatory speech on a regular basis – even daily – and that none of them said social media platforms were taking enough action on this.

Introduction

Trans creators shape digital culture. But visibility comes at a cost. Trans users and content creators across the Council of Europe region routinely face hate speech, coordinated abuse, misgendering, and platform bias at alarmingly high rates.

In its 2024 Annual Review, ILGA-Europe described how "transphobic speech continues to be on the rise" across the region (online as well as offline), intensifying around parliamentary debates, elections and LGBTQI events.¹ In the UK, a 2021 Office of Communications report found that 1 in 3 people spotted hate speech in online video

¹ ILGA-Europe, Annual Review 2024, <https://www.ilga-europe.org/report/annual-review-2024/>

platforms and 25% observed hateful content directed against trans people.² However, there are still research gaps that could be filled to support advocacy for trans rights.

European institutions have made taken some steps to address hate speech online, including:

- The European Union (EU)'s 2016 Code of Conduct on Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online, which requires social media platforms to have clear and effective processes to review and remove hateful content. Several big platforms have signed up to this code. However, compliance and enforcement remains low.
- The EU's Digital Services Act (DSA), which came into effect in 2024. It requires Very Large Online Platforms³ to disclose algorithms, processes and platform data to researchers and civil society for independent investigations. Users are also empowered to report content, ask for a second review, and initiate out-of-court dispute settlement.⁴ The EU Commission is responsible for supervising platforms under this act and has already begun investigations for non-compliance.⁵

To make online spaces safer for trans people, it is essential to understand the prevalence and scale of hate speech targeting trans social media users; what kind of hate speech is being observed; where it comes from and how it spreads online; and how social media platforms are responding to such hateful conduct. To initiate an investigation into these questions, TGEU and IJSC developed a two-step process: first, an online survey of trans content creators and second, testing a social media content analysis in one language (English) and one platform based on the survey results. This briefing summarises the results of the survey of online trans content creators.

Methods

In March 2025, TGEU and IJSC launched an online survey of trans content creators in Europe to understand how trans people experience hate speech online, especially the language and patterns that often go unnoticed, and ensure that trans voices shape and inform this research. As far as we know, this is the first time such a survey has been conducted. For the purposes of the survey ('Your Voice Matters: Survey on Online Hate

² <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-56513000>

³ Those with over 45 million monthly active users

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_23_2413

⁵ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/list-designated-vlops-and-vloses>

Speech Against Trans People’), hate speech was described as follows (with this definition included in the survey text):

Hate speech is when someone attacks, threatens, or insults you because of your identity. It can include slurs, threats, harassment, or messages that deny your right to exist. The Council of Europe Committee of Ministers defines it as: Hate speech is understood as all types of expression that incite, promote, spread or justify violence, hatred or discrimination against a person or group of persons, or that denigrates them, by reason of their real or attributed personal characteristics or status such as “race”, colour, language, religion, nationality, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, sex, gender identity and sexual orientation.⁶

The survey asked respondents to identify the country they live in and the social media platforms they use to share content and engage with followers, as well as:

- What types of online hate speech targeting your gender identity or related content have you experienced in the last 12 months?
- Can you share examples of the hate speech you have experienced, including specific words, phrases, or hashtags – in any language?
- Are there specific topics or types of posts where you notice more hate?
- How often do you experience hate speech targeting your gender identity or related content?
- Who was behind the hate speech you experienced? (If known)
- Was it the same person/group targeting you more than once? (If known)

The survey also asked about experiences reporting hate speech and whether respondents reported hate speech they experience, and to whom, and what, if any response they received. Further, it asked how experiencing hate speech has impacted respondents’ activity online, and finally whether respondents had anything else to share on their experiences or how they think platforms and regulators should respond to hate speech.

The survey was produced and translated into 7 languages (Russian, Polish, French, German, Italian and Spanish) and sent directly to 189 openly trans content creators online in the relevant languages. These creators were selected because they publicly self-identify as trans, actively engage with content on platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Twitch, and have public-facing profiles; meaning they are more likely to encounter the forms of online

⁶ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/freedom-expression/hate-speech>

hate this research seeks to document. The survey was also posted on social media by TGEU and IJSC and a webinar was organised at a mid-point in June 2025 to generate additional interest in the survey and generate more responses.

