

COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

SAI MODEL UNITED NATIONS

BACKGROUND GUIDE

Bridging the Digital Gender Divide: Ensuring Equal Access to Technology, Skills and Online Safety for Women and Girls

AGENDA ITEM	Bridging the Digital Gender Divide
COMMITTEE	Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)
BODY	United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)
PREPARED BY	The Secretariat

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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

From the Desk of Bureau,

Honorable Member State Representatives,

On behalf of the Executive Board (EB), it is our distinct privilege to welcome you to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women simulation at SAI Model United Nations 2026. We look forward to a committee defined by rigorous analysis, principled diplomacy, and meaningful multilateral engagement.

The agenda for this session is:

"Bridging the digital gender divide: Ensuring equal access to technology, skills and online safety for women and girls."

This agenda invites representatives to engage in meaningful discourse on a crucial contemporary issue affecting marginalised stakeholders globally on digital platforms which are in spirit meant to be a safe, regulated environment.

Representatives are expected to deliberate upon the institutional capacity of the United Nations (UN) to counter the existing fallacies in the status quo, the role of regional organizations (ROs), the challenges of political will and sovereignty, as well as the long-term sustainability and implementation of mediated settlements.

Representatives are expected to ground their arguments in relevant UN resolutions, relevant past discussions across committees linked to the agenda and understand the extent to which the mandate of the United Nations Commission on Status of Women would deal with the intricacies of the given agenda.

The Executive Board (EB) would like to place the following instructions on record:

- 1. Use of Study Guide:** Representatives are strongly advised to engage with the study guide in its entirety. However, it should not be treated as an exhaustive source, where meaningful participation will depend on the ability to move beyond descriptive understanding and engage in critical, analytical, and policy-oriented discussion.
- 2. Rules of Procedure (RoP):** To be informed before commencement of the committee. All representatives are required to maintain decorum, respect the authority of the Dais, and participate in proceedings with the expected diplomatic courtesy towards every associated individual.

Prior to the commencement of the committee, representatives are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the institutional functioning of the Commission on the Status of Women and hierarchical relevance including its deliberative processes, resolution drafting practices, and the role of subsidiary bodies.

The Executive Board (EB) places particular emphasis on diplomacy that is both substantive and solution-oriented, where representatives are encouraged to engage in constructive dialogue, build consensus where possible, and propose recommendations that are politically viable, institutionally grounded, and aligned with the principles of the United Nations.

We look forward to an engaging and intellectually rigorous committee that reflects both the significance of the agendas and the responsibilities entrusted to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women.

Warm regards,

Srotoswini Ghatak, Chairperson

Sambit Bhattacharjee, Vice Chairperson

Executive Board

United Nations Commission on the Status of Women | SAI MUN 2026

I. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE AGENDA

1.1 The Digital Era and Its Unequal Terrain

The twenty-first century has witnessed an unprecedented transformation of social, economic and political life through digital technology. The internet, mobile connectivity, artificial intelligence, and digital platforms now mediate access to employment, education, financial services, healthcare, political participation, and personal safety. Yet this transformation has not been gender-neutral. The systematic exclusion of women and girls from meaningful digital participation constitutes one of the most consequential and least visible forms of structural inequality in contemporary global development.

According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), as of 2023, approximately 259 million fewer women than men use the internet globally—a figure that, while showing some improvement from prior years, continues to represent a structurally entrenched disparity. In low-income countries, this gap widens dramatically: women are up to 52 percent less likely than men to use mobile internet in South Asia, and the gap in sub-Saharan Africa remains over 37 percent.

Metric	Statistic
Women offline vs. men (global)	259M
Women in AI professions	<30%
Smartphone gender gap (LICs)	22%
STEM degrees held by women	35%+

1.2 Why the Digital Divide is a Development Crisis

Digital exclusion is not a peripheral issue; it is architecturally connected to the full spectrum of sustainable development imperatives. The digital divide compounds pre-existing inequalities across every dimension:

- **Economic Exclusion:** The shift to digital labour markets, platform economies, and e-commerce ecosystems systematically disadvantages women who lack digital skills or connectivity. The McKinsey Global Institute (2019) estimated that closing the digital gender gap could add USD 13 trillion to global GDP.

- **Educational Deficit:** Remote and hybrid learning environments, now standard across much of the Global South following the COVID-19 pandemic, assume digital access. Girls who lack devices or connectivity lose years of educational continuity.
- **Healthcare Disparities:** Digital health platforms, telemedicine, and public health communications increasingly depend on mobile internet access. Exclusion from these systems disproportionately affects women's reproductive and general healthcare.
- **Political Marginalisation:** Digital public discourse and civic mobilisation occur increasingly on online platforms. Women's absence from these spaces diminishes their voice in democratic processes.
- **Safety and Violence:** The internet has become a primary vector for gender-based violence. Cyberharassment, non-consensual intimate image sharing, online stalking, and digital coercive control disproportionately target women, deterring engagement and participation.

1.3 Structural Causes of the Digital Gender Gap

The digital gender divide does not arise from a single source; it is overdetermined by multiple intersecting structural forces:

Dimension	Structural Driver	Manifestation
Economic	Income inequality; device & data costs	Women less likely to own smartphones or afford data plans
Socio-cultural	Gender norms restricting mobility & tech use	Male gatekeeping of household devices; family restrictions
Educational	Low female STEM participation	Underrepresentation in ICT fields; digital skills gap
Infrastructural	Urban/rural connectivity disparities	Women concentrated in rural areas with weaker coverage
Safety	Online harassment & GBV	Self-censorship and withdrawal from digital spaces
Institutional	Lack of gender-responsive tech policy	Policies designed without accounting for women's needs

II. CSW: MANDATE AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

2.1 Origins and Authority

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was established in 1946 by ECOSOC Resolution 11(II). It is the principal intergovernmental body of the United Nations dedicated exclusively to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Commission operates under the aegis of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and maintains close linkages with UN Women. The CSW fulfils its mandate through the adoption of agreed conclusions and resolutions, which while not legally binding carry significant normative weight, shaping national legislation, UN programming, and donor priorities.

2.2 The Digital Divide Within CSW's Mandate

- **Economic Empowerment:** CSW's focus on women's economic rights encompasses access to labour markets, entrepreneurship, financial services, and livelihood - all of which are now digitally mediated.
- **Education and Skills:** The Commission's long-standing concern with gender parity in education extends naturally to digital literacy and STEM education.
- **Elimination of Violence Against Women:** Online gender-based violence—cyberharassment, image-based abuse, digital stalking—is an extension of the VAWG mandate that CSW has pursued since its inception.
- **Governance and Political Participation:** Women's participation in public life now includes digital civic spaces, making digital access a prerequisite for political agency.
- **Health and Rights:** Telemedicine and digital health tools are increasingly central to the realisation of women's health rights.

2.3 CSW67 Agreed Conclusions on Technology-Facilitated GBV

The CSW67 Agreed Conclusions (E/CN.6/2023/L.3), adopted on 24 March 2023 under the priority theme 'Innovation, technological change and education in the digital age', represent the most comprehensive multilateral articulation of norms on technology-facilitated gender-based violence to date. The Agreed Conclusions explicitly call upon Member States to enact, strengthen and enforce legislation specifically criminalising online and technology-facilitated forms of violence against women and girls, including cyberharassment, non-consensual intimate image sharing, online stalking, and digital coercive control by intimate partners. The document further calls for accessible, gender-responsive, and survivor-centred redress mechanisms, including reporting channels that do not re-traumatise survivors.

Critically, the CSW67 Agreed Conclusions call on digital platforms and technology companies to assume proactive due diligence obligations including the design of safety-by-default features, transparent and gender-responsive content moderation, and accessible remedies for survivors of online GBV. Delegates must situate their deliberations within the normative framework established by these Agreed Conclusions, which constitute the most recent authoritative CSW standard on this subject.

CSW PRIORITY THEMES - RECENT YEARS

CSW67 (2023): Innovation, technological change and education in the digital age for the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. This theme placed the digital divide at the explicit centre of the Commission's annual work. The Agreed Conclusions produced at CSW67 are among the most operationally specific normative outputs on technology-facilitated GBV in CSW history.

2.4 Relationship with Other UN Bodies

UN Body / Process	Relevance to Digital Gender Divide
UN Women	Operational arm; implements digital inclusion and e-safety programmes globally
ITU	Technical standard-setting; gender digital divide data; Broadband Commission
UNESCO	ICT in education; media and information literacy; open educational resources; AI ethics
UNCTAD	Digital economy; e-commerce; ICT for development
OHCHR	Human rights in the digital space; freedom of expression online; right to privacy
Special Rapporteur on VAW	Mandated to report on online and technology-facilitated VAWG
WSIS/IGF	Global ICT governance framework; multi-stakeholder internet governance
UNDP	Digital public infrastructure; integrated national financing frameworks
HLPF/SDG Review	Accountability for SDG 5, 9, 10-gender, infrastructure, inequality

III. THE DIGITAL GENDER GAP - A GLOBAL PORTRAIT

3.1 Access and Connectivity

The most fundamental layer of the digital divide is physical connectivity. While global internet penetration has grown rapidly, the gender dimension of this expansion has been persistently unequal. The ITU's Facts and Figures 2023 report documents that, globally, 70 percent of men use the internet compared to 65 percent of women—but these aggregate figures mask dramatic regional variation. In low-income countries, the gap can exceed 20 percentage points, and in parts of sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, women's internet use remains below 30 percent.

