

Tech companies must go 'above and beyond' to protect women and girls from online abuse or face further action

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Tech firms must do more to protect women and girls online or face further action, Tech Secretary Liz Kendall warns at major platform roundtable.

- Government tells tech companies to go further and faster in implementing safety measures to protect women and girls online
- Warning comes after government takes decisive action to tackle online violence and Ofcom issues practical guidance to tech firms
- Tech Secretary encourages Ofcom to report on which companies are failing to act soon as possible, to inform women and girls which platforms decide not to protect them

Major technology companies must use every tool at their disposal to protect women and girls from abuse and misogyny online – or face further action from government, the Tech Secretary Liz Kendall warns.

Holding a roundtable, on Monday 9 March, with leading companies including Snapchat, Meta, YouTube and TikTok, the Secretary of State urged platforms to go further and faster in implementing safety measures.

The warning follows a series of robust interventions the government has taken to meet its commitment to halve violence against women and girls within the next decade. Over the past 6 months alone, the government has made intimate image abuse, cyberflashing and choking priority offences under the Online Safety Act – treating this material with the same seriousness as child abuse or terrorism and placing legal duties on platforms to stop this content before it reaches users.

In January, the Prime Minister called out Grok for the despicable, illegal sexualised images of women and girls that were being spread on its site, and the government then acted within days to fast-track legislation to ban the creation of non-consensual intimate deepfakes.

And new legal requirements introduced by the government mean tech firms must now remove intimate images shared without consent within 48 hours of being flagged, shifting the burden from victims to platforms. This month, an amendment to the Crime and Policing Bill also created a new offence criminalising so-called “nudification apps”, AI tools that generate synthetic sexualised images of women and girls.

Having taken these decisive steps, the government is now clear that tech companies must match that level of action. Three months ago, Ofcom set out important measures that companies can take to reduce online misogynistic abuse, harassment, stalking and image-based sexual abuse – including prompts to reconsider harmful posts, limits on pile-ons, stronger privacy defaults and hash-matching for intimate images.

The regulator is expected to report on what platforms are failing to comply and the government is encouraging Ofcom to do so as soon as possible, enabling women and girls – and the wider public –

to make informed decisions about where they spend their time online.

Tech Secretary Liz Kendall said:

Every woman and girl deserves to be safe online and we will stop at nothing to ensure the digital world is working for them, not against them.

This government has taken tough action to tackle intimate image abuse, deepfakes and the online harms women and girls face every day.

Now, tech companies must go above and beyond to use the tools readily available to them to make their platforms safer. If they don't, these companies are not innocent bystanders - they are enabling abuse to thrive.

That is why we are asking Ofcom to report swiftly on how companies are complying, because better safety and better accountability go hand in hand.

Later this week, Technology Secretary Liz Kendall will also convene the Women in Tech Taskforce, which is focused on ensuring women are at the table in shaping the technologies of the future - tackling bias in tech design and helping build online spaces that prevent harm to women and girls from the outset.

Last week, the government also launched a public consultation, calling on parents, guardians, and young people across the UK to shape the country's next steps on children's digital wellbeing.

The consultation will gather insights from the public on how to keep children safe online across social media, AI chatbots and gaming platforms, and the government will respond in the Summer.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/tech-companies-must-go-above-and-beyond-to-protect-women-and-girls-from-online-abuse-or-face-further-action>