



EQUALS
GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP



UN WOMEN

GENDERED DIGITAL DIVIDE "DIGITALLY EMPOWERED GENERATION EQUALITY IN THE WAKE OF COVID-19"

9 March 2021

Summary of discussions

Held within the framework of the 2021 UN Regional Forum for Sustainable Development for UNECE Region and the ITU Regional Forum for Europe on Meaningful Connectivity

REGIONAL FORUM
ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOR THE UNECE REGION

Virtual | 10-18 March 2021



Table of Contents

EVENT SUMMARY	3
ABOUT THE EVENT.....	5
PARTICIPATION	5
DOCUMENTATION.....	5
SESSIONS	5
REPORT	9
CLOSING REMARKS.....	9

EVENT SUMMARY

The session "[Gendered digital divide: Digitally Empowered Generation Equality in the wake of COVID-19](#)" was organized by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (UN Women) and EQUALS. This event took place virtually on 9 March 2021 from 10:00 – 12:00 CET and was held within the framework of the [2021 UN Regional Forum for Sustainable Development for UNECE Region](#) and the [ITU Regional Forum for Europe on Meaningful Connectivity \(8-9 March 2021\)](#).

The special session was held virtually with over 300 participants following and supported by captioning and live streaming on both YouTube and Twitter platforms. The full agenda for this special session can be accessed [here](#) and the presentations can be accessed [here](#). The full event webpage can be accessed [here](#) and the recorded livestream is available [here](#).

This special session launched the Digitally empowered generation equality report, the advance copy of which can be [accessed here](#). Youth representatives from the countries mentioned in the report shared key points and recommendations.

It was identified that there is a significant digital gender divide and COVID-19 did not cause gender inequality but had served to exacerbate it. It has now become urgent to have a more equal, just, and secure future for all to accelerate action towards achieving gender equality by 2030. Technological change is not gender neutral; women and girls face higher exposure to violence and abuse in technology-enabled spaces, which needs to be considered.

Concrete initiatives and best practices were shared in stimulating girls and women towards initiating and staying in ICT related careers. Concrete steps towards achieving gender equality were shared, such as access to high-speed broadband everywhere, raising ICT awareness, creation and delivery of digital public services and digital skill building and trainings for all.

Speakers called for putting in place commitments that are translated into action and the creation of long-term sustainable solutions to achieve gender equality.

ITUEvents

Gendered Digital Divide "Digitally Empowered Generation Equality in the wake of COVID-19"

9 March 2021
10:00 - 12:00 CET
Online meeting

Follow us on Twitter
@ITU_EUR
Join us online!

Organized within the framework of the ITU Regional Initiative for Europe on accessibility, affordability and skills development for all, to ensure digital inclusion and sustainable development.



Organized by:

EQUALS
GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP



**MEANINGFUL
CONNECTIVITY** **BROADBAND
MAPPING** **LAST MILE
CONNECTIVITY** **DIGITAL SKILLS
DEVELOPMENT** **SCHOOL
CONNECTIVITY**

ABOUT THE EVENT

The session "[Gendered digital divide: Digitally Empowered Generation Equality in the wake of COVID-19](#)" was organized by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (UN Women) and EQUALS. This event took place virtually on 9 March 2021 from 10:00 – 12:00 CET and was held within the framework of the [2021 UN Regional Forum for Sustainable Development for UNECE Region](#) and the [ITU Regional Forum for Europe on Meaningful Connectivity \(8-9 March 2021\)](#) that was kindly hosted by the Ministry of Public Administration of the Republic of Slovenia.

This special session focused on solutions and best practices to address the root causes of the gendered digital divide. It provided an overview of the current ecosystem when it comes to Women, Girls, and ICT in the context of COVID-19 in selected countries of the ITU Europe region. The session provided an opportunity for the representatives of UN agencies (ITU, UN Women) and partners to highlight a series of key actions, activities, initiatives, and partnerships that address the gendered digital divide. In this context, ITU and UN Women launched the "Digitally Empowered Generation Equality: Women, Girls & ICT in the context of Covid-19 in select Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership Countries" Report", which informed the discussions at this special session. The event was divided in three sections as follows:

- **Opening Segment and Keynote**
- **Setting the context:** Digitally Empowered Generation Equality Report Launch: This session focused on short discussion of key findings and recommendations of the Digitally Empowered
- **Generation Equality Report:** launched by Youth panellists.
- **Panel Discussion:** An interactive panel discussion on concrete steps to deliver transformative change for women and girls using ICTs with particular focus on the Europe region.

