INTRODUCTION

Global Partners Digital is pleased to respond to this Open Consultation and to provide our perspectives on bridging the digital gender divide.

Global Partners Digital is a social purpose company dedicated to fostering a digital environment underpinned by human rights and democratic values. We work with a range of stakeholders around the world – including governments, businesses and civil society organisations – in pursuit of two core aims: to empower a wider diversity of voices to engage in internet-related decision-making processes; and to make these processes more open, transparent and inclusive.

Summary

In this consultation response, we identify a number of barriers which prevent or limit women's access and use of the internet, as well as digital literacy more broadly, and make a number of recommendations as to how they can be addressed. In particular, we focus on six key barriers: (i) cost/affordability; (ii) a lack of technical/digital literacy/skills; (iii) poor infrastructure, quality or coverage; (iv) harassment; (v) a lack of relevant content/lack of time; and (iv) a low level of women's participation in internet-related policymaking and the technology sector.

We also note that the digital gender divide is both a symptom and a cause of the underrepresentation of women in internet-related policymaking and the technology sector. We therefore set out a number of specific steps that existing policymakers should take to help ensure that internet-related policies tackle, rather than ignore or exacerbate, the digital gender divide.

Finally, with respect to the role of governments, we consider that in addition to the specific barriers identified, there are three broader issues which need to be addressed, and where governments have a specific role: (i) tackling gender inequality more broadly, (ii) collecting better and gender-disaggregated data, and (iii) ensuring that ICT-related policies are developed through open, inclusive and transparent processes.

QUESTION ONE

> *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?*

QUESTION TWO

> *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?*

Both questions one and two address the same broad issues, namely promoting access and use of ICTs, and, connected to this, increasing digital literacy among women and girls. Both aspects are part of the 'digital gender divide', which we understand to mean the gap between women and men in their access to, use of and ability to influence, contribute to and benefit from ICTs.[1]

The main difference between the questions is that the first focuses on access and use of ICTs and digital literacy generally, whereas the second focuses specifically on access and use by SMEs in developing and least-developed countries. However, for women in developing and least-developed countries, the barriers to access and use are likely to be similar whether it is in the context of personal use or as the owner or manager of an SME, and so responses are likely to address both problems.

Given that overlap, the first part of our answer addresses *both* questions one and two, and looks at approaches and examples of good practices in promoting access and use of ICTs, and increasing digital literacy, among women and girls. In the second part, we look specifically at the aspect of question one which relates to the development of internet-related decision and policymaking.

(a) Internet access and digital literacy

The existence of a digital gender divide in terms of access to the internet is well known, although global, as well as national, figures vary. The ITU estimated in 2017 that fewer women than men use the internet in every region of the world (44.9% of women, globally, compared to 50.9% of men), although there are significant variances:[2]

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[1] This definition is taken from the Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet: ways to bridge the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective", UN Doc. A/HRC/35/9, 5 May 2017, Para 4.
[2] International Telecommunication Union, *ICT Facts and Figures*, 2017, p. 3, available at: https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/ICTFactsFigures2017.pdf.

	Male users (%)	Female users (%)	Ratio of male to female users
Africa	24.9	18.6	1.34
Arab States	47.7	39.4	1.21
Asia and the Pacific	47.9	39.7	1.21
Europe	82.9	76.3	1.09
Commonwealth of Independent States	69.8	65.8	1.06
The Americas	66.7	65.1	1.02
World	50.9	44.9	1.13

The situation is particularly pronounced for developing and least-developed countries:[3]

	Male users (%)	Female users (%)	Ratio of male to female users
Developed countries	82.2	79.7	1.03
Developing countries	44.7	37.5	1.19
Least developing countries	21.0	14.1	1.49
World	50.9	44.9	1.13

A significant digital gender divide in developing and least-developed countries has also been noted by others, not only in terms of access to, but also use of, the internet. In its 2015 report, 'Women's Rights Online: Translating Access into Empowerment',[4] the Web Foundation looked at the situation in nine low- and middle-income countries and estimated that women were about 50% less likely to be connected to the internet than men in the same age group with similar levels of education and household income.[5] Further, while women are almost as likely as men to own a mobile phone, they were a third less likely than men of similar age, education level and economic status to use their phones to access the internet.[6]

In order to evaluate what approaches and examples of good practice could be emulated in order to increase access to ICTs, as well as digital literacy among women and girls, it is first crucial to understand the barriers which prevent or limit such access and digital literacy. These barriers will vary from country to country, as well as within countries, as a result of the

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[3] *Ibid*.
[4] Web Foundation, "Women's Rights Online: Translating Access into Empowerment", October 2015, available at: https://webfoundation.org/research/womens-rights-online-2015/.
[5] *Ibid*., p. 3.
[6] *Ibid*., p. 4.

wide range of differences between various groups of women, and the cultural, political, and even physical and infrastructural differences across different parts of a country. Three recent studies give a strong indication of the most significant barriers.