Mobile internet is the dominant mode of connectivity in the Global South, and the mobile gender gap is particularly acute. The GSMA's Mobile Gender Gap Report 2023 notes that women in low- and middle-income countries are 15 percent less likely than men to own a mobile phone, and this rises to 41 percent for smartphone ownership. The high cost of devices and data, combined with socio-cultural restrictions on women's use of technology, drive these disparities.

3.2 Digital Skills and Literacy

Access alone is insufficient. Digital inclusion requires meaningful capacity to navigate, create, evaluate, and communicate using digital tools. The gender gap in digital skills is pronounced across all income levels:

- Basic digital skills (sending emails, using search engines) show significant gender gaps in LDCs, where only 30 percent of women possess foundational skills compared to 46 percent of men.
- Intermediate and advanced digital skills (coding, data analysis, digital design, cybersecurity) remain heavily male-dominated globally. Women constitute only 22 percent of professionals in artificial intelligence fields, 28 percent of computer science graduates globally, and fewer than 20 percent of cybersecurity professionals.

The skills gap is rooted in gender-differentiated patterns of STEM education, occupational steering, and workplace culture, all of which reinforce a pipeline that systematically produces fewer women with advanced digital competencies.

3.3 Online Safety and Gender-Based Violence in Digital Spaces

The internet has emerged as a significant arena for gender-based violence. The Economist Intelligence Unit's 2020 report documented that 45 out of 51 countries surveyed had no legal mechanism specifically addressing online violence against women. Key forms of technology-facilitated GBV include:

- **Cyberharassment and cyberstalking:** Systematic use of digital platforms to intimidate, threaten, or monitor women, frequently by intimate partners.
- **Non-consensual intimate image sharing (NCII):** Commonly referred to as 'image-based abuse', this involves the distribution of intimate images without consent, predominantly targeting women and girls.
- **Doxxing:** Publication of private personal information online to facilitate real-world harm.
- **Online sexual harassment:** Unwanted sexual messages, imagery, and solicitation, disproportionately experienced by women across social platforms.
- **Hate speech and sexist abuse:** Women in public life—politicians, journalists, activists—face systematic online abuse designed to silence their participation.

The UN Broadband Commission's 2015 report estimated that 73 percent of women online had experienced some form of cyber violence. The 'chilling effect' of online abuse on women's digital participation is well-documented: women modify their online behaviour, self-censor, and withdraw from digital public life in response to harassment.

3.4 Digital Public Infrastructure - The UNDP Framework

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has advanced a comprehensive policy framework for Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), defining it as a suite of shared, interoperable, open-standard digital systems that serve as foundational building blocks for a country's digital economy and public service delivery. Core DPI components include digital identity systems (such as biometric national IDs), interoperable payment infrastructure (real-time payment rails and digital wallets), and data exchange platforms that enable government-to-citizen and government-to-business service delivery.

From a gender equality perspective, DPI represents both a structural opportunity and a structural risk. Where designed with explicit gender-responsiveness, DPI can dramatically accelerate women's access to financial services, social protection, healthcare entitlements, and civic participation—as demonstrated by India's Aadhaar-based direct benefit transfers, which improved women's access to government welfare schemes.

However, where DPI design fails to account for women's lower rates of formal identification, mobile phone ownership, and literacy, it risks actively excluding the most marginalised women from digital public services at scale. UNDP's DPI guidance emphasises that gender impact assessments must be embedded in DPI design, deployment, and governance cycles, with particular attention to data protection, biometric equity, and

consent architecture. Delegates should engage with UNDP's DPI frameworks when discussing digital infrastructure policies and their gendered implications.