PARTICIPATION

Over **300** participants from more than **15** countries viewed the special session. Participants included high-level representatives of administrations and national regulators from the ITU Europe region and representatives of the private sector, UN agencies, academia, and civil society.

DOCUMENTATION

The full agenda for this special session can be accessed [here](#) and the presentations can be accessed [here](#). The full event webpage can be accessed [here](#) and the recorded livestream is available [here](#).

The Special Session has also been livestreamed on [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#). Proceedings are available at the links above.

SESSIONS

Opening Segment



Video message: Ms Doreen Bogdan-Martin

In her video message, Ms Bogdan-Martin, Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau of the ITU stated that women need to be full and equal partners in the global digital transformation. She indicated that there was a significant digital gender divide and COVID-19 did not cause gender inequality but had served to exacerbate it. She further mentioned the work of the ITU in this area and its commitment to digital gender equality into action for more

than 10 years with initiatives such as: annual Girls in ICT day is celebrated in 170 countries; the EQUALS global partnership has grown into a network of over 100 organizations worldwide; the EQUALS EU group works to promote equity and social innovation; the new Network of women programme to promote more gendered balanced participation in WTDC-21. She thanked the UN Women team for joining forces with the ITU to launch the report and welcomed ITU stakeholders to read it and implement its recommendations.



Opening Remarks: Alia El-Yassir, UN Women Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia

In her opening remarks Ms El-Yassir, UN Women Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia stated that it was expected that the pandemic had a disproportionate impact on women and girls. She stressed the need to make sure that women and girls are leading and engaging in decision making and public life. She mentioned the importance to have a more equal, just, and secure future for all to accelerate action towards achieving gender equality by 2030. Ms El-Yassir mentioned that discussions like the one today, are so important: they are needed to pinpoint actions requiring further acceleration and how to make them happen. During her opening remarks she stressed on the importance and great potential of technology for ensuring faster and fuller promotion and enjoyment of all human rights, including women's rights. Without women and girls accessing and fully using technology, they will be left behind, failing the ambitions for sustainable development. This is an urgent agenda, now more than ever, as Covid-19 has led increased dependence on the use of ICTs for work, school, social activities, and political engagement. Technological change is not gender neutral; women and girls face higher exposure to violence and abuse in technology-enabled spaces, which needs to be considered. She called for the need to work collectively, collaboratively, and responsibly to make sure that we understand all aspects of the issues when it comes to addressing the digital divide, using platforms such as generation equality initiative and the actioned coalitions. She mentioned the importance of the launch of the ITU, UN Women study and the implementation of its recommendations.



Opening Remarks: Jaroslaw Ponder, Head, ITU Office for Europe

Mr Jaroslaw Ponder, Head of the ITU Office for Europe launched the study on the "Digitally Empowered Generation Equality Women, Girls & ICT in the context of Covid-19 in select Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership Countries". He informed the audience that the study focuses on the digital divide occurring in 5 Western Balkan states (Albania, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia) and 3 Eastern Partnership countries (Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova). The study aimed at identifying key factors and trends in the participation of women in the digital sector in education, career, and entrepreneurship at the national level. It concludes into country specific recommendations to develop a set of national initiatives fostering participation of women and girls in the ICT sector. The study was developed under the umbrella of Regional initiative for Europe within the framework of "Accessibility, affordability and skills development for all to ensure digital inclusion and sustainable development". ITU is committed to implement objectives that are paving the way to sustainable development and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 5 on gender equality and 10 on reduced inequalities.