The first, a study in 2015 undertaken by the GSMA as part of its Connected Women programme, examined the barriers that prevented or limited women from owning and using mobile phones in eleven low- to middle-income countries.[7] Although the study, 'Bridging the gender gap: Mobile access and usage in low- and middle-income countries', looked at access to mobile devices, rather than the internet, many of the conclusions reached apply equally to the internet as they do to mobile devices, particularly given that the primary form of internet access in many countries where access is low is often through mobile phones. The five most significant barriers to mobile ownership and access, as reported by women, were found to be:
[8]

	Ownership	Access
1	Cost	Cost
2	Network quality and coverage	Network quality and coverage
3	Security and harassment	Security and harassment
4	Operator / agent trust	Technical literacy and confidence
5	Technical literacy and confidence	Operator / agent trust

The second, the Web Foundation report, 'Women's Rights Online: Translating Access into Empowerment', also from 2015, looked at the barriers faced by users from using the internet more often, and non-users from using the internet at all, in nine developing countries.[9] The main barriers that women respondents reported were: lack of digital skills, cost, lack of time, the perceived lack of relevance and usefulness of internet content and services, low availability or quality of connection, the lack of an internet-enabled device and/or lack of access to a safe public access point.[10] When broken down by internet users/non-users, the most barriers reported as the most significant were:[11]

	Non-users	Users
1	Lack of digital skills (34%)	Lack of time (29%)
2	Cost (16%)	Cost (20%)

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[7] GSMA, "Bridging the gender gap: Mobile access and usage in low- and middle-income countries", 2015, available at:
https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/programmes/connected-women/bridging-gender-gap.
[8] *Ibid*., p. 42.
[9] See above, note 4.
[10] *Ibid*., pp. 18-23.
[11] *Ibid*.

3	Lack of relevance and usefulness (14%)	Lack of relevance and usefulness (16%)
4	Lack of an internet-enabled device (13%)	Low availability or quality of connection (11%)
5	Lack of time (11%)	Lack of an internet-enabled device (6%)
6	Low availability or quality of connection (4%)	Lack of digital skills (3%)
	Other (including harassment) (8%)	Other (including harassment) (15%)

The third is the report from the Internet Governance Forum Best Practice Form on Gender and Access's report, 'Overcoming Barriers to Enable Women's Meaningful Internet Access' from 2016.[12] The report - which looks both at the barriers that limit women's meaningful access to the internet, as well as ways to overcome them - was developed on the basis of input from individuals and stakeholder groups through a variety of sources including a survey, virtual meetings, workshops and a mailing list. The report concluded that there were seven key barriers (the figure in brackets is the proportion of survey respondents who considered it a barrier):

1	Culture and norms (71%)
2	Affordability (67%)
3	Women's participation in decisionmaking roles pertaining to the Internet and/or in the technology sector (65%)
4	Capacity and skills (60%)
5	Availability of relevant policies (59%)
6	Availability of relevant infrastructure (48%)
7	Availability of relevant content (41%)
	Other (including threats and harassment) (16%)

While the barriers identified in the reports are not identically worded, and reach different conclusions in terms of their significance , these reports nonetheless suggest that, overall, the most significant barriers which currently exist fall within six broad headings: (i) cost/affordability; (ii) a lack of technical/digital literacy/skills; (iii) poor infrastructure, quality or coverage; (iv) harassment; (v) a lack of relevant content/lack of time; and (iv) a low level of women's participation in internet-related policymaking and the technology sector. However, it is important to bear in mind that the significance of these barriers and the degree to which

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[12] Internet Governance Forum Best Practice Forum on Gender and Access, "Overcoming Barriers to Enable Women's Meaningful Internet Access", 2016, available at: http://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/index.php?q=filedepot_download/3406/437.

they have a greater impact on women rather than men vary significantly from country to country, as well as within countries among different groups of women. Responses to address these barriers therefore need to be appropriately tailored to meet the needs of the particular target group. That being said, there are some general considerations and approaches that can be taken in respect of each of the barriers under each heading.

Cost / Affordability: The GSMA report found that while the costs involved were the greatest barrier to accessing and using mobile devices for both men and women, women were more likely than men to report it as such.[13] The IGF BPF report also found cost of devices, connection and data to be a significant barrier, with 67% of survey respondents citing it as the second highest factor.[14] The Web Foundation report found that cost was the second most significant barrier to access and use of the internet among both users and non-users.[15] Although the report noted that women were, in fact, less likely to report cost as a barrier than men, it suggested that, among non-users, this might simply reflect greater awareness of data costs among men.[16]

There are a range of reasons why cost may be a greater barrier for women than men, particularly in low- and middle-income countries: women are less likely than men to earn an income, and, when they do, are likely to earn less than men; women do not always have control over household expenditure with men playing a larger decisionmaking role in some countries. In some countries, women do not pay for their devices or for credit, with husbands or other male family members doing so; and, in others, where women spend their own money, they still require permission from their husbands or fathers to spend it in a particular way.

The greater impact that cost may have on women not accessing or using ICTs results, therefore, from broader inequality women face which restrict or limit their economic independence and empowerment. Disadvantages faced by women in education and employment, as well the existence of gender-related societal norms and stereotypes, result in many men having greater financial security and independence than women. Addressing these broader forms of gender inequality is therefore critical, and an issue we look at in our response to question five.

There are, however, more specific actions which can be taken to address the challenges to women posed by the costs associated with access to and use of the internet:

- Providing financial support to lower the costs involved with access to, and use of, the internet, such as removing VAT or sales tax on ICT devices, or by providing direct subsidies;
- Supporting, financially or otherwise, public access solutions such as free or subsidised internet access in schools, libraries and other public buildings; free public wifi in certain areas; and community wifi networks;

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[13] See above, note 4, p. 42.
[14] See above, note 12, p. 33.
[15] See above, note 7, p. 20.
[16] *Ibid*.

- Adopting legislative, policy and regulatory frameworks which foster open and competitive markets, as well as tax and copyright regimes which incentivise the development of cheaper devices;
- Adopting legislative, policy and regulatory frameworks which encourage equitable infrastructural development. particularly in rural areas;
- Ensuring that broadband planning and implementation which take into consideration a gender perspective, and which also contain clear, time-bound and measurable targets, including achieving gender equality in broadband adoption and use.

Further examples of actions can be found in the Alliance for Affordable Internet's annual affordability reports.[17]

Technical / digital literacy and skills: The Web Foundation report found that women were 60% more likely than men to report lack of skills as a barrier to using the internet, although there were notable decreases in the proportion of women who identified this as a barrier as their level of education increased (40% of women with little or no formal education reported this as a barrier, compared to 18% of women who had completed secondary education and 5% of women who had completed tertiary education).[18] The IGF BPF paper also cited digital literacy as a significant barrier, with 60% of survey respondents considering it as such.[19]

While the IGF BPF paper noted that the lower level of literacy generally among women in many countries was part of the problem,[20] the Web Foundation report suggested a number of possible reasons why women were less likely than men, even where they have the same educational level, to report this is as a barrier: men might be more reluctant to admit to lacking ICT skills; women might be underestimating their ability as a result of being socialised to believe they are less good with technology; men might have more informal opportunities to pick up digital skills either through greater employment in jobs which use the internet more often or as a result of being freer than women to move around and socialise in public places where people use technology, such as cafes, bars and marketplaces.[21]

States should therefore ensure that digital literacy and skills are taught in all schools from primary age onward, and focus on empowerment and autonomy, as well as technical ability. Digital literacy programmes should also be made available for women in other age groups. As well as providing specific digital literacy programmes, states should also take steps to tackle gender inequality within education more broadly, an issue we discuss in more detail in our response to question five.