While the sample spans a range of follower sizes, from niche micro-creators to those with audiences in the millions, the emphasis was on lived experience, not popularity. An online event with some survey respondents was also held to gather more detailed insights and encourage further participation.

This approach prioritised visibility and language diversity, but also comes with limitations. The sample is not representative of all trans people online, as it skews toward those who are publicly visible and active, and may underrepresent trans individuals in countries with lower internet access, anti-LGBTQI legislation and anti-trans public opinions, or high levels of surveillance.

Our ability to reach some creators was also constrained by the lack of direct contact channels: many could only be reached via DMs, which are often filtered or lost in platform messaging systems, and some may have hesitated to engage due to trust concerns or previous negative experiences.

Results

We received 30 responses from trans people in 16 countries in the Council of Europe region (Azerbaijan, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, Northern Cyprus, Norway, Poland, Romania, Switzerland, Ukraine) in 10 languages. While the total number of responses is small, the quality was high. Respondents ranged from emerging creators to established influencers.

Key findings

- Hate speech was reported by 100% of trans content creators who responded to the survey. Not one indicated they had avoided online hate. 35% reported experiencing hate speech daily, while 53% said they received it weekly.

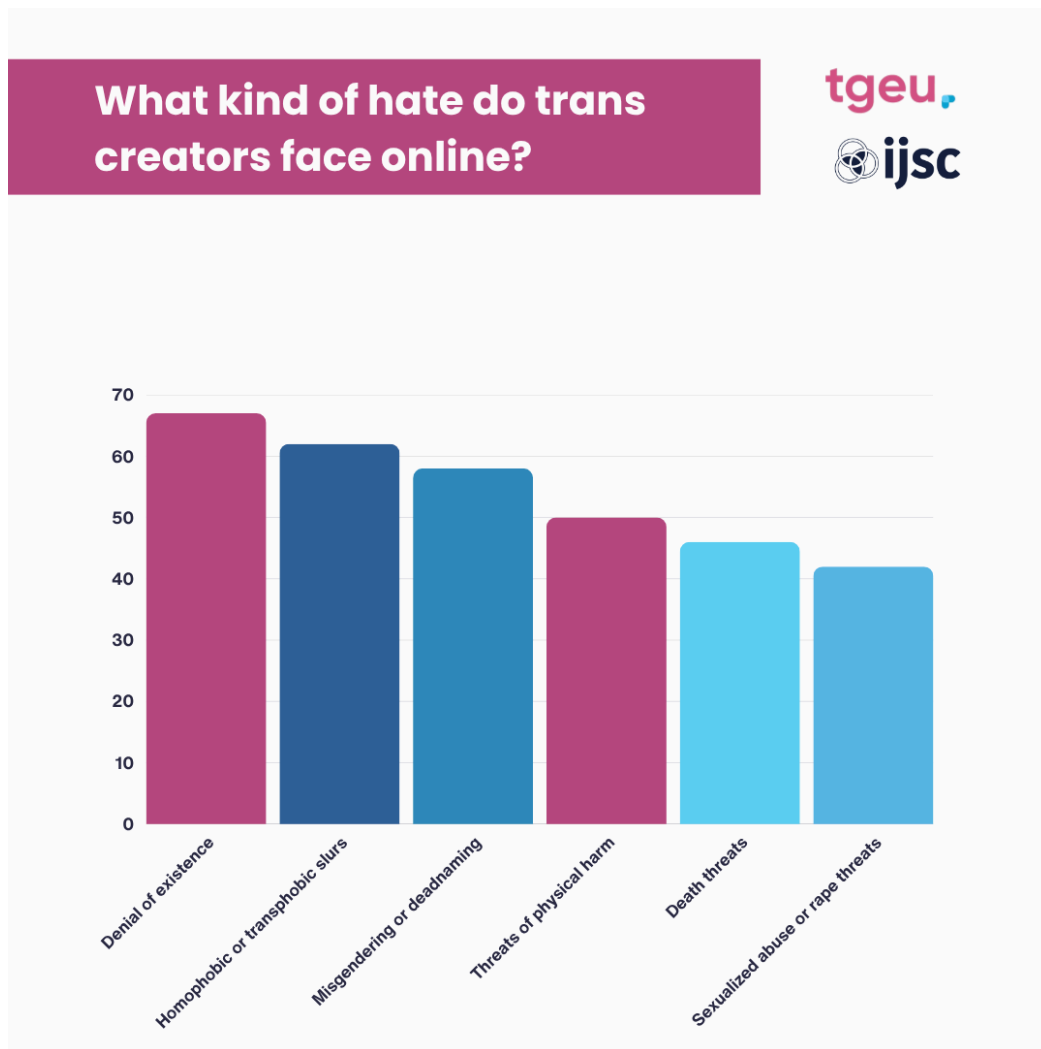
- Trans content creators surveyed reported hate speech across several platforms including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Youtube, X, Reddit, BlueSky, Mastodon and language-specific platforms like Odnoklassniki
- Abuse was also reported in response to non-political content, including videos of walking in public, selfies, and daily updates – illustrating how simply being visible as a trans person online is enough to provoke attacks.
- The responses also reflect how forms of hate speech encountered are diverse, often repeated, and explicitly aimed at delegitimising trans identities, such as consistently referring to the person with their *deadname* or claiming they had no right to life.
- An overwhelming majority of survey respondents selected multiple categories of harm. The most common forms included:
 - Denying their existence as trans people, reported by 67% of respondents
 - Homophobic or transphobic slurs: 63%
 - Misgendering or deadnaming: 57%
 - Threats of physical harm: 57%
 - Death threats: 50%
 - Rape or sexual abuse threats: 37%
 - Threats to family or friends: 10%