Opening Keynote: Ajda Cuderman, State Secretary, Ministry of Economic Development and Technology, Slovenia

State Secretary H.E. Ms Ajda Cuderman indicated in her opening keynote that the recommendations included in the study will contribute to foster participation of women and girls in the ICT sector. She shared Slovenia's engagement in the preparation of the national review. She indicated that the 2030 agenda and the national review process call upon all to see where we stand, what has been done and what challenges need to be tackled to move forward to prosperity and well-being of everybody. Additionally, she stated that on the basis of the national review, Slovenia prepared a national development strategy and aligned all the SDGs of the 2030 agenda with its national priorities and targets. The State Secretary shared some of the challenges for girls and women when it comes to ICTs and that gender-based barriers preventing girls and women from accessing and utilizing technology and digital use exists. She indicated the importance of the role of the government to equip girls and young women with digital skills through prioritizing education in ICT subjects. This is the only way for girls and women to thrive in the economy, where the routine work has been automated and digital skills are valued.

Setting the context: Digitally Empowered Generation Equality Report Launch

Focus: Short discussion of key findings and recommendations of the Digitally Empowered Generation Equality Report by Youth panellists.

Moderator: Ms Belma Kucukalic, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Speakers:

Ms Eljona Avdo, European Youth Envoy, Generation Connect, Albania

Ms Andreea Barbu, European Youth Envoy, Generation Connect, Romania

Ms Zerina Mandžo, IT Girls Project Officer, UN Women

Key points:

- The session's speakers, youth representatives from the report countries, shared key points and recommendations from the report on Digitally empowered generation equality, the advance copy of which can be [accessed here](#).
- Gender equality and the challenges that women face is one of the key chapters of the report. In all the countries, women suffer from brain-drain, gender gaps within the ecosystem, shortage of qualified workers, a lack of maturity of innovation ecosystems and companies not having a culture of support of the acquisition of women employees.
- The percentage of women working in STEM environments is low: Bosnia and Herzegovina 29%; North Macedonia 27%; Serbia 14%; Ukraine 24% and Georgia 12%. Moldova 31%.
- Regarding the topic of women leaders, the statistics are even more alarming: the numbers diminish with women being founders or leaders. 19% of women managers in Montenegro: 16% of women founders in Moldova. We do not see women be encouraged to found companies and take on loans.
- With regards to education, during COVID-19, many girls and women had difficulties to study because they did not have access to digital devices; women were also the ones found to have to share devices with their children for their schooling.

- Some of the recommendations of the report shared were that: benefits given by companies should also be targeted towards women; there is no exact data for the gender situation, and this should be gathered; women should be offered upskilling and reskilling programmes to evolve in the ICTs; girls and women have a hard time starting a job, so extracurricular STEM programs for girls would be key.
- Digitalization is all around us. ITU, UN Women and EQUALS made a huge step by publishing this report and discussing this topic.
- To change the situation, there is a need to search for barriers as only after proper identification, responses can be found. From June 2019 UN WOMEN conducted research when it comes to education and career choice in ICT and STEM fields. Even a small change can have an impact on decisions made and the actions taken.
- All individuals are surrounded by a bubble of people, and by several close friends. If behaviour, views, thoughts of one person from that bubble are changed. the thoughts of the whole bubble can be changed.
- As we try to motivate more girls to enter ICT, we must think about all the challenges they face online. The COVID-19 had led to an increasing use of digital platforms not just for personal use but for education as well, and for many young people this might be the only contact they can have with their peers.

Panel discussion

Focus: An interactive panel discussion on concrete steps to deliver transformative change for women and girls using ICTs with particular focus on the Europe region.

Moderator: Mr. Jaroslaw Ponder, Head of the ITU Office for Europe

Speakers:

[Presentation 1](#) **Ms. Mariam Lashkhi**, Member of the Parliament of Georgia, [Presentation 2](#), **Ms. Tamara Dancheva**, International Relations Manager, GSMA, [Presentation 3](#), **Ms. Babou Olengha-Aaby**, Founder & CEO of the Next Billion, [Presentation 4](#), **Ms. Priyanka Banerjee**, CEO and Co-Founder, BusinessWiz, [Presentation 5](#), **Ms. Emilija Stojmenova Duh**, Assistant Professor at the Faculty of electrical engineering, University of Ljubljana

