



ITU Backgrounders

ITU AND GENDER EQUALITY

ICTs can play a profoundly transformational role in the lives of women and girls, providing them with education and training, promoting literacy, enhancing job opportunities, improving health care, and providing access to information that can help them change social attitudes that constrain their life choices.

Since ITU's adoption and progressive strengthening of [Resolution 70](#), which recognizes the enormous potential of information and communication technologies to furthering gender empowerment, ITU has positioned itself as UN agency committed to 'ICT and gender' issues. From bridging the world-wide digital gender gap to specific policies within the Union that promote gender equality, ITU has committed to Gender as one of its key areas of action.

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Accelerating progress towards [MDG 3](#)

The potential of ICTs to bridge the gender gap, particularly in developing countries, is enormous:

Education and training: ICT applications can deliver training in basic literacy as well as in ICT and other skills that expand economic opportunities. Young girls need to be assured of equitable access to the ICT resources increasingly available in schools throughout the developing world.

Health: Mobile phone applications and telemedicine platforms are enabling better access to health care for women and their children, especially in rural areas. They can help to combat maternal and infant mortality, and provide information and advice on health, hygiene and birth control.

Entrepreneurship: ICTs open up new possibilities for women's entrepreneurship. Village 'phone ladies' are one example. Women are also managing telecentres, setting up online businesses, and using ICTs to run their businesses better.

Giving women a voice: ICTs, from mobile phones to social networks, enable women to express and share experiences, concerns and knowledge, make their voices heard in decision-making processes, and access information and services provided by governments, international organizations and NGOs.

Social attitudes: By increasing access to information on the world outside, including through entertainment such as films and television shows, ICTs can help in changing social attitudes that constrain opportunities for women and girls.

ICT careers: In the developed world teenage girls use computers and the Internet nearly as much as boys do, but they are far less likely to make ICT a career. While computer and information systems managers are consistently rated in the top 20 best-paying jobs – along with surgeons, orthodontists, lawyers and airline pilots – in most countries girls now represent under 20% of all computer science degrees.



Change begins at home

ITU's new Gender Equality and Mainstreaming (GEM) Policy is being implemented across the whole organization, both at the Geneva headquarters and across ITU's network of [13 Field Offices](#). As part of the policy, ITU has established gender guidelines for all staff, developed skills training through an online gender course hosted by UN Women's training centre, and created an online platform, ConnectHer, to help ITU staff and the broader 'ITU community' of 193 governments and over 750 private sector and academia members to share best practices related to gender equality promotion.

But ITU's work on Gender equality reaches far beyond its organizational boundaries. We're involved in a broad range of initiatives to raise global awareness, provide grassroots training, and empower women to harness ICTs to take control of their own futures.

International Girls in ICT Day

With the number of school girls opting to study technology-related disciplines on the decline in most countries worldwide, ITU is committed to championing the catalytic role a tech career can play in creating exciting, far-reaching opportunities for women and girls.

Launched in 2011 and now celebrated every year on the fourth Thursday in April, International [Girls in ICT Day](#) has been gaining enormous momentum worldwide, with almost 2,700 events in 140 countries held to date, empowering over 100,000 girls and young women.

These inspirational and educational events provide girls with hands-on skills training and mentorship opportunities to encourage them to pursue careers in the field of information and communication technology. Now in its fourth year, global excitement around Girls in ICT Day continues to grow, with over 130 countries expected to hold events hosted by governments, the private sector and NGOs during 2014.

In June 2012, Academy Award winning actress Geena Davis became ITU's Special Envoy for Women and Girls in ICT, to promote the empowering role technology can play in the lives of women and girls.

Digital literacy training for women around the world

ITU's [Women's Digital Literacy Campaign](#) is a global initiative to help empower disadvantaged and underserved women with knowledge of basic ICT skills for personal growth and expanded opportunities for better lives.

Thanks to a key partnership with international NGO Telecentre.org, ITU has helped bring vital digital literacy training to women in 79 countries. Through the efforts of 153 participating organizations and 20,000 telecentres around the world, ITU and Telecentre.org have already trained over one million women to become digitally literate, and both organizations are now looking at future partnership activities to offer more advanced training programmes.

Basic digital literacy training opens the door to many skills needed to succeed in today's broadband environment, including financial literacy skills and ICT-enabled career training. Training enables women to set up online businesses and to use broadband services, such as social networking sites, to enhance their economic activity. ITU has also developed a range of multilingual training materials to promote women's digital literacy and the use of ICTs to improve women's lives.

ITU's gender initiatives are just one more example of ITU's commitment to 'connecting the world' and ensuring all people – especially marginalized or disadvantaged groups – get the opportunity to harness the empowering potential of digital technologies.



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Access to advanced ICT training

ITU [ICT training programmes](#) targeting Least Developed Countries have a target of 30% female enrolment. Two of ITU's global network of Internet Training Academies - Indonesia and Uganda – both have a special gender focus, and a sponsorship programme for female students in developing regions helps around 100 girls a year get access to ICT training that they would not otherwise be able to afford.

ITU is also involved in promoting community ICT centres through its Connect a School, Connect a Community initiative, which focuses on using connected schools as community ICT centres, providing ICT skills and access for people with special needs including women.

MoU with UN Women

As part of its partnership strategy across the UN family, ITU recently signed a key partnership agreement with leading UN gender agency UN Women, which will see both agencies collaborate on new initiatives and campaigns to promote ICTs as tools for women's empowerment. ITU will be closely involved in the development of the Beijing+20 event which will be held in New York in 2015, highlighting the catalytic role of ICTs in transforming women's lives.

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