Despite the diversity of respondents, across contexts:

- Hate speech is experienced regularly – even daily
- Misgendering was reported as commonly experienced
- The “Groomer”/“danger to children” narrative spanned languages and countries
- Religious and moral condemnation was common (particularly in Georgian, Polish, Russian, Turkish and Italian responses)

The hate speech is both frequent and explicitly aimed at erasing trans people from online spaces. Respondents reported misgendering, deadnaming, and denial of existence as their most common experiences, often accompanied by dehumanising slurs and threats. Comments such as “you will never be a real woman,” “he’s a man,” and “groomer” were repeated across languages. In some cases, the harassment experienced by trans content

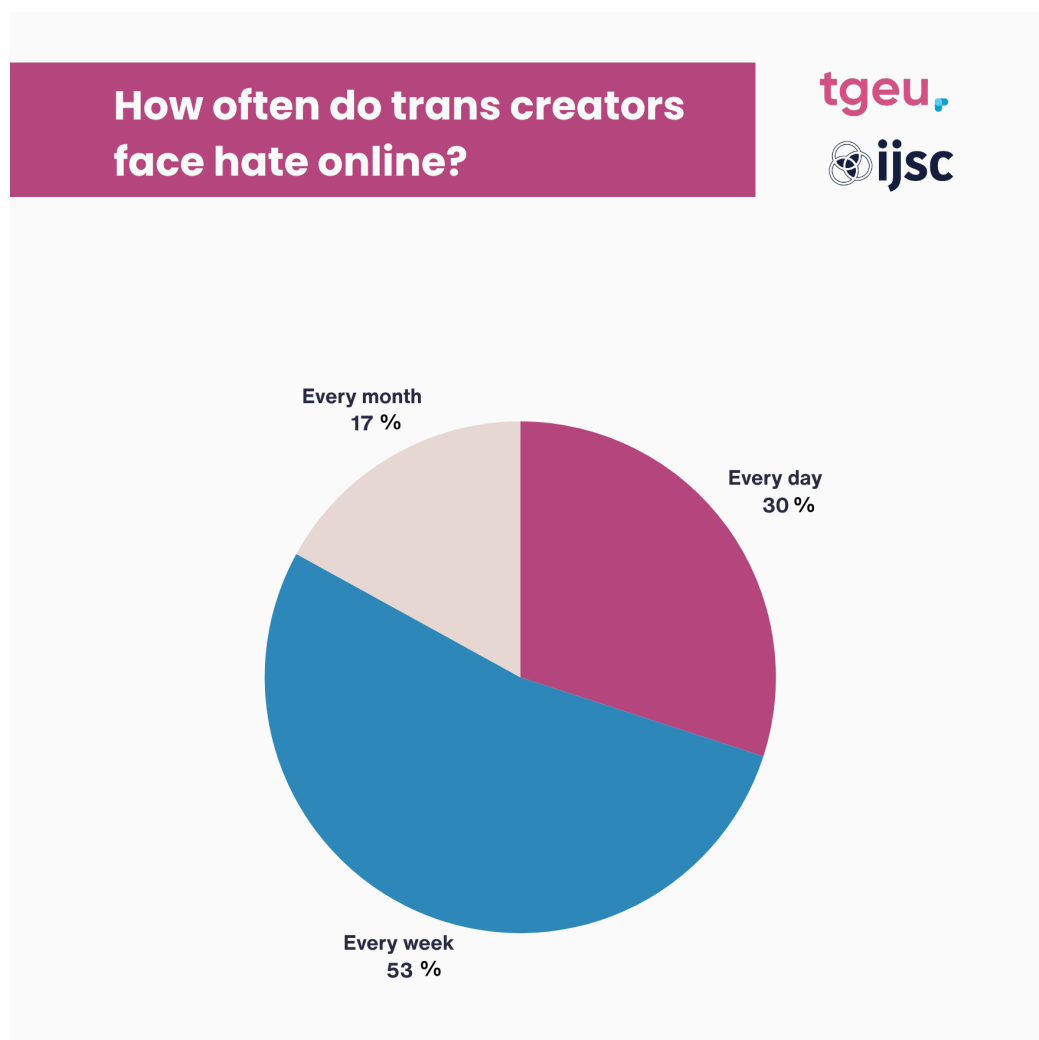
creators escalated to graphic threats of sexual violence and death, including videos of guns being loaded and bullets marked with creators' names. One Albanian creator described receiving over 500 comments threatening rape on a single video about a Pride event.



“They told me I don’t have the right to consent, that I’d probably enjoy being raped.”

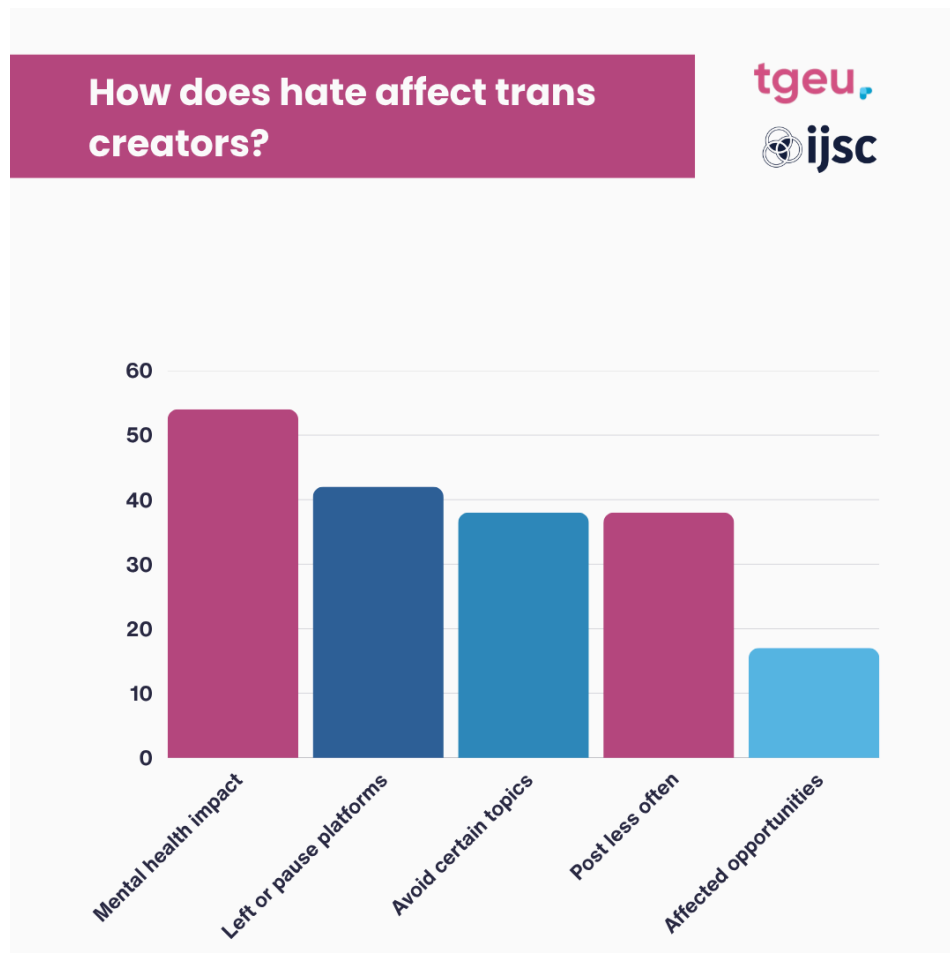
Trans content creators reported experiencing hate speech from a range of sources, from individuals (known and unknown) to bots and coordinated groups. 23 respondents