IV. PREVIOUS UN DISCUSSIONS AND RESOLUTIONS

4.1 CSW Agreed Conclusions and Resolutions

Session / Year	Relevance to Digital Gender Divide
CSW 67 (2023)	Priority theme: 'Innovation, technological change and education in the digital age.' Produced Agreed Conclusions directly addressing the digital gender gap, digital skills, online safety including specific provisions on technology-facilitated GBV and ICT governance.
CSW 57 (2013)	Priority theme: 'Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls.' Agreed Conclusions addressed technology-facilitated VAWG and called for legal frameworks targeting cyberviolence.
CSW 56 (2012)	Addressed rural women's access to productive resources, ICT among them, recognising digital exclusion as a rural development issue.
CSW 52 (2008)	Priority theme: 'Financing for gender equality.' Noted ICT as a critical investment area.
CSW 45 (2001)	Early recognition of the digital divide as a form of structural discrimination.

4.2 General Assembly Resolutions

- **A/RES/70/125 (2015)** - WSIS+10 Outcome Document: Reaffirmed commitment to inclusive information societies, with explicit recognition of the need to close the digital gender gap.
- **A/RES/74/253 (2019)** - 'Information and communications technologies for sustainable development': Called on Member States to integrate gender perspectives in national ICT policies.
- **A/RES/76/185 (2021)** - 'Intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls': Specifically addressed technology-facilitated violence.
- **A/RES/77/301 (2023)** - 'Gender equality and the empowerment of women through digital technologies': Dedicated resolution on digital gender equality, calling for bridging connectivity gaps, digital skills, and online safety.

4.3 ECOSOC Resolutions and High-Level Commitments

- **ECOSOC Resolution 2020/23:** Called for gender-responsive approaches to the digital economy and digital public services.
- **ECOSOC Resolution 2023/18:** Addressed digital public goods and gender equality, calling for open-source digital infrastructure designed with women's needs in mind.
- **UN Secretary-General's 'Roadmap for Digital Cooperation' (2020):** Included a dedicated pillar on digital inclusion, with women and girls as a priority group.
- **'Our Common Agenda' Report (2021):** The Secretary-General identified digital inclusion, including gender equality in digital spaces, as a foundational condition for the Summit of the Future.

4.4 WSIS and ITU Processes

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), held in Geneva (2003) and Tunis (2005), produced the Geneva Plan of Action and Tunis Agenda for the Information Society—foundational texts for global ICT governance that contain explicit gender equality commitments. The ITU's Connect 2030 Agenda specifically targets gender digital equality as a strategic goal. The Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, a joint ITU-UNESCO initiative, has published dedicated reports including the seminal 2013 report 'Doubling Digital Opportunities', providing quantitative baselines and policy recommendations.

4.5 The Beijing Platform for Action — Technology Provisions

The Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, includes Strategic Objective J.5 under Section J on 'Women and the Media': calling for increased women's participation in and access to new communication technologies. The Beijing+25 Political Declaration (2020) specifically noted the risks and opportunities of technological change for gender equality.

4.6 South-South and Triangular Cooperation for Technology Transfer

South-South cooperation (SSC)—defined in the Buenos Aires Plan of Action (1978) and reaffirmed by the Nairobi outcome document of the High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation (2009) and subsequent UNGA resolutions—offers a critical complementary modality to North-South development assistance for addressing the digital gender divide.

CSW has explicitly recognised in its agreed conclusions that technology transfer and capacity-building through South-South and triangular cooperation mechanisms can be particularly effective in reaching women and girls in contexts where traditional ODA flows are insufficient or poorly aligned with local needs. Successful models include: Brazil's digital inclusion centres for rural women, adapted and transferred to Lusophone African partners; India's deployment of the Common Service Centre model to multiple South

Asian and African states; and ASEAN's technology-sharing frameworks for women's digital entrepreneurship.

The United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC), in partnership with UN Women, has advanced frameworks for leveraging SSC to scale gender-responsive digital literacy programmes, mobile broadband deployment models, and open-source digital public goods across the Global South. Delegates from developing countries should consider articulating SSC-based technology transfer commitments as a concrete deliverable of committee deliberations.

V. GOVERNING TREATIES, CONVENTIONS AND FRAMEWORKS

5.1 CEDAW — General Recommendations 35 & 36 and Due Diligence

CEDAW, adopted by the General Assembly in 1979 and entered into force in 1981, is the most comprehensive international treaty addressing women's rights. With 189 States Parties as of 2024, it is among the most widely ratified human rights instruments. While CEDAW does not explicitly address digital technology (predating the internet), its provisions have been interpreted authoritatively and progressively by the CEDAW Committee to encompass the digital sphere. Key applicable provisions include Article 2 (obligation to eliminate discrimination in law and policy), Article 10 (equal rights in education), Article 11 (equal rights in employment), Article 13 (equal rights in economic and social life), and Article 16 (rights in marriage and family life—relevant to digital coercive control).

