

**COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT
(CSTD)**

**Twenty-seventh session
Geneva, 15-19 April 2024**

**Submissions from entities in the United Nations system, international
organizations and other stakeholders on their efforts in 2023 to
implement the outcomes of the WSIS**

Submission by

GSM Association

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 27th 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.

DISCLAIMER: The views presented here are the contributors' and do not necessarily reflect the views and position of the United Nations or the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

GSMA's submission to WSIS Reporting Process 2023

Executive Summary

Part One: An executive summary (half a page) of activities undertaken by all stakeholders, progress made, and any obstacles encountered.

The GSMA continues to work with its members and partners on addressing the digital divide and mobile gender gap, which are at the heart of the WSIS outcomes (C-1, C-3, C-4, C-5 and C-6). The GSMA Connected Society (CS) and Connected Women (CW) programmes are funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), with additional support from GSMA members. The CS and CW programmes drive impact through industry-leading data and insights, supporting members to implement projects and initiatives, and through advocacy and policy support.

In 2023, the GSMA CS and CW programmes launched its two flagship reports, [The State of Mobile Internet Connectivity Report 2023](#), and [The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2023](#), which are based on GSMA's latest data from its annual consumer survey in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

Through GSMA's [Connected Women Commitment Initiative](#), mobile operators have continued to make formal commitments to reduce the gender gap in the customer base of their mobile internet or mobile money services in their markets, supported by the CW team. Since the initiative was launched in 2016, more than 65 million additional women have been reached with mobile internet and mobile money services (over 10 million additional women in the last year).

In the past year, the GSMA commenced a new [3-year project](#) to accelerate the digital and financial inclusion of female micro-entrepreneurs in Africa and Asia, with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation. In 2023, the GSMA published a report titled [Understanding women micro-entrepreneurs' use of mobile phone for business](#), which provides new data and insights from LMICs on the use of mobile phones by women micro-entrepreneurs and the challenges that prevent them from using mobile services for business. Drawing on these insights, the GSMA is supporting mobile operator partners to identify, develop and scale approaches to reach women micro-entrepreneurs in India, Pakistan, Kenya and Ghana.

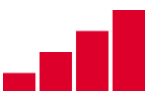
In 2023, the GSMA has delivered its 'Bridging the Mobile Gender Gap' capacity building course to policymakers and regulators in LMICs online and in Ethiopia, Washington, DC., and Oman.

The GSMA has also continued to deploy its [Mobile Internet Skills Training Toolkit \(MISTT\)](#), which is a set of 'train the trainer' resources that are used by mobile operators, governments, and the development community to help people with little or no mobile internet skills use the mobile internet. To date, MISTT has been deployed in 27 countries with more than 65 million people trained (15 million additional people in the last year).¹

Trends and Experiences in Implementation

Part Two: A brief (1–2 pages) analytical overview of trends and experiences in implementation at the national, regional and international levels and by all stakeholders, highlighting achievements and obstacles since WSIS and taking into account the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This could include information on the facilitation process of implementation, monitoring and cooperation among stakeholders.

