COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT (CSTD)

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Geneva, 27-31 March 2023

Submissions from entities in the United Nations system, international organizations and other stakeholders on their efforts in 2022 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 26th 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.

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.

The 67th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women 2023: Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age.

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the principal global intergovernmental body dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. Every year, The Commission deliberates a different priority theme. The sixty-seventh session (6-17 March 2023) will examine: **Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.** This provides a unique opportunity to examine the theme of innovation and technology from a gender perspective, exploring how to harness technology so that women and girls enjoy full political, economic and social equality, participate in innovation processes from design to application, monitoring and evaluation and shape the values and principles that should underpin their governance.

The Commission will examine the gender gap in digital access and skills and how to ensure meaningful connectivity for women and girls. It will seek to better understand and address the range of barriers to meaningful access and use of digital technologies, including affordability and social norms. It will also explore education in the digital age for girls and also for women, covering both formal and informal and adult education and re-skilling, as well as digital tools and learning environments. It will examine how to foster inclusive innovation ecosystems and digital transformation, attracting, retaining and promoting women in STEM careers and ensuring that we leave no-one behind from digital transformation, looking at the future of work in the digital economy and the under-representation of women in key emerging technological sectors. It will explore the need to ensure that technology and innovation actually responds to the needs of women and girls and are inclusive. It will also cover the gendered risks of emerging technologies and the need for safeguards to ensure that emerging technologies protect the rights of the women and girls they aim to serve and support. It will explore online and technology-facilitated gender-based violence and linkages to democracy and human rights such as freedom of expression, and the right to privacy and the broad range of impacts of online violence, including in terms of restricting or dissuading women's participation and agency in digital spaces.

A call to place gender equality at the heart of the *Global Digital Compact*

One of the Secretary-General "Our Common Agenda" key recommendation is the development of the Global Digital Compact, to be presented at the Summit of the Future in 2024. The choices that will be made to develop shared principles for an open, free and secure digital future for all will shape the digital transformation of our societies for the years to come. In the past years, we have seen how technology

often reinforces a pernicious cycle in which existing inequalities and stereotypes are amplified and perpetuated. To break this cycle, the [Action Coalition on Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality](#), a multi-stakeholder global partnership to promote equal opportunities for women and girls to safely and meaningfully access, use, lead, and design technology and innovation, has united public, civil society and private partners to [launch a call to adopt a feminist approach to the Global Digital Compact](#) as the most effective path to securing a sustainable digitalization and building a digital society which works for everyone.

The Global Digital Compact should embrace the principles and values of the Beijing Platform for Action. It should encompass:

- An inclusive design, which facilitates the inclusion of diverse voices and stakeholders.
- An intersectional lens, which takes in consideration the multidimensionality of people's lived experiences.
- An emphasis on Feminist Leadership, which acknowledges that women are often under-represented in decision-making processes, particularly on digital cooperation, and works consciously to redistribute power and responsibility to secure their equal participation.

This will require dedicated funding and investments, education and inclusive policies, solutions relevant for people living in remote areas and in vulnerable situations, tackling discriminatory norms and practices online and offline as well as other necessary means.

The statement calls the international community to build on the preparation of CSW67, to recognize digitalization as a tool to achieve gender equality, social justice and poverty eradication and shape the Global Digital Compact to further promote:
- The achievement of meaningful connectivity for all women and girls as a policy priority
- The embedment of accountability, gender equality and non-discrimination in technology development
- The need to broaden intentional pathways for women and girls' advancement in technology, to ensure their equal access to and full participation in technical and decision spaces
- The prioritization of the protection of the online space.

Stepping up efforts to tackle the rise in online and ICT-facilitate Violence Against Women and Girls

Anonymity and widespread reach within online spaces have created a conducive context for increased violence in digital contexts. COVID-19 has increased the use of digital technology and the Internet, including among women and girls. As lives shifted online for work, school, access to services and social activities, reports emerged of a surge in violence against women and girls in digital contexts[1]. A global study found that 38 per cent of women have personal experiences of online violence, with 85 per cent of women who are online having witnessed digital violence against other women[2]. Young women and girls are particularly targeted by ICT-facilitated violence. Research found that more than half of the girls

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[1] UN Women, *Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women: Report of the Secretary-General* (2022)
[2] The Economist Intelligence Unit, "Measuring the prevalence of online violence against women", 2021. Available at https://onlineviolencewomen.eiu.com/ (accessed on 24 June 2022).

and young women surveyed globally had experienced online violence[3]. Most girls report their first experience of social media harassment between the ages of 14 and 16, and 47 per cent of girls who have been harassed online have been threatened with physical or sexual violence[4].

Many forms of violence occurring offline are replicated and intensified in digital spaces. There are specific features of digital spaces that create a particularly conducive context for violence against women, including the scale, speed and ease of Internet communication combined with anonymity, pseudonymity, affordability and impunity. Cross-platform abuse, is enabled through the proliferation of new technologies and can be particularly challenging to combat as abusive content removed from one platform, can reappear and persist on another. Current laws addressing digital violence lack clear and consistent definitions and have not kept pace with technological developments and different forms of violence in digital contexts. Addressing violence against women in digital contexts is particularly challenging in cases with multiple offenders, victims and platforms across different jurisdictions[5].

In his report entitled "Road map for Digital Cooperation", the Secretary-General has called for greater efforts to ensure that human rights standards apply in the digital age, including for the prevention of online harassment and violence ([A/74/821](#), para. 52). In order to effectively address violence against women in digital contexts, the United Nations system will work together with States, civil society and technology providers to develop international standards and a framework for preventing and responding to violence against women and girls in digital contexts, including standardized definitions, legal standards, roles and responsibilities, standards of accountability for internet intermediaries and transnational cooperation and coordination[6].

There is currently no internationally agreed definition of violence against women in digital contexts. The absence of agreed definitions and methodologies for measurement coupled with widespread underreporting are a challenge for understanding the true prevalence of violence against women and girls in digital contexts[7]. UN Women is therefore convening a multisectoral and multistakeholder process, in collaboration with UN partners, to develop a conceptual definition of online and ICT-facilitated VAWG which will support efforts to tackle this phenomenon.

➤ For further information, the annual **Report of the Secretary General on the intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of VAWG** had a special focus on online and ICT facilitated VAWG in 2022. UN Women has also developed a **policy brief on online and technology facilitated violence against women and girls** which builds on the SG report to UNGA77.

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[3] Plan International, Free to Be Online? Girls' and Young Women's Experiences of Online Harassment, 2020, p. 7; World Wide Web Foundation and World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, "Survey: young people's experience of online harassment", 2020.

[4] Plan International, "Free to Be Online?", pp. 16–17

[5] UN Women, *Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women: Report of the Secretary-General* (2022)

[6] UN Women, *Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women: Report of the Secretary-General* (2022)

[7] UN Women, *Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women: Report of the Secretary-General* (2022)