Infrastructure, quality and coverage: The GSMA report noted network quality and coverage to be the second most significant barrier for women to own and access a mobile phone,[22]

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[17] See, for example, Alliance for Affordable Internet, *2017 Affordability Report*, 2017, available at: http://a4ai.org/affordability-report/report/2017.
[18] See above, note 4, pp. 18-19.
[19] See above, note 12, p. 38.
[20] *Ibid*., p. 39.
[21] See above, note 4, p. 19.
[22] See above, note 7, pp. 48-49.

and, similarly, a lack of appropriate infrastructure - including network coverage - was cited by 48% of respondents to the survey used in the IGF BPF report.[23]

The GSMA report also suggested several reasons as to why this may be a greater issue for women than men in some settings, some of which would apply equally to access to the internet more generally, and regardless of the device used. In many societies, for example, particularly conservative societies, women spend more time in the household than men, as a result of expectations to look after children and other relatives, and indoor signals can be weaker. For women in rural areas, they may be less likely than men to work in more urban environments which have better internet coverage than at home.

States should therefore take steps to support greater infrastructural availability of the internet, such as by providing public subsidies to internet service providers to facilitate network expansion in rural areas, and allowing active and voluntary infrastructure sharing among internet service providers.

Harassment: The GSMA report found that, overall, more women than men considered harassment from strangers to be a concern.[24] In every country researched, it was as great as concern, or a greater concern, for women. The report noted that in Jordan, Egypt, Kenya, Niger and Turkey, it was not uncommon for men to harass women via mobile. In Egypt and Jordan, for instance, men and women reported the practice of men randomly dialling numbers in the hope of reaching a woman.

The Web Foundation report found extremely high rates of online harassment of women in Nairobi and Kampala, two of the cities researched with the lowest rates of internet access among women.[25] The report noted that where online abuse of women is widespread, this could act as a factor inhibiting women's use of the internet. The report also found that over six in ten connected women aged between 18 and 24 experienced online abuse, a figure rising to over nearly seven in ten of young women who use the internet daily. A number of respondees to the survey used in the IGF BPF report listed online threats, including abuse and harassment, as a barrier.[26]

States should therefore ensure the adoption and effective implementation of legislation which prohibits violence, harassment and other forms of abuse against women, and which apply online as well as offline. Ensuring effective implementation requires appropriate guidance and training for other actors, including the police, lawyers and the judiciary, so that they understand online harassment against women and respond to it appropriately. The digital literacy programmes which are provided in schools and to adults should include sections on appropriate online behaviour.

Lack of relevance / lack of time: In the Web Foundation report, a lack of time was cited as the most significant barrier by women who are online from using the internet more (29%) and

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[23] See above, note 12, p. 45.
[24] See above, note 7, pp. 50-52.
[25] See above, note 4, p. 39.
[26] See above, note 12, p. 28.

more often than by men.[27] It was also cited more often by poorer women. The report also found that women were more likely than men to cite a lack of relevance as a reason not to use the internet, but considered that the two reasons were connected on the basis that saying "I don't have time to go online more often" may be another way of saying "the benefit I would get is not worth the time I would have to give up".[28] A lack of relevant content was also cited by 41% of respondees to the survey used in the IGF BPF report, although its authors considered that this lower figure may have been as a result of the respondees already being online and able to find relevant content.[29]

Ensuring that there useful services and relevant content for women exist, such that they benefit of using the internet, relies predominantly on action from those who provide services or develop content. Such providers and developers should therefore consider the particular needs of women, including through consultation. Governments also have a role when it comes to investment develop or invest in services and should prioritise uptake by women. This can be done through prioritising development and investment in services which will be of most value to women; involving and consulting women during the development process or in investment decisionmaking; and subsidising or incentivising the development of services and content by women or of value for women.

Low levels of women in decision and policymaking roles and the technology sector: Over 65% of respondees to the IGF BPF report considered that women's inability to participate in decisionmaking roles pertaining to the internet and the technology sector was a significant barrier.[30] The involvement of women in the technology sector has been considered "vital" by the Broadband Commission to achieve gender equality in internet access,[31] but the proportion of women in the STEM sector is low and, in some regions, such as Europe, even falling.[32]

The low level of women in the STEM sector consequently results in women being under-represented in the governance and development of the digital world, and the needs and interests of women often insufficiently considered. All of the barriers identified above can only be fully addressed with intervention from both policymakers and the technology sector, and a greater representation of women can help ensure that their needs and interests are sufficiently heard and considered. Addressing those barriers via the recommendations we outline both above and in our response to part (b) of this question and in question five will help address this underrepresentation.

(b) Policymaking

The low proportion of women in internet-related decision and policymaking roles is both a symptom and a cause of the digital gender divide. As noted in our answer to question five,

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[27] See above, note 4, pp. 20-21.
[28] *Ibid*.
[29] See above, note 12, p. 47.
[30] *Ibid*., p. 34.
[31] Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, "The State of Broadband: Broadband catalyzing sustainable development", September 2016, p. 48, available at: http://www.broadbandcommission.org/Documents/reports/bb-annualreport2016.pdf.
[32] *Ibid*.

gender inequality more broadly is a key factor which perpetuates the digital gender divide, resulting in fewer women in education and the tech sector. Given the existence of several barriers to women's' access and use of the internet, and lower levels of digital literacy, it is inevitable that fewer women than men will opt for careers in internet-related technology or governance. The low representation of women in government and politics more broadly is well-documented.[33] As we note above, the underrepresentation of women in the technology sector and policymaking, is also a cause of the digital gender divide as the needs and interests of women are either not heard or not given sufficient attention.

Addressing the digital gender divide will in and of itself help address the low levels of representation of women in relevant policymaking spaces, however, existing policymakers should also take specific steps, to help ensure that internet-related policies tackle, rather than ignore or exacerbate, the digital gender divide.

- Ensuring that analyses conducted in order to develop policies relating to ICTs integrate gender considerations;
- Ensure that those with expertise on gender-related issues are involved in policymaking from the start;
- Include time-bound targets relating to gender equality in all ICT-related policies and plans;
- Where appropriate, allocate a proportion of resources available specifically to activities supporting women's access to ICTs, digital literacy, and entrepreneurship;
- Ensuring that capacity building and training programmes consider the needs of women and girls across all educational levels; and
- Where appropriate, adopt quotas to ensure the equal participation of women in all programmes and plans.

QUESTION THREE

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

There are few available sources and mechanisms for measuring women's participation in the digital economy at all, let alone those that look specifically at women's participation in SMEs and micro-enterprises. The improved collection of data on participation in the digital economy, disaggregated by gender and region, and collected regularly and systematically, would be of significant benefit in identifying gaps and trends, and thus developing tailored solutions.

The current sources that do exist include:

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[33] On 1 January 2017, only 23.3% of parliamentarians across the world were women: UN Women, Women in politics 2017 map, available at:
http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/4/women-in-politics-2017-map..

- The GSMA's **Connected Women** initiative, which aims to reduce gender gap in mobile internet and mobile money services in low- and middle-income countries.[34] For its 2015 report, 'Bridging the Gender Gap: Mobile access and usage in low- and middle-income countries', GSMA undertook research on access and use of mobile devices by men and women in eleven low- and middle-income countries, as well as barriers to access and use.[35]

- The **Global Entrepreneurship Monitor**, which collects data from over 100 countries focusing on the entrepreneurial behaviour and attitudes of individuals as well as the national context and how that impacts entrepreneurship.[36] The data is broken down by gender, and collected annually, but does not specifically look at entrepreneurship in the digital economy, but generally.

- **Women in Global Science & Technology**, an NGO which, among other things, undertake research on women's participation in the 'knowledge society'.[37] It has undertaken 'National Assessments on Gender and Science, Technology and Innovation', providing a cross-national comparison on the status of women in the 'knowledge society', for Brazil, India, Indonesia, the Republic of Korea, South Africa, the United States, and the European Union (all in 2012) and, more recently, Argentina, Mexico, Kenya, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Uganda, Senegal, and Nepal.

QUESTION FOUR

> *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?*

GPD considers that the recommendations and steps set out in our responses to questions one, two and five would also help foster the role of women as entrepreneurs and managers of SMEs, including in developing and least-developed countries.

QUESTION FIVE

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

In our answer to questions one and two we set out specific recommendations and steps that should be taken to address different aspects of the digital gender divide as it relates to

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[34] GSMA, *Connected Women Commitment Initiative*, available at:
https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/programmes/connected-women/the-commitment.
[35] See above, note 7.
[36] Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, available at: http://www.gemconsortium.org.
[37] Women in Global Science & Technology, available at: http://wisat.org/.

access and use of ICTs, and digital literacy. However, we consider that in addition to those specific recommendations, there are three broader issues which need to be addressed, and where governments have a specific role: (i) tackling gender inequality more broadly, (ii) collecting better and gender-disaggregated data, and (iii) ensuring that ICT-related policies are developed through open, inclusive and transparent processes.

1. Tackling gender inequality more broadly

One of the most significant gaps in addressing these challenges is the pervasive discrimination and inequality faced by women in many areas of life around the world. The barriers women face in accessing ICTs, as well as participating in the digital economy, reflect broader barriers which women face in areas such as education, employment, and as a result of gender-related norms and stereotypes, and which require action from governments. In other words, the digital gender divide will not be fully overcome until gender inequality itself is fully eliminated.

The role of governments is clear. All but four ITU member states have signed or ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (the exceptions being Iran, Somalia, Sudan and Tonga). By doing so, they have committed to "pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating discrimination against women" (Article 2), including by adopting appropriate legislative and other measures to prohibit discrimination against women (Article 2(b)), refraining from engaging in any act or practice of discrimination against women (Article 2(d)), taking all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women by any person, organisation or enterprise (Article 2(e)), and to modifying or abolishing laws, regulations, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against women (Article 2(f)). Article 5(a), further, requires states "to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women".

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (the CEDAW Committee) has recognised the links between ICTs and discrimination against women, both in terms of the existing inequality that women (particularly certain groups of women) face in access to ICTs, and the potential that ICTs have to empower women and address gender inequality. For example, in its General Recommendation No. 33, the CEDAW Committee stated that "ICTs play an important role in both reinforcing and reproducing gender stereotypes as well as in overcoming them".[38] In its following General Recommendation, No. 34, the CEDAW Committee went further, in the context of discrimination faced by rural women:

> "*75. ICT (including radio, television, cellular phones, computers and internet), play an important role in empowering rural women and girls by connecting them to the broader world and providing easy access to information and education. Various technologies can meet a diversity of needs, from joining on-line communities to*

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[38] Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, *General Recommendation No. 33 on women's access to justice*, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/GC/33, 3 August 2015, Para 34.

taking advantage of distance learning. However, rural women and girls are disproportionately affected by gender gaps in access to ICT, which is an important dimension of the 'digital divide.' For rural women and girls, poverty, geographic isolation, language barriers, lack of computer literacy, and discriminatory gender stereotypes, can all hamper access to ICT.

76. States parties should adopt measures to promote gender equality in the ICT sector and improve rural women's and girls' access to ICT, as well as develop or expand initiatives to increase their ICT skills, for example, through the development of village- or community-based knowledge centres. States parties should also explore public awareness-raising and training through mobile phone technology, which has potential to reach rural women and girls."[39]

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to which all ITU member states have committed, also reinforce the links between ICTs and gender equality from a developmental perspective. Target 9(c) commits states to "strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020" and Target 1.4 commits them to ensure that, by 2030, all men and women have equal rights to basic services, including new technology. By Target 9(b), they have also committed to "enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women". Many of the other SDGs, including those relating to education, health, economic growth, employment, and building peaceful and inclusive societies and institutions are strongly supported by equal access to the internet and other ICTs.

The role, indeed, obligation, of governments is therefore not limited solely to take action specifically relating to the ICT sector, but to address the broader forms of discrimination and inequality, including intersectional discrimination and inequality, faced by women which impact upon access to and use of the internet and other ICTs, digital literacy and participation in the digital economy. This requires governments to take action in the following areas:

● **Poverty**: It is axiomatic that a person living in poverty is far less likely to have access to ICTs, let alone be able to participate in the digital economy, than a person who is not. As noted above in our response to questions one and two, cost is the most significant barrier to women accessing and using mobile devices and this is likely to be equally true for other ICTs. The UN Statistics Divisions report, 'The World's Women 2015' showed that although poverty worldwide is declining, it is more prevalent among women than men.[40] The report showed, in particular, that single women of working age with children, in both developed and developing countries, are more likely to be in poverty than single men of working age with children. In developed countries, older women are also more likely to be in poverty than older men. States should therefore take steps to address poverty, with a particular focus on its disproportionate prevalence among women. In parallel, states should take the steps listed in our

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[39] Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, *General Recommendation No. 34 on the rights of rural women*, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/GC/34, 7 March 2016, Paras 75-76.
[40] United Nations Statistics Division, *The World's Women 2015: Trends and Statistics*, available at: https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/worldswomen.html.

response to questions one and two which aim to tackle the barrier of the cost of devices and access.

- **Inequalities faced in education**: The Web Foundation report, 'Women's Rights Online: Translating Access into Empowerment' showed a clear link between level of education and internet access. While at all levels of education, men were likely to use the internet than women, the higher the level of education received, the smaller was the gap. For those with no formal education, men were almost ten times more likely to use the internet than women (19% of men having access compared to 2% of women), however for those who had gone to university, internet use was broadly the same (83% of men using the internet compared to 78% of women).[41] As well as inequalities within education, women and girls are still far less likely to receive an education than men and boys at all in many developing and least-developed countries. States should therefore take steps to tackle inequality in education, both in terms of access to education, as well as within education, and in particular by ensuring they meet their obligations under Article 10 of the CEDAW, as interpreted in the CEDAW Committee's General Recommendation No. 36 on girls' and women's right to education.[42]

- **Inequalities faced in employment**: As has been noted in our response to questions one and two, cost is a significant barrier to access and use of the internet and other ICTs. The full economic independence and empowerment of women, which can be secured in part through employment on an equal basis with men, would significant help address this barrier, making access to the internet and other ICTs affordable and possible. However, women face many forms of discrimination and inequality in employment, including discrimination in access to employment opportunities, lower pay than men, a lack of parental leave (incentivising men to work instead of women within family relationships), and sexual harassment. States should therefore take steps to tackle inequality in employment, in particular by ensuring they meet their obligations under Article 11 of the CEDAW.

- **Gender-related norms and stereotypes**: Both the GSMA report and the Web Foundation report identified social norms and stereotypes relating to men and women as a key barrier to women's access to and use of ICTs. Such norms and stereotypes are varied and may differ significantly between countries as well as within countries. Examples include sending sons rather than daughters to school; expectations that male family members will work rather than females; expectations that women will act as carers for children and older relatives rather than men; attitudes towards 'appropriate' education and careers for men and women with science, technology, engineering and mathematics considered more 'appropriate' for men. These norms and stereotypes may exist informally, or be reinforced through legislation and other state action. In either case, they may act as a deterrent to women accessing and using the internet and other ICTs. States should therefore take steps to tackle

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[41] See above, note 4, p. 14.
[42] Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, *General Recommendation No. 36 on girls' and women's right to education*, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/GC/36, 16 November 2017.

gender-related norms and stereotypes, in particular by ensuring that they meet their obligations under Articles 2 and 5 of the CEDAW.

2. Collecting better and gender-disaggregated data

As is noted throughout this consultation response, there is a lack of data on a variety of important indicators relating to internet access and use, including barriers to access. Where such data exists, it is rarely disaggregated by gender and other connected factors such as age, level of education and income/economic status. Such information is, however, essential in order to design tailored responses which will address different aspects of the digital gender divide, particular when inequality is exacerbated by the intersection of gender with other factors. When ICT data excludes data on women specifically, women become ignored in data and in policy.

States should therefore collect, if they are not already doing so, statistics on internet access and use, as well as participation in the digital economy. As well as being disaggregated by gender, such statistics should also, if possible, be disaggregated by other connected factors (such as age, level of education, and income/economic status) so as to identify intersectional differences. Such data should be collected regularly to enable comparisons over time, and be in publicly accessible formats (taking into account data protection and privacy requirements). A model of good practice for collected gender-disaggregated data on ICTs can be found in the UNCTAD's 'Measuring ICT and gender: an assessment'.[43]

This data should then be used in order to develop any policy responses to the digital gender divide, taking into account intersectional inequalities, as well as to measure the implementation and impact of those policies.

3. Ensuring that ICT-related policies are developed through open, inclusive and transparent processes

In our response to question one, we emphasised the importance of ensuring that relevant ICT-making policymaking takes into consideration gender-related issues, from its development to implementation and measuring of success. In addition, states should ensure that the policymaking processes themselves are open, inclusive and transparent.[44]

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[43] UNCTAD, "Measuring ICT and gender: an assessment", 2014, available at: http://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/webdtlstict2014d1_en.pdf.
[44] As an example of best practice, we would recommend that internet-related policymaking processes follow the Global Partners Digital Framework for Framework for Multistakeholder Cyber Policy Development which can be found at: https://www.gp-digital.org/publication/framework-for-multistakeholder-cyber-policy-development/.