

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

**Twenty-fourth session  
Geneva, 17 to 21 May 2021**

**Submissions from entities in the United Nations system, international  
organizations and other stakeholders on their efforts in 2020 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 24<sup>th</sup> 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.

# 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

Report of the Secretary General 2021

Inputs from UN Women

**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.**

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted our **increased global dependence on digital technologies and flagged stark inequalities in terms of digital access**. Digitalization provides opportunities for access to information, education, employment and income, as well as public services. The future of skilled employment will increasingly be dependent upon digital technologies. However, those without access or the necessary skills will be increasingly marginalized. Women are less likely than men to have internet access (up to 33% in some countries<sup>1</sup>). The gap exists irrespective of a country's overall ICT access levels, economic performance, income levels or geographic location, and widens as technologies become more sophisticated and expensive<sup>2</sup>. The gap is also increasing, with the number of men joining the Internet in developing countries growing faster than that of women<sup>3</sup>.

While there are a number of policies and programmes promoting digital access, as well as digital skills for women and girls as individuals, the digital divide and economic implications that it has led to during COVID can also be felt strongly by small and micro sized businesses (that are mainly led by women), and by entrepreneurs who have not managed to adapt to continuing their activities in digital form.

When women and girls do have access to the internet, they face online violence more often than men. As the COVID-19 pandemic deepens economic and social stress coupled with restricted movement and social isolation measures, gender-based violence is increasing exponentially. Since the outbreak of COVID-19 – the first major pandemic in the social media age - emerging data and reports from those on the front lines, have shown that **all types of violence against women and girls has intensified, including through various forms of online violence**.

Women and girls are subject to online violence in the form of physical threats, sexual harassment, stalking, identity theft and sex trolling. Women and girls are the targets of 96% use of “deepfake” technologies, whereby in the majority of cases their faces are superimposed on pornographic images or videos, including for revenge porn or pedophilic purposes. These instances have risen dramatically in the past months, with hundreds of thousand of cases recorded as publicly available, affordable and non-regulated software has been made available. Concerns are growing as the technology becomes

---

<sup>1</sup> ITU (2019) Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures 2019.

<sup>2</sup> EQUALS Global Partnership, Taking Stock: Data and Evidence on Gender Equality in Digital Access, Skills and Leadership (2019), United Nations University Institute on Computing and Society/International telecommunications Union.

<sup>3</sup> UNCTAD (2020), Fifteen years since the World Summit on the Information Society.

increasingly sophisticated and difficult to detect. Specific cases have been documented by media and women's rights organizations of unsolicited pornographic videos displayed while women were participating in online social events, threats of violence and harmful sexist content, and "zoombombing" during video calls showing racially charged and sexually explicit material to the unexpected participants<sup>4</sup>. Research suggests that women tend to restrict their access online as a result of violence committed online. It is critical to address the increase of online and ICT violence against women during COVID-19 through concerted efforts of governments, civil society organizations and internet intermediaries.

UN Women's activities in 2020 have therefore focused on tackling these emerging challenges through 1) using online learning platforms to enhance the skills of women and girls, 2) supporting women entrepreneurs gain access to digital tools and markets, and 3) tackling the shadow pandemic of online violence.

**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.**

### Second Chance Education and Vocational Learning (SCE) programme

There is currently a gap in investment in the education of migrant, refugee and displaced women aged 18 and above. In order to address this gap, UN Women with support of BHP Foundation initiated the development of a Second Chance Education and Vocational Learning (SCE) programme that provides marginalized women and young women who have lost out on an education with pathways to employment. The UN Women **Second Chance online portal** provides learning and training materials, while Women's Empowerment Hubs support women to re-enter formal education or learn targeted vocational and entrepreneurial skills and put those skills to work in job placements - empowering the world's most disadvantaged women. The partnership is initially for a 3-year pilot phase in 6 countries - Cameroon, Jordan, India, Mexico, Chile, and Australia - directly benefitting 67,000 women and young women from indigenous, refugee, displaced, and low-income groups.

### UN Women's "Buy from Women" digital initiative:

UN Women's Buy from Women Digital Initiative is a mobile and web-based digital platform designed to empower women smallholder farmers, women cooperatives and women entrepreneurs by improving the management of their assets, their access to information critical to the growth of their business (such as market prices, weather forecasting, training content on digital, financial and business skills), the access to diversified supply chains and market opportunities, and the establishment of a digital commercial and financial identity.

---

<sup>4</sup> UN Women Policy Brief : Online and ICT Facilitated Violence Against Women and Girls During COVID-19: <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/brief-online-and-ict-facilitated-violence-against-women-and-girls-during-covid-19-en.pdf?la=en&vs=2519>

The initiative is currently being piloted in three countries (Rwanda, Haiti, Mali), with the aim of expanding to new locations in 2021 (Costa Rica, Liberia, Malawi, Senegal, DR Congo, and Cote d'Ivoire). As part of this expansion, UN Women is partnering with United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) to carry out a needs assessment and an ecosystem mapping in the context of digital disaster risk reduction and risk transfer solutions for women smallholders in Haiti, Liberia, Malawi, Mali and Senegal.

This digital initiative directly contributes 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). It further directly contributes 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.

#### Promoting safe online spaces:

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, emerging data and reports from those on the front lines, have shown that all types of violence against women and girls has intensified, including online violence. In order to respond to this trend, UN Women has developed the evidence base through **cutting-edge research** assessing the nature and main drivers of this form of violence, as well as state of play in terms of legislation. At **global level** a landscape analysis of online violence against women is being developed. At regional level, the **Middle East and North Africa** regional office published a [survey](#) and [regional assessment](#) on the issue. The **East and South Africa** Regional office developed a [Background Paper on Safe Digital Spaces: Protection of Women and Girls from Technological Violence](#), and **Asia and the Pacific** is publishing a multi country study focused on online violence against women in the region. At national level, in **Chile** the heavy reliance on technology for educational purposes during COVID-19, has prompted a large-scale study to assess violence against girls online.

In addition, **advocacy and capacity building initiatives** have been put in place to prevent online violence against women and girls with support of UN Women. For example, in **Bolivia, Guatemala and Egypt**, UN Women, in collaboration with government authorities and women rights organizations, has produced communications material in simple and user-friendly formats, in local languages, that demonstrates the harmful impact of online violence on high-risk groups of women and girls, including those who are in public and political life. In **Fiji**, a curriculum focused on women's safety online was developed in collaboration with the Australia National University.

Finally, UN Women is supporting several countries to leveraged technology and innovative methods to address women's safety online and offline. In **Turkey** [an online campaign](#) has reached out 6,000 users who have downloaded the guidelines on digital safety tips and how to report online violence. In **Mexico**, UN Women in collaboration with UN International Computing Centre (UNICC) and the city of Guadalajara carried out a Thinkathon to ideate solutions to address and prevent violence against women in public spaces.