

Response to ITU

Open Consultation of the CWG-Internet on

*“Bridging the Digital Gender Divide”*

# Objective

This document is a response to the Open Consultation of the CWG-Internet on “Bridging the Digital Gender Divide” that was sent by the ITU focusing on the following basic questions:

* What approaches and examples of good practices are available to increase Internet access and digital literacy of women and girls, including in decision-making processes on Internet public policy?
* What approaches and examples of good practices are available to promote the access and use of ICTs by SMEs in developing and least-developed countries, particularly those owned/managed by women, in order to achieve greater participation in the digital economy?
* Which are the available sources and mechanisms for measuring women's participation in the digital economy with focus on SME's and micro-enterprises?
* What measures/policies could be envisioned in order to foster the role of women as entrepreneurs and managers of SMEs, specifically in developing and least-developed countries?
* What are the gaps in addressing these challenges? How can they be addressed and what is the role of governments?"

# Introduction

The Communications and Information Technology Authority- CITRA of the State of Kuwait has been established in 2014 by Law No. (37). It is a government organization responsible for regulating and monitoring Telecommunications and Information Technology in the country. CITRA's organizational objectives are driven from its law, the major roles are as the following:

* Set the regulation and the policies of Telecommunications and IT services within Kuwait.
* Ensuring competence of Telecommunications and IT services throughout Kuwait, in the means of quality, transparency and variety.
* Resolving disputes between the licensed Telecommunication operators.
* Development and implementation of frameworks and policies for Telecommunication and Information Technology systems and services.
* Develop technical and operational requirements and specifications related to national security and must be adhered by public and private sectors.

Unquestionably, utilizing the Internet, and encouraging women’s participation in ICT is a social and economic driving force central to the core objectives and responsibilities of CITRA.

# Response to Invitation

## Approaches to Increase Digital Literacy for Women and Girls

Kuwait believes that encouraging women in ICT fields is of great importance to development and progression as for any modern society and economy. Technology is the way forward for societies, as the Internet along with its newest phenomenon, blockchain, will shape the future. Kuwait is certain of that the Internet space is yet to play major roles in various aspects of its society and country.

Some approaches to increase digital literacy among women and girls in Kuwait are as follows:

Kuwait provides several awards to encourage people of all kinds to create web content. For instance, the Kuwait e-award encourages the progress of information technology in the fields of e-government, e-entertainment, e-health, e-business, e-culture, e-learning, and e-science. Leading the judging panel is a female Kuwaiti technology entrepreneur who was also a prominent member of the judging panel in Microsoft’s Imagine Cup and the World Summit Award. Another award that recognizes the works of individuals in ICT is the Sheikh Salam Al Ali Informatics Foundation, where many women have organized as well as been awarded for their achievements in creating innovative web content.

Women are also engaged in creating the Internet public policy. For example, in the field of ICT there are female employees and managers forming internet policies in Kuwait where their involved in setting up e-governance laws along with forming legislations preventing cybercrime.

## Promoting the Use of ICT by SMEs Managed by Women

Government entities and private companies employ many female IT employees, and many managers are females who are initiating new ICT projects for implementation on a national level, they are contributing to diversifying Kuwait’s economy and reliance on the oil industry alone. Such projects include cyber security and smart government initiatives. There could be more recognition honouring such female contributions, but there do exist annual awards for women’s recognition in the country.

Moreover, many women are involved in what may be considered as informal employment, wherein women utilize social media as a medium to support and promote their fashion, catering or event planning among other businesses.

## Micro-Enterprises

In April 2013, the Kuwaiti Government has enacted law number 98 of 2013 to establish a National Fund for SME Development. The law is intended to help the country make a major stride in the efforts to support the youth, combat unemployment, and enable the private sector to drive economic growth. The National Fund offers financial and technical services to start-ups and aim to help turn their ideas into profitable projects. Hubs provide both incubation and acceleration services to start-ups from targeted sectors, which include coaching, mentorship, training, financing, and workspace following specific programs. On March 22, 2016, the National Fund has hosted its first Women in Entrepreneurship event with a panel discussion. The Minister of Social Affairs and Labour and Minister of State for Planning and Development welcomed the attendees with her speech on the effectiveness of “Women in Entrepreneurship”. Panellists at the event addressed a variety of topics including best practices for social media, how women can support each other, and educating young women early on pursuing their passion and start their businesses.