General Recommendation No. 36 (2017) — Girls' and Women's Education

CEDAW General Recommendation No. 36 (UN Doc. CEDAW/C/GC/36, 2017) constitutes the Committee's most authoritative interpretation of States Parties' obligations regarding education under CEDAW Article 10. GR 36 explicitly addresses information and communications technology (ICT) education, stating that States Parties bear an obligation to ensure equal access for girls and women to quality ICT education, digital literacy training, and STEM programmes at all levels of the educational system.

The Recommendation calls on States to address structural barriers—including discriminatory curricula, lack of female ICT role models, gender-biased pedagogical approaches, and family restrictions on girls' access to technology—through positive legislative and programmatic measures. GR 36 further affirms that the right to education includes the right to the skills necessary for full participation in contemporary digital societies, making digital exclusion of girls and women a *prima facie* violation of CEDAW Article 10. Delegates should reference GR 36 when framing arguments regarding STEM education, digital literacy programmes, and gender-responsive educational reform.

General Recommendation No. 35 (2017) — Gender-Based Violence and Cyber Violence

CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35 (UN Doc. CEDAW/C/GC/35, 2017) updates and extends GR 19 (1992), the foundational CEDAW interpretation of gender-based violence as a form of discrimination. GR 35 explicitly names 'cyber violence' and 'online harassment' within the prohibited forms of gender-based

violence under CEDAW—a critical interpretive development that brings the full force of CEDAW obligations to bear on digital GBV. The Recommendation affirms that cyberviolence may constitute torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment under international law when it reaches a threshold of severity.

Critically, GR 35 elaborates the due diligence standard applicable to States Parties: States bear not only the obligation to refrain from committing gender-based violence but also a positive obligation to prevent, investigate, prosecute and provide redress for technology-facilitated GBV perpetrated by private actors—including individual perpetrators and digital platforms. This due diligence standard provides the human rights foundation for arguments that States must regulate platforms, criminalise cyberGBV, and ensure access to justice for survivors. Delegates invoking international human rights law in the context of online safety must anchor their arguments in GR 35's due diligence framework.

5.2 The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

The ICCPR (1966) protects rights directly relevant to digital gender equality, including Article 17 (right to privacy—foundational to data protection and freedom from digital coercive control), Article 19 (freedom of expression—interpreted to include digital expression), and Article 26 (equality before the law—basis for non-discrimination in digital access and governance). The Human Rights Committee's General Comment No. 34 (2011) affirms that states have positive obligations to address private-actor restrictions on online expression, including the silencing effects of harassment.

5.3 ICESCR — Science, Technology and the Right to Development

The ICESCR (1966) provides for rights to education (Article 13), work (Article 6), and an adequate standard of living (Article 11), progressively interpreted to encompass digital dimensions. The CESCR's General Comment No. 25 (2020) on science and its application explicitly links access to the benefits of scientific progress to digital technology access.

5.4 The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

The CRC (1989) is directly applicable to girls. The Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment No. 25 (2021) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment addresses digital privacy, safety, freedom of expression, and education. It calls on states to ensure girls have equal access to digital technologies and to protect them from online violence, including gender-specific online harms.

5.5 The Sustainable Development Goals (2030 Agenda)

SDG / Target	Relevance
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SDG 4 — Target 4.4	Substantially increase youth and adults with relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills — encompasses digital skills for women and girls.
SDG 5 — Target 5.b	Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular ICT, to promote the empowerment of women. Most direct SDG mandate on digital gender equality.
SDG 9 — Target 9.c	Significantly increase access to ICT and strive to provide universal affordable internet access — deadline missed; renewed urgency for gender-responsive implementation.
SDG 10	Closing the digital gender gap as a dimension of reducing inequalities within and among countries.
SDG 16 — Target 16.b	Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies — applicable to online GBV legislation.
SDG 17	Multi-stakeholder partnerships for digital inclusion, including South-South cooperation mechanisms.

5.6 Budapest Convention on Cybercrime (2001)

The Council of Europe's Convention on Cybercrime (Budapest Convention) is the principal international instrument on cybercrime. While not gender-specific, it provides a framework for criminalising computer-related offences that frequently target women. As of 2024, the Convention has 68 parties, with ongoing negotiations for a Second Additional Protocol. Civil society organisations have called for gender-responsive implementation, particularly regarding online sexual harassment and image-based abuse.

5.7 ILO Conventions on Women's Work and Technology

- **ILO Convention No. 100 and No. 111:** Apply to the ICT sector, where significant wage gaps and occupational segregation persist.
- **ILO Convention No. 190 (2019):** The first international standard on violence and harassment in the world of work, explicitly including technology-facilitated harassment within its scope.

5.8 Regional Human Rights Frameworks

- **African Charter / Maputo Protocol (2003):** Article 12 addresses women's right to education, interpreted to include digital education.
- **Belém do Pará Convention (1994):** Provides regional treaty basis for addressing technology-facilitated VAWG in Latin American and Caribbean states.

- **Istanbul Convention (2011):** The most comprehensive European treaty on violence against women, interpreted to apply to online and technology-facilitated forms of GBV.
- **ASEAN Declaration on Gender Equality (2021):** Contains provisions on ICT access and digital skills for women, reflecting growing regional consensus.

VI. THEMATIC AREAS FOR SUBSTANTIVE DEBATE

6.1 Digital Infrastructure and Connectivity Policy

- **Affordability:** Whether universal service obligations and regulatory mandates should require gender-disaggregated pricing analysis, and whether targeted subsidies for devices and data for low-income women are a government responsibility.
- **Last-Mile Connectivity:** Rural and peri-urban communities—disproportionately inhabited by women in many regions—remain underserved. Debates around universal service funds, community networks, and satellite broadband (LEO constellations) have significant implications for the gender gap.
- **Device Access:** The smartphone gender gap is as significant as the internet gender gap. Debates around device subsidy schemes, second-hand device markets, and shared community access points must consider how shared devices may not provide women with private, safe access.

6.2 Digital Education and STEM Pipeline

- **Early digital literacy:** Integrating digital skills into primary and secondary curricula, with attention to gender-equitable pedagogy that counters stereotypes about girls' aptitude for technology.
- **STEM education:** Addressing structural barriers to girls' participation in secondary and tertiary STEM programmes, including biased teaching practices, lack of female role models, and family pressure against STEM pathways.
- **Vocational and lifelong learning:** Digital reskilling programmes for women in the workforce, particularly those displaced by automation. The ILO's analysis suggests that women face disproportionate automation risk due to occupational concentration in routine, codifiable tasks.
- **Coding and technical skills:** Government and civil society programmes specifically targeting girls' coding education require evaluation and scaling.

6.3 Women in the Digital Economy

- **Platform work and gig economy:** Women's participation in digital platform work is growing, but concentrated in lower-paid, less protected categories. Labour rights in the platform economy—including social protection, minimum wage application, and protection from harassment—are an emerging policy frontier.

- **Digital financial inclusion:** Mobile money and digital banking have significantly expanded women's access to financial services in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. However, gender gaps in mobile money adoption persist.
- **Women's digital entrepreneurship:** E-commerce platforms enable women-owned micro and small enterprises to reach wider markets. Policy frameworks supporting women's digital entrepreneurship—including credit, training, and regulatory simplification—are under discussion.

6.4 Online Safety, Legislation and Platform Accountability

- **National legislation:** As of 2024, only a minority of countries have specific criminal provisions for cyberharassment, non-consensual intimate image sharing, or online stalking. Legislative reform is a primary policy demand of women's rights organisations globally.
- **Platform governance:** Social media and communication platforms are primary vectors for online GBV. Debates around content moderation, algorithmic amplification of harassment, identity verification, and liability of platforms for user-generated violent content are central to online safety policy.
- **The role of Big Tech:** International human rights law's application to private corporations—the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights—has been invoked to argue that platforms bear due diligence obligations (anchored in CEDAW GR 35) to prevent and remedy technology-facilitated VAWG.
- **Access to justice:** Criminal justice systems in most countries are ill-equipped to investigate and prosecute cybercrime targeting women. Capacity building for law enforcement and prosecution services is an identified gap.

KEY TENSION: SAFETY VS. PRIVACY

Proposals to mandate platform transparency, scan private communications for abuse material, or require identity verification raise serious concerns about privacy, freedom of expression, and the potential targeting of marginalised women (LGBTQ+ individuals, activists, journalists). The Committee must navigate this tension: online safety measures must not, in themselves, create new vectors for discrimination or state surveillance of women.

6.5 Artificial Intelligence, Algorithmic Bias, and the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of AI

Artificial intelligence systems increasingly govern access to employment, credit, healthcare, and public services. The intersection of AI and gender equality is a rapidly emerging policy concern encompassing

algorithmic bias, AI-enabled labour displacement, generative AI and image-based abuse, and data governance.

- **Algorithmic bias:** AI systems trained on historically biased data replicate and amplify gender discrimination in hiring, lending, and content recommendation. Studies by Joy Buolamwini (MIT) and others have documented systematic underperformance of facial recognition systems on darker-skinned women.
- **AI and labour:** Automated systems disproportionately displace women in sectors like garment manufacturing, data entry, and clerical work, with insufficient support for reskilling.
- **Generative AI and image-based abuse:** AI-generated non-consensual synthetic intimate images ('deepfakes') represent a new and rapidly escalating form of gender-based violence, for which most legal systems are wholly unprepared.
- **Data governance:** Women's health, reproductive, and location data collected by digital platforms raise acute privacy concerns, particularly in contexts of restricted reproductive rights.

UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021)

The UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, adopted unanimously by UNESCO's General Conference in November 2021, is the first global normative instrument on AI ethics. It provides the primary multilateral framework for addressing the gendered dimensions of artificial intelligence from a human rights and ethical perspective. The Recommendation is anchored in four core values—respect for human rights and dignity, living in peaceful and interconnected societies, ensuring diversity and inclusiveness, and an environment in which AI can flourish—and articulates eleven interdependent principles including proportionality, safety, fairness, non-discrimination, and gender equality.

Of particular relevance to this Committee are the Recommendation's explicit gender equality provisions: UNESCO calls on Member States to ensure that AI systems do not perpetuate or exacerbate gender-based discrimination, to conduct gender impact assessments before deploying AI systems in high-stakes domains (employment, education, justice, healthcare), and to ensure women's meaningful participation in AI research, development, and governance bodies.

The Recommendation establishes an ethical impact assessment framework that Member States are encouraged to institutionalise, which should include systematic gender analysis. The UNESCO Recommendation further calls for transparency and explainability in AI systems, which is directly relevant to addressing algorithmic bias in systems that affect women's access to economic and social opportunities. Delegates should engage with UNESCO's AI ethics framework when advancing positions on AI governance, algorithmic accountability, and the protection of women from AI-facilitated forms of violence and discrimination.

6.6 Intersectionality and Multiple Vulnerabilities

The digital gender divide does not affect all women equally. An intersectional analysis is essential:

- **Girls:** Face age-specific barriers including family restrictions on technology use, online sexual exploitation, and lack of digital skills.
- **Rural women:** Concentrated in areas with limited connectivity infrastructure, higher data costs, and fewer digital skills training opportunities.
- **Women with disabilities:** Accessibility barriers in hardware, software, and digital content design systematically exclude women with visual, auditory, cognitive, or motor disabilities.
- **Indigenous and linguistic minority women:** Digital content overwhelmingly in dominant languages creates barriers for women whose primary language is not served by available digital resources.
- **Women in conflict and humanitarian settings:** Displacement disrupts access to devices, connectivity, and digital services. Online GBV is a documented risk in refugee settings.
- **LGBTQ+ women:** Face targeted online harassment and digital surveillance, with particular risk where same-sex relationships are criminalised.

VII. REGIONAL DIMENSIONS

7.1 Sub-Saharan Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa displays some of the world's largest gender digital divides. The GSMA reports that women in the region are 37 percent less likely than men to use mobile internet. Mobile money platforms—particularly M-Pesa in East Africa—have demonstrated the transformative potential of digital financial inclusion for women. The African Union's Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa (2020–2030) includes gender equality commitments, and several African states have adopted national digital gender equality plans. South-South cooperation mechanisms within the African continent and with Asian partners have increasingly facilitated technology transfer for gender-inclusive digital public infrastructure.

7.2 South and Southeast Asia

South Asia has the largest absolute number of women offline globally. Cultural norms restricting women's use of mobile phones compound infrastructure gaps. The Government of India's 'BharatNet' rural broadband programme and state-level smartphone distribution schemes have had mixed gender outcomes. India's DPI stack (Aadhaar/UPI/DigiLocker), developed through national investment and shared through South-South cooperation, illustrates both the opportunities and risks of DPI for gender equality. In Southeast Asia, the Philippines shows relative gender digital parity, while Myanmar and Cambodia show significant gaps.

7.3 The Middle East and North Africa

The MENA region presents significant variation. Gulf Cooperation Council countries show high internet penetration with relatively modest gender gaps, driven by income levels. However, legal and cultural restrictions on women's digital autonomy—including surveillance of women's online activity by male guardians—represent distinctive barriers. Several MENA states have adopted cybercrime laws that have been critiqued for potentially criminalising women's online expression rather than protecting them.