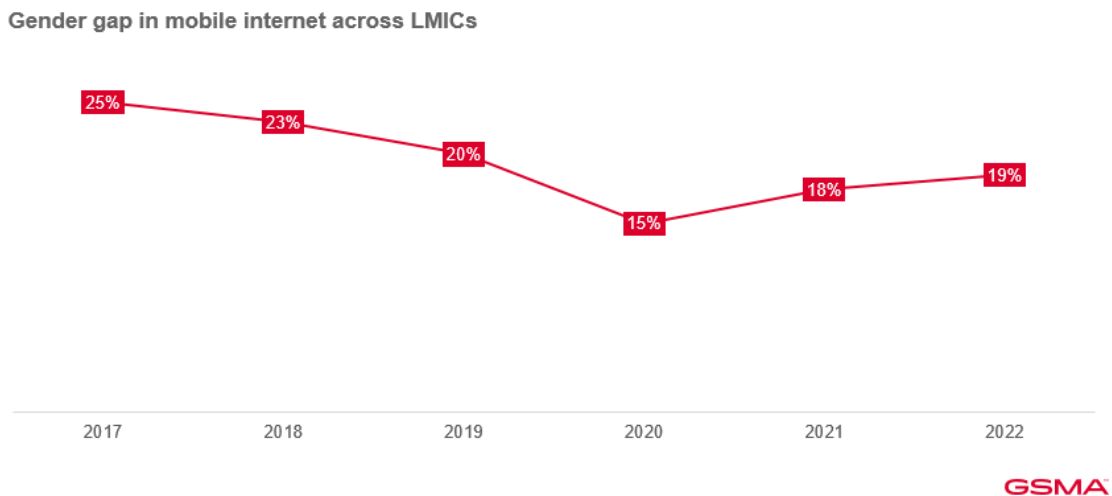
¹ GSMA. (2023). [The Mobile Internet Skills Training Toolkit](#).



Mobile internet is connecting more people to the internet than ever before. According to GSMA’s recently published [State of Mobile Internet Connectivity report 2023 \(SOMIC\)](#), by the end of 2022, the number of people using mobile internet increased to 4.6 billion people.² This is equivalent to 57% of the world’s population and is up from 35% in 2015.³ Although 200 million people came online in the past year, this represents a slowdown in the growth of mobile internet users compared to 2021 and 2020, when 300 million new users went online each year. Just over three quarters of the growth in mobile internet in 2022 came from LMICs, where 95% of the unconnected population live.⁴ The unconnected population is made up of people who live in an area not covered by mobile broadband (“coverage gap”), and people living in an area that is covered but do not use mobile internet (“usage gap”). The usage gap has been declining slowly in recent years and dropped to 38% in 2022.⁵ However, with 3 billion people living in areas covered by a mobile broadband network but not using mobile internet, addressing the usage gap remains a much more substantial challenge to accelerating digital inclusion.

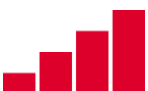
The unconnected are disproportionately poorer, rural, less educated and women. Currently, women in low- and middle-income countries are 19% less likely than men to use mobile internet, which translates into 310 million fewer women than men.⁶ According to the latest data in [GSMA’s Mobile Gender Gap Report 2023](#), women’s rate of mobile internet adoption has slowed for the second year in a row (See Figure 1).⁷

Figure 1: Gender gap in mobile internet use across LMICs, 2017-2022



This slowdown serves as a clear call to action for all stakeholders to take targeted action to close the mobile gender gap. The mobile gender gap is driven by social, economic and cultural factors, which result in women experiencing barriers to mobile ownership and use. To close the mobile gender gap, we need to address these issues and focus on affordability, knowledge and skills, safety and security concerns, relevance, and access. These barriers also differ slightly among women micro-entrepreneurs. New GSMA research highlights that the main barriers preventing women microentrepreneurs who own a mobile phone from starting to use it for business or from using it

² GSMA. (2023). [State of Mobile Internet Connectivity 2023](#).
³ GSMA. (2023). [State of Mobile Internet Connectivity 2023](#).
⁴ GSMA. (2023). [State of Mobile Internet Connectivity 2023](#).
⁵ GSMA. (2023). [State of Mobile Internet Connectivity 2023](#).
⁶ GSMA. (2023). [The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2023](#).
⁷ GSMA. (2023). [The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2023](#).



more are: not having the right kind of phone; preference for cash over digital transactions; lack of confidence or digital skills; and safety and security concerns.⁸ These barriers are also experienced by men, however women tend to experience these barriers more acutely due to structural inequalities and underlying social norms, including disparities between men and women in terms of education and income.⁹

Programmes and projects to implement the outcomes

Part Three: A brief description (1–2 pages) of:

(a) Innovative policies, programmes and projects which have been undertaken by all stakeholders to implement the outcomes. Where specific targets or strategies have been set, progress in achieving those targets and strategies should be reported.

