Asia-Pacific Regional Consultation on the priority theme for the Sixty-Seventh Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 67): "Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls"
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Opening Remarks by

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Distinguished representatives,
Civil society partners,
Dear friends and colleagues,

On behalf of ESCAP, and together with Ms. Sarah Knibbs, Regional Director a.i., UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, it is a great pleasure to welcome all of you to the Asia-Pacific Regional Consultation on the priority theme of the sixty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

This year's theme "**Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls**" focuses our attention on the increasing digitalization of societies. Digital transformation has immense potential to increase access to information and services, and improve economic and social outcomes, particularly for those who have been left behind in development efforts.

While some innovations and technological changes have contributed to reducing inequalities for women and girls, without sufficient policy guidelines and interventions, these changes also have the potential to exacerbate inequalities in the digital age.

In Asia and the Pacific, women and girls are less digitally connected than men. Sixty-one per cent of women in the region use the internet compared to 67% of men.[1] In low- and middle-income countries in the region, women are 20% less likely to own a smartphone or to use the Internet on a mobile device compared to men.[2]

Lack of access to digital technology is both a symptom of and contributes to the underrepresentation of women in science, technology, engineering and math (or STEM) related education programmes and careers. Many education systems fail to challenge gender

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[1] ITU (2022). Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures 2022.

[2] https://www.unescap.org/kp/2021/towards-meaningful-connectivity-insights-asia-pacific-case-studies

stereotypes that depict the digital sphere as a male domain, leading to less women in STEM careers. For example, in the Asia-Pacific region, women account for less than 10% of the cybersecurity workforce.[3]

The digital age also creates new risks for gender-based violence. Women and girls are more prone to online violence and are disproportionately influenced by it. The incidence of cyberviolence surged during the COVID-19 pandemic, with wide-ranging and devastating impacts, for the individuals and society.

Dear participants, colleagues,

Let us not repeat the inequalities of yesterday in today's digital age. Innovation and technology must instead be used as a means of achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.

To do this in the Asia-Pacific region, there are several key actions for consideration:

First, we must achieve meaningful and universal connectivity to narrow the gender digital divide and fulfill the commitment of "leaving no one offline". As digitalisation is revolutionising the ways people engage in social, economic, and political processes, lack of digital and Internet access further marginalises those who are already in a vulnerable position and excludes them from sharing the benefits of the digital transformation. Targeted policies as diverse as subsidizing the cost of devices and data, removing barriers to registration for SIM cards, and redistributing unpaid care and domestic work can all contribute to narrowing the gender digital divide.

Second, we need to build more inclusive educational systems and labour markets to increase female representation in STEM-related studies and professions. It is key to integrate a gendered lens in STEM education, encourage female students to pursue studies in STEM-related areas, and promote women's   participation in STEM professions, especially at leadership and management levels.

Third, we must safeguard the rights of women and girls online and combat online violence through more effective policies, sound legislative systems, and law enforcement. Today, many cyberviolence cases are not investigated or prosecuted. It is critical to recognise that online violence is as destructive as offline violence and to commit to eliminating cyberviolence in all its forms through collected efforts.

This regional consultation on the priority theme for the Commission on the Status of Women provides an opportunity for us to reflect on the "digital challenges" women and girls face and to create concrete and actionable recommendations to guide the region.

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[3] https://vietnam.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/Action%20Brief%20%20WPS%20%20CYBERSECURITY16620final_0.pdf

This meeting is being co-organized by six UN agencies, including ESCAP, UN Women, ITU, UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA. The UN family looks forward to working closely with member States, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders. Together we can achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the digital age.

I thank you.