7.4 Latin America and the Caribbean

Latin America shows improving but still significant gender digital divides. The region has been relatively progressive in addressing online GBV through legislation; several states have adopted specific laws criminalising digital violence against women. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has been active in developing standards on online violence. South-South cooperation within the region has facilitated sharing of legislative and programmatic models for addressing online GBV.

7.5 Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States

LDCs and SIDS face compounded challenges: infrastructure underdevelopment, fiscal constraints, limited regulatory capacity, and climate vulnerability. The particular vulnerability of SIDS to climate-related digital infrastructure disruption adds a dimension to the digital divide not captured in standard gender analyses. The Istanbul Programme of Action for LDCs and the SAMOA Pathway for SIDS both recognise ICT development as a priority, with gender equality as a cross-cutting concern.

VIII. FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES

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3. Council of Europe Convention on Violence Against Women (Istanbul Convention), 12 April 2011.
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5. ECLAC, 'The Digital Revolution and the Path to Equality in Latin America and the Caribbean,' 2021.

IX. ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR THE COMMITTEE

9.1 On Infrastructure and Access

- What specific obligations do Member States bear to ensure gender-equitable distribution of broadband infrastructure investment, and how should these obligations be monitored and enforced?
- How can universal service frameworks be redesigned to incorporate gender as a core equity criterion?
- What measures are necessary to close the device gender gap, and who bears responsibility—governments, private sector, or international development institutions—for implementing them?
- How should UNDP's Digital Public Infrastructure frameworks be applied to ensure that DPI systems do not exclude women from digital public services due to gaps in identification, literacy, or device access?

9.2 On Digital Skills and Education

- What structural reforms to national education systems are required to achieve gender parity in STEM education, consistent with CEDAW GR 36 obligations?
- How can digital skills training programmes be designed and delivered to reach women and girls in rural, conflict, and humanitarian settings?
- What role should the private sector, particularly technology companies, play in funding and delivering digital education and reskilling programmes for women, and what accountability mechanisms should govern such partnerships?
- How can South-South cooperation mechanisms be leveraged to accelerate the transfer of effective digital literacy models to LDCs and SIDS?

9.3 On Online Safety and Legal Frameworks

- What constitutes a minimum legislative standard for the criminalisation and prosecution of technology-facilitated gender-based violence, consistent with States Parties' due diligence obligations under CEDAW GR 35?
- What obligations do social media and communication platforms bear under international human rights law and the CSW67 Agreed Conclusions to prevent, detect, and remedy online gender-based violence?
- How can the tension between online safety measures and the rights to privacy and freedom of expression be resolved at the level of international policy?

- What data protection standards are necessary to prevent the surveillance and targeting of women through digital platforms?

9.4 On Artificial Intelligence and Emerging Technologies

- How should States implement gender impact assessments for AI systems, consistent with the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence?
- What international mechanisms are needed to address gender bias in AI systems governing employment, financial services, and public administration?
- How should non-consensual AI-generated intimate imagery be addressed under international law, and what obligations do states and platforms bear to prevent and remedy this form of violence?
- How can women be meaningfully included in AI governance processes at the national and international level, in accordance with UNESCO's AI ethics principles?

9.5 On Financing, Partnerships and Implementation

- What financing mechanisms should be established or strengthened to fund the implementation of commitments on digital gender equality, including through South-South and triangular cooperation?
- How should the private sector be held accountable for contributing to and not exacerbating the digital gender divide?
- What reporting and accountability mechanisms should the UN system establish to track progress on closing the digital gender gap, and how should CSW67 Agreed Conclusions be operationalised through national action plans?
- How can the voices and expertise of women's civil society organisations, particularly from the Global South, be structurally integrated into digital governance processes at the international level?

NOTE TO DELEGATES

This Background Guide is intended as a starting point for research, not an exhaustive treatment of all relevant issues. Delegates are strongly encouraged to review the primary documents cited in footnotes, examine their country's national ICT policy and gender equality strategy, review relevant CEDAW concluding observations for their country (with particular attention to GR 35 and GR 36 implementation), and consult the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of AI and UNDP's DPI frameworks. Positions should reflect not only national interest but also engagement with the normative frameworks that govern this agenda—including the CSW67 Agreed Conclusions, CEDAW General Recommendations, and emerging AI ethics standards.