(b) Future actions or initiatives to be taken, regionally and/or internationally, and by all stakeholders, to improve the facilitation and ensure full implementation in each of the action lines and themes, especially with regard to overcoming those obstacles identified in Part Two above. You are encouraged to indicate any new commitments made to further implement the outcomes.

In the past year, the GSMA Connected Women and Connected Society Programmes have continued to undertake activities related to insights, market engagement and advocacy to address the digital divide and the mobile gender gap.

Insights:

The GSMA provides industry leading research, case studies and data on the state of mobile connectivity, the size and drivers of the mobile gender gap, and approaches to addressing it. The GSMA undertakes an annual in-person nationally representative survey across a number of LMICs to size the gender gap in mobile ownership and use, and understand the barriers that prevent women from using mobile and mobile services. Furthermore, GSMA publishes an annual flagship report on [The State of Mobile Internet Connectivity](#), and [The Mobile Gender Gap](#), and produces various thought leadership pieces, case studies and blogs. A full list of GSMA CW and CS reports, blogs and case studies published in 2023 can be found [here](#).

Market Engagement:

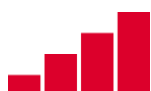
The GSMA supports our mobile operators and other partners to accelerate digital and financial inclusion across LMICs. Through the GSMA [Connected Women Commitment Initiative](#), over 40 mobile operators across LMICs have made formal commitments to reduce the gender gap in the customer base of their mobile internet or mobile money services, collectively reaching over 65 million additional women with these services since 2016.

Advocacy:

The GSMA engages with key stakeholders and platforms at a global and regional level to drive increased awareness, prioritisation and action around addressing the digital divide and the mobile gender gap. In 2023, the GSMA's data and messaging have been shared at various high-level platforms including at the Commission on the Status of Women, and the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) among others. The GSMA's data, insights and calls to action are already informing the work of many other key stakeholders. For instance, in 2023, the GSMA has contributed to key initiatives of the following organisations:

⁸ GSMA. (2023). [Understanding women-microentrepreneur use of mobile phones for business: Evidence from 10 low-and middle-income countries](#).

⁹ GSMA. (2022). [Policy considerations to accelerate digital inclusion for women](#).



- **Broadband Commission:** The GSMA co-chaired the Broadband Commission’s Working Group on Connectivity for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) with the International Trade Centre, and launched the outcome report [Making Digital Connectivity Work for MSMEs](#) at UNGA.¹⁰
- **World Bank:** The GSMA contributed to the World Bank’s Affordable Devices for all Report.¹¹
- **W20:** Based on the GSMA’s advocacy efforts at the W20 Summit in India, delegates representing G20 countries adopted a [Communiqué](#), which called for ‘halving the digital gender gap (including mobile) by addressing barriers around affordability, literacy and digital skills, accessibility, online safety, and lack of relevant content in usage and adoption of digital technologies’.¹² This target was also adopted in the [G20 New Delhi Leaders’ Declaration](#), which also calls for halving the digital gender gap by 2030.

The GSMA also supports governments and collaborates with partners to address the digital divide and address the barriers to digital inclusion by providing advisory support including on policy recommendations as well as through sharing data and tools such as MISTT. For example, in Nigeria, GSMA is currently working with the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) to implement its National Digital Literacy Framework and expand digital skills throughout the country. Together with GSMA, NITDA developed and launched pilot digital skills training programme targeting artisans. The training incorporated GSMA’s MISTT material and focused on using digital skills to grow a business.

Moreover, the GSMA contributed to the creation of UNCDF Uganda’s Digital and Financial Literacy toolkit, which incorporates MISTT content, and has been used to train 90,000 people in Uganda. So far, fifteen partner organisations have adopted the toolkit as a benchmark for digital literacy in Uganda.

