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**Submissions from entities in the United Nations system, international
organizations and other stakeholders on their efforts in 2021 to
implement the outcomes of the WSIS**

Submission by

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

This submission was prepared as an input to the report of the UN Secretary-General on "Progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels" (to the 25th session of the CSTD), in response to the request by the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2006/46, to the UN Secretary-General to inform the Commission on Science and Technology for Development on the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS as part of his annual reporting to the Commission.

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Secretary-General's Report on the implementation of outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)

Inputs from UN Women - October 2021

Inputs to Parts One/Two:

In an increasingly digitalized world, the rising gender digital divide is a major concern in terms of leaving no-one behind. Women are less likely than men to have internet access – up to 33 percent in some countries. Barriers to access go far beyond the availability of infrastructure, and include unaffordability, lack of digital skills, and social norms preventing use by women and girls. The future of public services, education, employment and trade will all be increasingly digitalised, marginalising those who do not have the necessary skills, or access to the most recent technologies. The COVID-19 pandemic has not only highlighted, but has exacerbated, these inequalities, with the unconnected being left behind. Ensuring equitable access to technologies is essential in order to secure their benefits for all. There is a need to scale up policies and programmes promoting digital access, as well as digital skills for women and girls.

The design of technology can also perpetuate gender inequalities. Technologies developed without considering gender differences can reduce their usability for women, while others can perpetuate gender biases. The unintended gendered impacts of technologies must therefore be examined from their conception, while promoting more women in STEM careers can contribute to ensuring gender-responsive technology design.

When women and girls do have access to the digital world, they face new forms of violence. We have seen a dramatic rise of cases of online violence and harassment, especially since the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic. So just as our freedom to enjoy public spaces is curtailed by risks of violence, so does our freedom to enjoy digital spaces.

UN Women is therefore targeting all aspects of the information society and its differentiated impacts on women and girls.

Inputs to Part Three:

International initiatives:

Promoting Global Action for Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality

Action Coalition for Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality

The [Generation Equality Forum](#), held in Mexico and Paris in 2021, brought together thousands of partners from across the globe to foster action and renew movements for gender equality, as well as launch a set of multi-stakeholder Action Coalitions. It has been a ground-breaking making moment where for the first time, technology and innovation was identified as a gender priority in a major international event. This resulted in the launch of an [Action Coalition for Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality](#)¹ to ensure women and girls have equal opportunities to safely and meaningfully access,

¹ The leaders of the Action Coalition on Innovation and Technology for Gender Equality, representing a range of stakeholders, are: A+ Alliance, the Government of Armenia, the Government of Chile, Digital Grassroots, the

use, lead, and design technology but also to ensure that building inclusive digital economies is at the core of the COVID-19 recovery efforts.

The Action Coalition on Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality aims to create a collaborative space where governments, civil society, international organizations, youth networks and the private sector will come together to catalyze action, drive investment and deliver concrete, game-changing results for gender equality. This initiative is open to world leaders and grassroots leaders equally, which makes it a unique space for co-creating innovative solutions. The Coalition's Global Acceleration Plan recommend stakeholders to join efforts on four priorities:

1. To prioritize initiatives that support digital access and the development of digital skills, to ensure equal use, creation and control of digital technology by women and girls.
2. To invest in feminist technology and innovation, to embed gender in tech development and create solutions that leverage technology for social impact.
3. To build inclusive, transformative and accountable innovation ecosystems that ensure women and girls' full participation in digital economy and society.
4. To prevent and eliminate online and tech-facilitated GBV and discrimination to allow women and girls in all their diversity to use digital spaces safely.

EQUALS International Partnership to bridge the Digital Divide

Launched in 2016 by the International Telecommunication Union, GSMA, the International Trade Centre, the United Nations University and UN Women EQUALS contributes to the UN Sustainable Development Agenda through actions and evidence-based research aimed at closing the global gender digital divide. In 2021, UN Women, as co-lead of the EQUALS Leadership Coalition continued to advocate, amplify, and build political commitment and awareness around promoting women in leadership in the technology sector. UN Women, ITU and ITC submitted a joint EQUALS commitment to UN Women's Generation Equality Forum, to provide business and digital skills, mentoring and networking opportunities for 10,000 thousand women entrepreneurs in the technology sector by 2026, powered by the EQUALS Global Partnership for Gender Equality in the Digital Age.

Girls in ICT Day marked its 10th Anniversary celebration in 2021, with members of the EQUALS Leadership Coalition participating and co-organizing multiple advocacy moments to observe the day. Through virtual interactive talks and advocacy campaigns, Leadership Coalition Partners highlighted the key trends, impacts and recommendations to close the gender digital gap and increase access and safety of ICTs for women and girls worldwide.

Engaging the private sector in bridging the gender digital divide

In 2021, UN Women engaged 160 tech-related companies to commit to the 7 Women's Empowerment Principles. We now have a total of 850+ tech-related companies that have committed to implementing the Women's Empowerment Principles. In the framework of EQUALS Global Partnership, as co-lead of Leadership Coalition, we are working with these companies to put in place gender-responsive policies and practices in tech sector, for example, how to drive gender diversity and equality in the workplace.

Government of Finland, the Global Fund for Women, the International telecommunications Union (ITU), Koç Holding, Microsoft, The Rockefeller Foundation, the Government of Rwanda, Social Builder, the Government of Tunisia, and UNICEF.