reported experiencing hate speech by individual accounts of whom 4 respondents reported having known the individuals. 16 respondents had experienced hate speech from coordination group actions and 18 respondents reported having received hateful speech from bots and fake accounts. Over one third of the respondents (35%) reported receiving hateful messages every day while over half (53%) reported receiving hateful messages weekly.



The emotional and professional toll of regularly receiving such hate is significant. Creators described prolonged fear, isolation, and mental health strain, often leading to the deletion of posts, self-censorship, or abandonment of platforms entirely. For some, it directly impacts income and professional opportunities, and creates a chilling effect that restricts

their full, free and equal participation in public discourse online.



“I usually receive the most insults when I share content about my **daily life**, when I’m out walking around or just chatting. That’s when people tend to **threaten me with violence** or even death.”

“Even **death threats don’t violate guidelines.**”

When asked whether they had reported hate speech and to whom, 23 respondents said they had reported it to the platform, 5 to the police, 7 to non-governmental organisations,

and 5 reported it to no one. Some respondents reported it to multiple people or authorities. However, the response was disappointing and wholly inadequate in all cases. Trans content creators face dual challenges when it comes to experiences reporting hate speech, according to the survey respondents: on one hand, platforms don't take action against anti-trans hateful and discriminatory content. On the other hand, they have had their own content taken down, including as a result of malicious reports. As one participant stated:

The TikTok account I currently use is my third one. People submit fake reports to get my pages and live broadcasts taken down.

Survey responses and testimony from creators at our online event highlighted that platform responses are grossly inadequate, compounding the harm. Death threats and explicit hate were frequently dismissed as “not violating guidelines”, while creators defending themselves were penalised.

“If I say ‘trans women are women,’ I get flagged for harassment.”

Others faced shadow banning, automatic takedowns of trans-related content or hashtags, and mass-reporting campaigns leading to repeated account closures. These patterns reflect systemic flaws in platforms' processes (e.g. opaque moderation, lack of effective appeals, and algorithmic bias) which disproportionately silence trans voices. Without changes and effective recourse, platforms remain unsafe by design for trans and gender-diverse users.

Conclusion

The survey results demonstrate that trans content creators who are active online experience concerning levels of harassment, abuse and hate speech online and correspondingly poor recourse against such hate speech. Despite policy reforms targeted at addressing this issue, trans people online face serious challenges in participating fully in public discourse and social media platforms have done little to address the routine harassment that trans people experience on these platforms. The survey results show the commonality in the experiences of trans people across countries and languages. To further investigate the scale, we developed a programmatic testing lexicon informed by both the



survey results and input from trans creators, which is a uniquely co-created approach in research of this kind. The results of that are attached as a separate briefing note.