In addition, the GSMA supports policymakers and regulators to expand digital inclusion through training and capacity building. Over the past year, GSMA ran numerous trainings on [Addressing the Digital Divide](#), the [Mobile Connectivity Index](#), and [Bridging the Mobile Gender Gap](#). These capacity building courses provided insights and policy recommendations on how to help bridge the usage gap, coverage gap, and mobile gender gap to policymakers from across the Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia-Pacific region. The GSMA will continue to deliver capacity building courses in LMICs and in collaboration with our partners over the next year and looks forward to continuing to work with governments and partners to address the digital divide and the mobile gender gap so that everyone can reap the benefits of connectivity.

¹⁰ Broadband Commission. (2023). [Making Digital Connectivity Work for MSMEs](#)

¹¹ World Bank. (2023). [Affordable Devices for all](#).

¹² Women 20. (2023). [Women 20 Communiqué Edition 2023](#).



Part One: An executive summary (half a page) of activities undertaken by all stakeholders, progress made, and any obstacles encountered.

As part of its active contribution to the 3 year [EQUALS-EU project](#), GSMA participated in an “EQUALS-EU: Europe’s Regional Partnership for Gender Equality in the Digital Age” panel discussion hosted by the ITU on 17 March as part of the 2023 WSIS Forum.

The panel discussed unexpected findings from the research activities of the project which is funded by the EU Horizon 2020 Framework Programme.

When an online survey distributed to 22 countries within and beyond the EU was translated into local languages, challenges emerged in the translation of key terms and concepts related to gender equality. For example, in some languages, there is no direct translation for the word *gender*.

Lead by Associate Professor Caroline Wamala-Larsson, Director of the SPIDER Center at Stockholm University, the panel discussed this issue and its implications for policy development and other contexts in which non-English speaking nations may be translating local language into English (and vice versa), perhaps in applications to secure international funding with mandatory gender equity criteria. Assoc. Prof. Wamala went on to introduce the online lexicon being developed from the project findings to provide translations for 10 core terms emerging from the EQUALS-EU project.

Tamara Dancheva from the GSMA presented the work of the EQUALS Global Partnership for Gender Equality in the Digital Age and how the EQUALS EU project fits within the [EQUALS Global Partnership for Gender Equality in the Digital Age partnership](#).

Related to language, systemic barriers to women’s inclusion in digital tech were discussed: that innovation development infrastructure is framed within competitive activities and language (hackathon, innovation boot camp) which is intimidating to women who respond to more inclusive and collaborative environments (for example ideation workshop). It was discussed that barriers such as this prevent women from participating and advancing in careers in ICT and STEM.

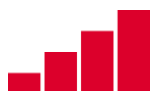
A further talking point was the need to not only provide access to digital tech but to build capacity in young women to become designers, developers and leaders in the tech industry, such that they contribute to the creation of the digital technology they use.

Part Two: A brief (1–2 pages) analytical overview of trends and experiences in implementation at the national, regional and international levels and by all stakeholders, highlighting achievements and obstacles since WSIS and taking into account the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This could include information on the facilitation process of implementation, monitoring and cooperation among stakeholders.

Further to the points outlined in the previous section, the EQUALS EU Consortium to which GSMA is a party recommends:

WSIS Action Line – C3: Access to information and knowledge

- There remain large gaps between infrastructure coverage and usage, so allowing more access to innovation spaces for women and minority groups so women contribute to their digital futures is urgent.
- There is a need for more secure mobile infrastructure as mobile devices dominate access to the internet- this is important for more inclusive approaches as EQUALS-EU works with women and minorities so they contribute to content development.



- Opening up the innovation economy to minority groups so they contribute to building and creating digital solutions, hence the STEM movement requires more resources.

WSIS Action Line – C8: Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content

- The gender gap in usage is shrinking but remains significant in the global south where, 30% women have connectivity in relation to 70% men – EQUALS-EU's hackathon and innovation camp events were multicultural in their representation.
- Social biases in AI prevail, examples abound on how AI unjustly profiles various minority groups – again with more women and minorities in the innovation spaces, they can contribute with more inclusive algorithms
- The platform economy is encouraging more local content production, contributing to relevance and use of mobile apps. There are a number of app development initiatives from the hackathon and innovation camp winners.
- Less than 7 years away from realizing Agenda 2030, the sense of urgency for digital uptake is growing- especially seen as a pathway to realizing many SDG targets. More inclusive innovation spaces such as EQUALS-EU's work, will contribute to some of the SDG targets.