The Women Mentor Forum (WMF) is a Kuwait-based non-profit organization that seeks to support and nurture the growth of women in the private sector, both entrepreneurs and professionals. WMF’s vision is to support Kuwaiti women in the private sector and increase their leadership rates by 2035. Their program includes a series of forums where successful women entrepreneurs and women executives are invited to participate as speakers to share their experiences and give their advice to aspiring young women and men. WMF also provides Mentorship Program from which young aspiring women benefit from directly as they are personally mentored by women that have succeeded in their careers and as entrepreneurs and are ready to give advice and consult their young women mentees.

The Kuwaiti Society of Engineers have organized the Women Forum from the International Perspective for two consecutive years to support female engineers in Kuwait.

## Measures and Policies

Examples of measures already in place in Kuwait that encourage and support the role of women as entrepreneurs and managers of SMEs:

Girls in Tech (a female led Kuwaiti initiative) collaborated with Microsoft for Microsoft’s biggest event in the region called ‘[Microsoft Open Door](https://kuwait.girlsintech.org/2014/02/03/microsoft-open-door-2014-kuwait/) ‘2014 – Kuwait and Zain Group introduces [Women Empowerment Network Initiative](https://www.telecompaper.com/news/zain-group-introduces-women-empowerment-network-initiative--1219374). These measures encompass females in Kuwait introducing ICT-related workshops and initiatives on a national and regional scale. There currently exist numerous CEO’s of major companies who are female, including the CEO of Zain (the largest Telecommunication Company in the country). There are numerous female managers of SMEs currently in Kuwait.

Policies that could be envisioned to encourage further female participation:

Like the policy in place to encourage a certain amount of Kuwaiti nationals in any private enterprise, a certain number of eligible females may be proposed in any entity to achieve gender balance. However, such policies must be accompanied by laws to for women who may begin this process and feel intimidated in a male-dominant environment, and interact with males who may be against high-ranked female employees. As with any major change, change happens as the older generations fade out and the newer generations who support gender equality in the work place become employed.

## Challenges, Gaps, and the Role of Governments

Kuwait understands the importance of bridging the gender gap in the country for an inclusive and dynamic society and economy. According to the Public Authority for Civil Information statistics of July 2017, in the government sector there are 179,123 male Kuwaiti employees and 165,983 women. In the private sector, there are 46,642 male employees, and 43,085 women. The total number of employed women is 217,577 and the total male employees are 231,579.

The recent World Economic Forum Report (The Global Gender Gap Report 2017) ranks Kuwait 129 out of 144 countries. However, some statistics which may show inequality on the surface may not consider the different nature and system or responsibilities of genders in different societies. It is noteworthy to add that Kuwait scores highly in wages paid during maternity/paternity leave. This does not apply to males, naturally. And while Kuwaiti women’s educational attainment and health and survival scores are high, there is a large gap regarding political and leadership empowerment, where the ratio of women in parliament is 3.1 to men 96.9. Kuwait realises this ratio is low, however, women in Kuwaiti parliament is a new concept, and so, few women can be seen in parliamentary or ministerial positions or as head of state. Kuwait is currently changing and embracing women more, as can be seen by the various initiatives and empowerment events for women mentioned in this document. However, as with any major change, the implementation of this will take time as mindsets change and the newer generations implement changes. Kuwait hopes that this will change in the foreseeable future. The government’s role is to encourage female participation in political and leadership roles.

Annual statistics show that in the government sector salaries for men are slightly higher than women. However, due to the nature of Kuwaiti society, the government issues allowances to males who are married and have children – as it is expected that they are responsible for and provide for their families and pay for the basic expenses of the family. Though, salaries for women in the oil sector are consistently around equal (higher in some groups) and in different age groups with men.