January 2018

**ITU Council Working Group on International Internet-related Public Policy Issues (CWG-Internet)**

**UNESCO’s Consultation Response**

UNESCO appreciates the opportunity to respond to the ITU’s CWG - Internet consultation to address gender equality for Internet users.

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?

Ensuring that everyone has the necessary digital skills to succeed in today’s technology-driven world is of global importance. Modern information and communication technologies (ICTs) are increasingly central to work and education, and acquiring skills to leverage these technologies is needed to address many of the global challenges outlined in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

Digital skills and competencies have already fostered the creativity and innovation that have brought about improvements in many aspects of life, such as health and well-being, infrastructure, sustainable energy production, agriculture and other sectors. Digital technologies have also demonstrated their potential to be a powerful catalyst for the political, economic and social empowerment of women and girls and the promotion of gender equality. They can be an important driver for information and exchange and can make female voices heard; they can enhance participation in public decision-making and can provide access to education, financing and networks.

UNESCO’s strong intersectoral collaboration across the Education and Communication and Information (CI) Sectors optimises the achievement of results. The following examples are initiatives taken by UNESCO to address some of the complex social, economic and cultural barriers that prevent women from internet access and digital literacy:

* 1. As Co-Vice-chair of the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, UNESCO led on the development of the publication Digital Skills for Life and Work, which examines how the education sector can ensure that all people develop essential digital skills for life and work. The Report’s policy recommendations and examples of innovative practice will be an important foundation for the products developed through this initiative. As a follow-up to the report, UNESCO is establishing a working group to develop an internationally recognized frameworks for digital skills in order to promote the equitable development of digital skills and the monitoring of progress towards SDG target 4.4.
	2. UNESCO’s Education Sector has been implementing ICT in education projects in more than 50 countries which aim to develop national ICT in education policies and master plans with a focus on reducing the digital divide, and building teachers’ ICT competency through its ICT Competency Framework for Teachers (ICT CFT). More specifically, UNESCO has been supporting field projects in harnessing mobile technology to empower women and girls in South Asian and Sub-Saharan African countries.
	3. UNESCO hosts an annual Mobile Learning Week conference which is recognized as a pre-eminent conference on mobile learning and attracts education leaders and practitioners from around the world. The theme of the 2018 Conference is “Skills for a connected world”, and will offer an important platform for the EQUALS Skills Coalition to a wide range of participants, including policy-makers, project managers, educators, researchers, and representatives of NGOs, international organizations and private companies.
	4. UNESCO’s Youth Mobile Initiative is providing young people with basic technical skills and the confidence to develop, promote, and sell locally relevant mobile apps, and professional skills to advance confidence, empathy and persistence. Active in over 25 countries, reaching more than 5,000 beneficiaries, the initiative will also provide an important platform to reach youth and youth-led organizations, contributing to the improved relevance and sustainability of the products developed through this proposal.
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?

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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 **UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS)** is the statistical office of UNESCO and is the primary UN depository for cross-nationally comparable statistics on education, science and technology, culture, and communication covering more than 200 countries and territories. As sex-disaggregated indicators are systematically integrated into all UIS data collections, gender equality data in education, science, culture and communication can be easily searched on its data base, “[UIS.Stat](http://data.uis.unesco.org/)”.

Specifically, under the theme “[Science, technology and innovation: Women in Science](http://uis.unesco.org/en/topic/women-science),” fact sheets and [visualized reports](http://uis.unesco.org/apps/visualisations/women-in-science/#!lang=en) can be found on the status quo of women’s participation in the field of science, technology and innovation. More data can be searched directly in the [database](http://data.uis.unesco.org/index.aspx?queryid=118&export) using indicators such as “Researchers by function and by sex”, “Researchers by sector of employment and sex”, “Researchers by field of R&D and sex”.

In 2015, UNESCO started the implementation of the project “**Improved Measurement of Gender Equality in Science and Engineering**”, also known as [**SAGA**](https://en.unesco.org/saga), with the objective to develop and access evidence to assess STI policies using sex-disaggregated data, and by collecting information on drivers and barriers in STEM. The SAGA project aims to contribute to improving the situation of women and reducing the gender gap in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields in all countries at all levels of education and research. To achieve these objectives, it determines, measures and assesses sex-disaggregated data, as well as supports the design and implementation of science, technology and innovation (STI) policy instruments that affect gender equality in STEM. Moreover, SAGA aims to analyse how policies affect the gender balance in STEM, undertake inventories of STI gender equality policies, develop new and better indicators to provide tools for evidence-based policy-making, build capacity in Member States for data collection on gender in STEM, and prepare methodological documents to support the collection of statistics.

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?

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

The term “digital divide” has been used to describe inequalities between certain social groups in their access to computers and the internet, but is also an issue in terms of digital skills acquisition and use. Recent reports show that worldwide, only 18% of graduates with computer science degrees are women. Women are 1.6 times more likely to report lack of skills as a barrier to internet use than men.

Illiteracy is a significant obstacle for girls’ and women’s digital skills development. Two-thirds of the world’s over 700 million illiterate adults are women. Bridging the digital divide will require equal access to learning opportunities in school and through training programmes, particularly for those who are most vulnerable to being left behind.

There is a need for innovative, long-term and holistic programmes that address this gender digital divide, and that empower women and girls in acquiring basic competences and digital skills that will help them to become both ICT users and creators in the digital world as well as in broader science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields.