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Online consultation on bridging the digital gender divide

1. 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?

The #eSkills4Girls initiative by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) aims to increase the participation of women and girls in the digital economy and successfully raised awareness among the G20. At their summit in Hamburg in July 2017, the G20 leaders endorsed the #eSkills4Girls statement as an annex to their Leaders’ Declaration. The statement defines common goals to facilitate education, employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for women and girls in the digital economy.

On a practical level, the BMZ supports the development of coding skills of women and girls in Africa. With the support of Germany, the Africa Code Week, a joint initiative by SAP, the Cape Town Science Centre and the Galway Education Centre, took place in 35 African countries in 2017, enabling 1.3 million, among them more than 40% women and girls to take part in coding lessons and training 800 teachers.

In Rwanda, Ghana and Indonesia for example, the BMZ implements projects that aim at encouraging more women to pursue a career in the male dominated tech industry. To this end, the BMZ supports its partners in updating the quality of technical vocational education and training. A main goal of these projects is to involve stakeholders from the private sector to allow practice-oriented trainings.

In the Palestinian territories, a BMZ funded programme qualifies women in non-traditional courses of higher education, such as IT or electrical engineering through dual study courses which link institutions of higher education and commercial enterprises as places of learning.

For more information, see: https://www.eskills4girls.org/learn/g20-flagship-projects/

1. 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?

Digital entrepreneurship is a key driver behind a society’s digital transformation. Tech entrepreneurs provide innovative, marketable digital solutions and services that address important needs and problems hindering development, such as lack of information and skills, reliable provision of electricity or basic healthcare. At the same time, these entrepreneurs create new employment opportunities and have a positive impact on the economies and societies of their countries.

Many technology start-ups in developing and emerging countries do not succeed on regional or international markets because they lack access to capital, clients, talented staff and digital infrastructure. For female, young or non-metropolitan entrepreneurs it is even harder to cope with these challenges.

The Make-IT Alliance is a joint initiative of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) that, together with stakeholders from the private sector and civil society, improves the framework for technology start-ups and entrepreneurs in developing and emerging countries. The aim of the Make-IT Alliance is to contribute to inclusive and sustainable economic growth through promoting tech entrepreneurship. This is realized through the cooperation of German and international businesses, industry associations, investors, funding institutions and further local partners on site.

1. Which are the available **sources and mechanisms for measuring** women’s participation in the digital economy with focus on SME’s and micro-enterprises?

The research group of EQUALS, the Global Partnership for Gender Equality in the Digital Age, is working on mechanisms to track the progress of women's and girls’ access to and use of ICT as well as their digital skills.

1. What **measures / policies could be envisioned in order to focus the role of women as entrepreneurs and managers of SMEs**, specifically in developing and least-developed countries?

* Support and promote a digital entrepreneurial culture for African women through the promotion and financial support of
* International, regional and national peer-to-peer exchange networks;
* mentoring for women and to further strengthen the role of women in existing programmes;
* public and private training programmes, including the improvement of curricula and the capacity of trainers and mentors
* Strengthen the capacity of intermediaries to sustain the local and regional support mechanisms
* Collaborate with the local entrepreneurial ecosystem in order to increase the number of activities and trainings targeted to female entrepreneurs and to create diversity policies that go beyond focusing on the recruitment of women in order to promote sustainable economic development and leadership
* Support Africa’s governments to provide suitable and well-targeted monetary, fiscal and regulatory measures and financial support, including subsidies, grants, credit and tax incentives for women
* Expand access to education and training through digital technology and other innovative services

1. What are the **gaps in addressing these challenges**? How can they be addressed and what is the role of governments?

Depending on geographic and social conditions women face numerous challenges to financing, owning, and growing businesses, including access to capital and networks and foundational literacy and digital skills, as well as legal and policy obstacles to business ownership and development.

Among policy-makers, there is a need to raise awareness on the digital inclusion of women and girls and to jointly commit to promote **the role of women as entrepreneurs and managers of SMEs**. This is why the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) has developed the initiative #eSkills4Girls to contribute to improved digital skills and employment perspectives for women and girls in the digital economy, particularly in developing and emerging countries. The initiative was launched during Germany’s G20 presidency, calling for more action at a global level.

In the G20 statement [“Transforming the future of women and girls in the digital economy”](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/23556/2017-g20-initiative-eskills4girls-en.pdf), the G20 committed to: “work towards improving an enabling environment – including through private sector engagement – for women to facilitate their entrepreneurship, innovation and participation in the digital economy including through support programmes such as entrepreneurship education and training, financing schemes, incubators and support networks. We support initiatives for strengthening womenʼs and girlsʼ ability to generate and disseminate their own content that reflects their viewpoints and experiences. We also support initiatives to develop digital financial services that are accessible and appropriate for women.”

The recommendations developed by the [Africa-EU Youth Lab](https://make-it-initiative.org/africa/activities/events/africa-eu-youthlab-2017/) that took place on the occasion of the 6th EU-Africa Business Forum in November 2017 in Abidjan, Cote d’Ivoire, also include a paragraph on women in digital entrepreneurship and call to: “Create safe online and offline spaces for women to promote and exchange ideas and experiences on digital entrepreneurship and connect with role models from the tech world, as well as dedicated spaces to ensure the promotion of women in the ICT sector.”

It is the role of governments to establish a policy framework that (1) assures fair and equal access for all people to ICTs, including the most vulnerable; (2) sets up a legal and regulatory framework that addresses market failures; (3) design education systems to equip women and girls with the skills needed in the digital economy.