Part Three: A brief description (1–2 pages) of:

(a) Innovative policies, programmes and projects which have been undertaken by all stakeholders to implement the outcomes. Where specific targets or strategies have been set, progress in achieving those targets and strategies should be reported.

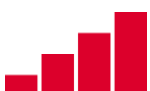
(b) Future actions or initiatives to be taken, regionally and/or internationally, and by all stakeholders, to improve the facilitation and ensure full implementation in each of the action lines and themes, especially with regard to overcoming those obstacles identified in Part Two above. You are encouraged to indicate any new commitments made to further implement the outcomes.

As a result of the discussions at this session, several collaboration opportunities were identified with CORSERA and the Digital Coalition which intervened during the talks and approached the panellists afterwards.

As a next step a call is to be set up with CORSERA and the Digital Coalition as to explore how they can support with converting the EQUALS-EU summer school curriculum into self-paced learning modules as well as support with the dissemination of the content among relevant audiences and beneficiaries.

Suggestions for thematic aspects that might be included in the WSIS Forum 2024 (WSIS+20 Forum High-Level Event) (one paragraph)

- Gender Transformative Digital Skills Education
- Bridging the Gender Gap in Social Innovation/Building Inclusive Innovation Ecosystems





Session Outcome Document

(2 pages max)

Summary of Session: EQUALS-EU: Europe's Regional Partnership for Gender Equality in the Digital Age

ITU

Friday 17 March 2023 9:15-10:15

<https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2023/Agenda/Session/387>

Key Issues discussed (5- 8 bullet points)

The panel discussed unexpected findings from the research activities of the EQUALS-EU project (<https://equals-eu.org>), an initiative funded by the EU Horizon 2020 Framework Programme.

When an online survey distributed to 22 countries within and beyond the EU was translated into local languages, challenges emerged in the translation of key terms and concepts related to gender equality. For example, that in some languages, there is no direct translation for the word *gender*.

Lead by Assoc. Prof Caroline Wamala- Larsson, the panel discussed this issue and its implications for policy development and other contexts in which non-English speaking nations may be translating local language into English (and vice versa), perhaps in applications to secure international funding with mandatory gender equity criteria.

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Tamara Dancheva from the GSMA presented the work of the EQUALS Global Partnership for Gender Equality in the Digital Age and how the EQUALS EU project fits within the EQUALS network.

Related to language, systemic barriers to women's inclusion in digital tech were discussed: that innovation development infrastructure is framed within competitive activities and language (hackathon, innovation boot camp) which is intimidating to women who respond to more inclusive and collaborative environments (for example ideation workshop). It was discussed that barriers such as this prevent women from participating and advancing in careers in ICT and STEM.

A further talking point was the need to not only provide access to digital tech but to build capacity in young women to become designers, developers and leaders in the tech industry, such that they contribute to the creation of the digital technology they use.

Towards WSIS+20 and WSIS beyond 2025, please share your views on the emerging trends, challenges, achievements, and opportunities in the implementation of the WSIS Action Lines to date (5-8 bullets)

Further to the points outlined in the previous section, EQUALS-EU suggests:

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Tangible outcomes (such as key achievements, announcements, launches, agreements, and commitments (3-5 bullet points))

As a result of the discussions at this session, several collaboration opportunities were identified with CORSERA and the Digital Coalition which intervened during the talks and approached the panelists afterwards.

Actionable plan (2-5 points)

As a next step a call is to be set up with CORSERA and the Digital Coalition as to explore how they can support with converting the EQUALS-EU summer school curriculum into self-paced learning modules as well as support with the dissemination of the content among relevant audiences and beneficiaries.

Suggestions for thematic aspects that might be included in the WSIS Forum 2024 (WSIS+20 Forum High-Level Event) (one paragraph)

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