Vacancy announcement

Individual Consultancy to Perform an Analysis of Policies, Community Guidelines, and Community Standards, Pertaining to Comprehensive Sexuality Education and Information, Gender and Gender Expression on Social Media Platforms

Background

In today's digital age, children and young people are increasingly turning to digital platforms for information concerning sexuality, gender, reproductive health, and relationships. Digital spaces have matured into indispensable and trustworthy resources for young people, providing them with easily accessible and user-friendly information, as well as guidance and support. The role of digital spaces becomes particularly accentuated in regions where alternative sources of comprehensive sexuality education, such as school-, community- or family-based programmes, are scarce or nonexistent.

The provision of inclusive and high-quality sexuality education and awareness within digital spaces transcends mere convenience; it constitutes a fundamental right to information and expression, particularly for young learners. Nevertheless, as dialogue on these themes continues to evolve in digital domains, new challenges arise. Hate speech, cyberbullying, online gender-based violence, and explicit content pose serious risks to young individuals seeking information and engaging in conversations about their identities, health, and relationships.

In response to these challenges, among other measures, social media platforms enact filtering and moderation policies, aiming to ensure user's safety and safeguard them from harmful content. While these actions are taken to prevent potential risks and curtail adverse practices, they can also inadvertently impede the overall accessibility of sexuality education and availability of evidence- and rights-based sexuality-related content in digital spaces. These measures might inadvertently restrict the inclusivity of these digital realms, marginalize those of diverse sexualities, gender identities and expressions, and erode fundamental rights and freedoms.

UNESCO emphasizes the importance of providing adolescents and young people with safe and accessible online education and information on sexuality. Meanwhile, the enforcement of filtering and moderation policies can lack clarity and consistency. As a result, content designed for educational purposes that addresses sexuality and relationships might be flagged as inappropriate or offensive, even when it is intended solely for educational value and devoid of explicit material.

The implications of such policies extend beyond the mere removal of content. The ramifications may span from the elimination of posts or accounts to curtailing the visibility of specific content or hashtags through shadow banning, thus hindering content monetization and advertising potential. These complex restrictions place digital content creators in a challenging position, requiring them to navigate the nuanced and often opaque boundaries set by social media platforms, often at the risk of unjust punitive actions or outright bans. Consequently, the enforcement of such policies might significantly impact the accessibility and quality of content on sexuality, gender and health within digital spaces, and young individuals are disproportionately affected. The absence of reliable open resources can lead individuals to seek information from less reputable or even harmful sources, including the darker corners of the internet.
In line with the [UNESCO Guidelines for the governance of digital platforms](https://www.unesco.org/en/what-we-do/communication-and-information/years/unesco-guidelines-governance-digital-platforms), UNESCO plans to conduct an in-depth study of the effects of filtering, moderation, and other platform-driven restrictive practices and policies on access to sexuality education and information on social media. This in-depth mixed-method study investigates how platforms’ restrictions affect content creators and educators, and how these practices impact young people’s access to sexuality education and information on social media.

**Scope of work**

UNESCO is seeking an individual consultant to analyse policies, community guidelines, and standards related to comprehensive sexuality education and information, gender and gender expression on the four to seven largest social media platforms.

Following specific guidance from UNESCO, and in close collaboration with the designated team in the Section of Health and Education, the contractor's tasks will include:

1. Identify and select the 4 to 7 largest global social media platforms, ensuring regional representation based on usage statistics.
2. Collect and review the policies, community guidelines, and community standards of the platforms regarding comprehensive sexuality education, gender and gender expression, and sexual and reproductive health content.
3. Analyze the enforcement mechanisms, appealing procedures, and policy consultative processes implemented by these platforms.
4. Assess the potential impact of these policies and standards on the availability and quality of sexuality education content on the platforms.
5. Develop a comprehensive report, at least 20 pages in length summarizing the review findings and providing insights into identified gaps, areas for potential improvement, and recommendations.

**Contractor profile**

**Work experience:**

- Strong expertise in digital policy analysis, evidenced by a proven track record in assessing and evaluating platform policies, community guidelines, and standards.
- Deep understanding of comprehensive sexuality education, gender, particularly within digital spaces.
- Proven experience in conducting research and analysis related to online content policies and digital censorship.
- Broad knowledge of global social media trends, usage statistics, and regional variations.
- Strong legal and ethical awareness regarding online content, including privacy, safety, and freedom of expression.

**Education:**

- Minimum requirement: Master’s degree in digital media policy, internet governance, law, gender studies, social sciences, public policy, or related fields. A Ph.D. is advantageous.

**Technical skills:**
• Exceptional written communication skills for report preparation.
• Strong policy analysis skills to evaluate the impact of platform policies on content accessibility and quality.
• Proficiency in digital tools and social media platforms for data collection and analysis.

**Sensitivity and ethical considerations:**

• Commitment to gender and diversity awareness and cultural sensitivity in addressing sensitive topics.
• Adherence to ethical research practices and principles.

**Languages:**

• Excellent written and oral skills in English are mandatory. Proficiency in at least one other official UN language (Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian, Spanish) is an asset.

**Timeline:**

The consultancy will take place from April to June 2024. Location (Remote).

**Application process:**

Qualified individuals are invited to submit their applications, including a detailed CV, cover letter addressing the selection criteria, a sample of relevant work, as well as a financial proposal to Ms Séverine Pillado at se.pillado@unesco.org, by 21 April 2024, at 23:59 CET. Please indicate “Consultancy application - Digital policy analyst” in the subject line.

For further information or clarification, please contact Ms. Yulia Plakhutina at y.plakhutina@unesco.org