Ending Online and Technology-Facilitated Violence Against Women and Girls

In an increasingly digitalized world, instances of online harassment, cyber bullying, and sexual predation are rising rapidly, facilitated by the proliferation of digital technologies. UN Women's work on ending violence against women and girls is therefore expanding in order to ensure safe online and digital spaces for women and girls. At global level, UN Women is working to raise awareness of the rise in online and technology-facilitated violence by convening in online workshops with multi-sectoral experts (UN agencies, government, women's rights organizations and other partners)². Efforts to develop innovative Guidance on the use of safe technology in the provision of essential services are underway in 2021, accelerated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to move to safer forms of remote service provision for survivors of gender-based violence.

In 2021, UN Women country teams worked with multiple partners to implement recommendations outlined in UN Women's [Policy Brief: Online and ICT-facilitated violence against women and girls during COVID-19](#), launched in 2020. For example, UN Women Regional Offices in the Arab States, Asia Pacific, and Eastern and Southern Africa are all working to address gaps in knowledge on online ICT facilitated violence against women, through convening sessions, conducting regional studies, and providing technical advice. UN Women Egypt is developing a communications campaign, including a focus on cyber violence against women.

Leveraging digital technologies for gender equality:

Digital technologies to support women's SRHR and HIV prevention and services

UN Women has developed digital Apps together with and for women living with and affected by HIV and explored the opportunities provided by other digital messengers' services to reach out to populations often left behind. In **Uganda**, as a result of collaboration between UN Women and Uganda Network of young people living with HIV & AIDS (UNYPA), a new [UNYPA SRHR App](#) now helps young women and girls to access accurate information to make informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health, including how to prevent HIV and access HIV testing and treatment services. The App has an average daily turnout of 35 users, 40 referrals and 30 purchases for HIV prevention and sexual and reproductive health commodities and services. In **Tajikistan**, women living with HIV designed a mobile application for people living with HIV to quickly access data and information on availability of HIV treatment and care and connect women to gender-based violence services. This mobile app would replace patient cards and allow the users to stay in touch with health care providers, schedule appointments and set up reminders. In addition to accurate information about HIV/AIDS, survivors of violence can reach hotlines and online legal and psychological support through this app.

Digital tools for women entrepreneurs: Buy from Women initiative

UN Women's Buy from Women digital inclusion initiative, originally piloted in three countries (Rwanda, Haiti, Mali), expanded to new locations in 2021 (including Costa Rica, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal, DR Congo, and Cote d'Ivoire). The Buy from Women Costa Rica platform will be launched in late 2021 with the government partners and the pilot group of women microentrepreneurs. This mobile and web-

² *The shadow pandemic: Online and ICT-facilitated violence against women and girls during COVID-19*, 10 March 2021, in partnership with Organized GIZ; *Fighting Terror at Home: Fighting domestic violence with innovation and technology*, CSW side event; 17 March 2021, Organized by: Michal Sela Forum, Permanent Mission of Israel to the UN, United States Mission to the UN, UJA Federation New York; *Women's Online Safety Program in Europe*, 7 September 2021, organized by: Google; *Online sexual harassment and other forms of ICT facilitated violence against women and girls*, 20 October 2021, organized by: UN Women Ending Violence against Women and Girls (EVAW) Section.

based platform empowers women smallholder farmers and women entrepreneurs by improving their access to diversified supply chains and market opportunities, the management of their assets, their access to information critical to the growth of their business (market prices, weather forecasting, training contents on digital, financial and business skills), and by establishing a digital commercial and financial identity.

Digital innovations for Rural Women's Resilience to Disasters

UN Women and UNCDF, with support from Innovation Norway, are implementing the D4RWRD (Digital innovations for Rural Women's Resilience to Disasters) project to leverage digital and mobile technology and develop innovative solutions and partnerships with the private sector to enhance the resilience of rural women to climate change and natural disasters. An innovative market and policy dialogue process was organized through virtual workshops and meetings with over 150 participants from governments, UN agencies, civil society and the private sector, to present the needs faced by rural women in Haiti, Liberia, Malawi, Mali and Senegal and to discuss potential solutions and innovations to strengthen their resilience to disasters. UN Women and UNCDF are currently identifying concrete private-sector led innovations – around microinsurance, tailored credit and savings mechanisms and early warning systems – that will be supported and pilot tested in 2022 to strengthen the resilience of rural women to disasters and climate change.

These digital initiatives directly contribute to connecting rural women with ICTs and establishing community access points through the agricultural cooperatives (WSIS Target 1), to encouraging the development of digital content in local languages (WSIS Target 9) and to connect all businesses with ICTs (WSIS Target 11). They further directly contribute to reducing the mobile and digital gender gap across developing countries and emerging economies and facilitate the access to digital financial services for underserved and unbanked segments, in particular rural women.

Regional Initiatives:

Promoting women and girls in ICT in the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe

UN Women and ITU joined efforts to conduct a study on [Women, girls and ICT in the context of COVID-19 in selected Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries](#) occurring in five Western Balkan states (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia) and three Eastern Partnership countries (Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova). The study evaluates trends in the participation of women and girls in the ICT sector and in the digital world, with a special focus on the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic and provides country-specific recommendations to foster the participation of women and girls in the ICT sector.

Closing the Digital Gap in Africa

In 2021, UN Women participated in the “Closing the Digital Gap: Africa 2021 Strategies and Actions to Ignite Africa’s Education Sector Potential” conference. Closing the digital divide in Africa is more important than ever. We know that the jobs of the future will be driven by technology and innovation, and women must be at the forefront of this transformation. In line with the Action Coalition for Innovation and Technology, UN Women advocated by 2026 to:

1. Reduce by half the gender digital divide across generations.
2. Increase investments towards feminist technology and innovation by 50% to better respond to women and girls’ most pressing needs.
3. Double the proportion of women working in technology and innovation.
4. Make sure countries and tech companies demonstrate accountability to fight online gender-based violence, which has spiked along with other forms of gender-based violence during the COVID-19 crisis.