
Asia-Pacific Regional Consultation on the Sixty-Seventh Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW67) Priority Theme: Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

8 February 2023 from 9.30 – 16.00 Hours/9 February 2023 from 9.30– 16.30 Hours

LOCATION: ESCAP Conference Room 3

Opening Remarks by Sarah Knibbs, Regional Director a.i., UN Women ROAP

9.30Hrs (Time allocated- 5-7 mins)

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates and participants, good morning and afternoon to all.

- On behalf of my team and our UN Women Executive Director, I have the pleasure of also welcoming you this regional consultation.
- Let me begin by expressing my deep appreciation to your Excellencies and distinguished delegates and participants present in Bangkok and online, for making time for this two-day Regional Consultation on the **Priority Theme for the Sixty - Seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women i.e. *Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.***
- Further, I wish to take this opportunity to appreciate our collaboration with our co-hosts UN ESCAP – and International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).
- **The Priority Theme for this year is particularly important for this region, which has played a key role in spearheading developments in this area.** Digitalization and technological innovations have redefined: (i) how human beings can interact and communicate with each other; (ii) how we can access essential information, resources and services, (iii) and our abilities to be able to contribute and benefit from social, political and economic life.

- They have demonstrated their ability to be game changers in our efforts to realize the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - as was demonstrated in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - According to data published by the [International Telecommunication Union \(ITU\)](#) the number of users **surged by 800 million to reach 4.9 billion people between 2019 and 2021 i.e. 63 per cent of the population- up from 4.1 billion people - or 54 per cent of the world's population.**
- However, this left some 2.9 billion people (37 per cent) still offline, demonstrating that the benefits of technological innovation *do not necessarily translate into inclusive and/or gender transformative inclusive outcomes.*
- While the digital revolution has immense potential to improve social and economic outcomes for women and girls, it poses the risk of perpetuating existing patterns of discrimination and gender inequalities.
- Demand-side barriers to meaningful connectivity for women and girls are varied, and context specific, and include lack of digital skills, affordability of Internet access and/or digital tools/equipment, safety concerns, relevance of content, and lack of autonomy.
- These issues link back to the learning environment and contribute significantly to the representation of women and girls in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). The prevalence of gendered social norms and stereotypes, continue to serve as barriers to women and girls, in entering STEM education and careers.
- Gender disparities in digital skills, in the use of the Internet- and in the ICT sector, all have implications for the abilities of women and girls to define and/or influence innovation and technological changes in the digital space. It also means they lag behind in skills needed to navigate the rapidly changing job markets.
 - It is estimated that by 2030, around 40 - 160 million women (7% - 24% of those women who are currently employed), may need to transition across different occupations, due to shifts in labor demand with automation¹.

¹ <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/gender-equality/the-future-of-women-at-work-transitions-in-the-age-of-automation>

- As digital skills and competencies have moved from “optional to essential”, this year’s CSW theme is especially relevant.
- Technology has also been used as a tool for perpetuating violence, for surveillance and censorship, and to propagate gendered disinformation, and harmful societal narratives.
- Those at heightened risk of online and ICT-facilitated violence include young women and girls, indigenous women, women with disabilities, and women whose professions or activism require them to be more visible online – such as women journalists, politicians, women’s rights activists and women’s human rights defenders.

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- There is an urgent need to work together across different sectors of society i.e. with civil society, UN and private sector partners, to ensure that technological innovations and advances are conceptualized and designed to contribute to transforming social norms, and to amplify the voices of women and girls in all aspects of life, so that the benefits of digitalization benefit all, equally to achieve the SDGs.

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- Let me conclude here by thanking you for your kind attention- and to urge everyone, to take this convening, to contribute to shaping a global normative framework on gender equality, technology and innovation i.e. one that *advances a human-centered approach to digitalization, with feminist principles of inclusion, intersectionality and systemic change, at the core.*
- We hope this will inform subsequent intergovernmental process on the development of the Global Digital Compact as part of the UN Secretary-General's Our Common Agenda- at the Summit of the Future, planned for September 2024.
- Together with our UN partners present here today, UN Women stands ready to support you however we can on this endeavor.
- Thank you and over to you Jessica.