Key points

- Of the 781 million illiterate people in the world, 2/3 are women. Of 7 million people working in ICTs, 30% are women. Only 6% of CEOs at the top 100 global tech companies are women. Gender equality in the ICT would open a market of 50-70 billion USD.
- ICT is an enabler for jobs and exponential growth. The COVID-19 crisis has not only highlighted the critical role of ICTs for continued functioning of societies but has also brought to the fore the startling digital inequalities between and within countries.
- Georgia introduced regulatory incentives in the public sector and advocates to transfer this good practice to the private sector.
- In Georgia, there are 44% of female STEM college graduates and two key concepts are introduced as follows: FemTech (applied to software, products and services that use technology often to focus on women related industry and women's health) and Mumpreneurship (the creation of a new business venture by a woman who identifies as both a mother and a business woman).

- Addressing the digital gendered divide is impossible by just addressing one issue. Access to mobile phone can be a lifeline particularly for women and girls who tend to be marginalized. GSMA Connected Women aims at tackling the mobile gender gap in access, when it comes to access to mobile phones and to mobile internet. Ultimate goals are to ensure that women have access to mobile technology and increase access and use; this would support the growth of the mobile industry and economy more broadly.
- Tech4Girls Initiative powered by EQUALS, focuses on reducing the gender gap in the mobile industry. It offers workshops for elementary to high school girls to educate and inspire interest in careers in STEAM studies. It increases the talent pipeline for girls in STEM. The initiatives preliminary impact to date: 94% of participants that completed the workshop had improved their understanding of STEAM and possible career paths within this field; 88% felt confident about pursuing further tech studies/a career in tech; 70% had increased their knowledge of STEM career opportunities.
- Lack of investment in women entrepreneurship, is because their businesses are not visible enough. The need for a place where anyone who wants to contribute to the growth of women entrepreneurship, and businesses can do so by searching for products and services that they need that are created and led by women.
- Sustainable transformation requires structural changes. Creating inclusive workplaces that will attract women and people from different backgrounds must occur through a pull effect, not a push effect, providing them with a culture of work where they can try to be themselves. Using digital innovations like data in science, data analytics, machine learning, to bring the future that we are envisioning faster is key.
- Digital technologies are important for women because they give access to: quality education and training, work and income, health and social care, and public services which give women a voice.
- Concrete steps towards achieving gender equality include: access to high speed broadband everywhere, anytime, raising awareness about ICTs, creation and delivery of digital public services, digital skill building and trainings for all.
- The speakers called for commitments that should be translated into action and the creation of long-term sustainable solutions to achieve gender equality must be put in place.

REPORT

The Report was launched at this special session. The report's advance copy can be accessed [here](#) as well as its executive summary can be accessed [here](#). This report is the result of the collaborative efforts of the ITU and UN Women. This study aims at identifying key factors and trends in the participation of women in the digital sector in education, career and entrepreneurship at a national level. The analysis concluded into country-specific recommendations to develop a set of national initiatives fostering participation of women and girls in the ICT sector.

CLOSING REMARKS

Mr. Jaroslaw Ponder, Head of Regional Office for Europe, ITU, and Chair of the event, thanked participants and panellists and briefly summarized the excellent content emerged through the various sessions. In his closing remarks, Mr. Ponder echoed the discussions of the two days by reaffirming the importance of ensuring meaningful and inclusive connectivity to all and the importance that Women and Young girls play and must increasingly play in the ICT sector.

He also emphasized the importance of continuing the discussion in other meetings taking place in Europe in March and April, such as the [UN Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE region](#) where the ITU Office for Europe will also lead a “[Cross-cutting session on Digitalization](#)”, as well as the upcoming [ITU Regional Forum for Europe on Digital Skills](#), the [ITU – European Commission Accessible Europe 2021 Forum](#), and the [GSR+ Interregional Symposium for Europe and Africa](#).

Finally, Mr Ponder thanked the Ministry of Public Administration of the Republic of Slovenia for the support provided for event, organised by the ITU Office for Europe as implementation of Regional Initiative 1 on “broadband development, broadcasting, and spectrum management”.