



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-seventh session

6–17 March 2023

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

### Statement submitted by Lutheran World Federation, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

Increasing access to technological innovation and the global legitimization of local knowledge can transform societies and create opportunities for women and girls to thrive but protecting them from violence and harassment must be at the core of any agreements.

The Lutheran World Federation has engaged with United Nations Member States on promoting gender equality and justice for decades. As a global coalition of churches, we welcome the 67th session of the Commission on the Status of Women with its focus on ‘Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.’ Our network strongly urges open, free and safe access to technology coupled with an equal emphasis on local knowledge and the legitimization of multi-generational oral traditions and knowledge sharing. The Lutheran World Federation has a vision for an equitable world where all people, regardless of gender have rights and dignities that are respected and celebrated.

The Lutheran World Federation is profoundly aware of the digital divide as it compounds and has an adverse effect on the social, political, and economic environments women and girls can access in order to participate meaningfully in their societies. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, women and girls are less likely than men to know how to leverage digital technology for basic purposes. They are four times less likely to know how to program computers and 13 times less likely to file an information and communication technology patent.

The Lutheran World Federation recognizes the urgency to bridge this gender digital gap to ensure access to technology and innovation by women and girls. Without rapid change, the world risks leaving women and girls behind.

Women and girls in the global south, particularly those from marginalized indigenous communities, remain largely outside opportunities created by technological innovation, thus further compromising their economic, social and educational output.

Our member churches and country programs have been at the forefront of the gender revolution, working within our communities to fight for systemic change to benefit all women and girls. Our network has also observed that obstacles inhibiting access to technological education are intersectional. Certain groups of women and girls have disproportionate access to connectivity and digital technologies. This further entrenches the digital divide.

The Covid pandemic further demonstrated the need for the rapid rollout of universal access to technology and innovation by all. Education has changed dramatically with the rise of e-learning. However, millions of learners without reliable internet or technology have been left behind.

Safety online is another major concern of the Lutheran World Federation. According to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 45% of women reported that they or a woman they knew had experienced a form of violence since the start of the pandemic while 6 in 10 felt sexual harassment in public had worsened. In addition, violence against women and girls, including sexual harassment, in digital contexts, especially on social media escalated. A 2022 report by the United Nations Secretary-General shows that young women and girls are particularly targeted by Information and Communication Technology-facilitated violence.

Ending violence against women, on and offline, is a priority area for the Lutheran World Federation. We work to combat sexual and gender-based violence using digital tools. For example, the Lutheran World Federation country program in Uganda uses information and communication technology in the fight against sexual and gender-based violence in various ways including using the web-based Inter-Agency Feedback Referral and Resolution Mechanism, hosted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees through which complaints and feedback are processed.

Working with partners, the Lutheran World Federation has utilized opportunities offered by information and communication technologies in its work, from educational programs for Refugees in South Sudan, to our “Innovation Lab” in Jordan where Syrian refugees and vulnerable Jordanian youth learn about and build innovations for people in their communities. Additionally, the Lutheran World Federation and partners have created an application that assists farmers in Nepal to improve their productivity, through early detection and solving of farming-related problems, as well as linking them directly with consumers.

The Lutheran World Federation also affirms the potential of the internet and technology education to offer opportunities to disseminate local knowledge complemented by scientific and technological advancements for global good. However, we recognize that access to technological education, innovation and the internet is limited to those with financial resources and power. Many indigenous communities, whose knowledge has been preserved for decades, have remained on the margins of mainstream dialogue and technological innovation.

On the occasion of the 67th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, States have an opportunity to recommend policy that could level the playing field and give access to all.

In this regard, and on behalf of its 149 member churches, representing 77 million Christians in 99 countries, the Lutheran World Federation makes an urgent call to the international community and Member States to:

- Intensify efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls (including in digital contexts) through the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other key United Nations agreements.
- Put in place inclusive policies that effectively promote useful and meaningful digital content for women in order to increase their access and use of basic services.
- Ensure that women and girls, their knowledge, experiences, differentiated needs and capacities, are incorporated into the creation, design and execution of innovative programs and guarantee their role as actors of development and subjects of rights.
- Empower young people, including girls, as agents of change who are committed to use information and technology for gender equality.
- Allocate adequate funding for formal and non-formal education, including access to education and technologies for women and girls in emergency situations.
- Implement the decisions reached at the sixty-second session of the Commission to ensure that there are real and tangible efforts to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls.

- Promote local and indigenous knowledges and prioritize intergenerational approaches to learning.
  - Include work with churches and faith-based organizations, which provides millions of people around the world with quality education, and work to empower women and girls to achieve the full enjoyment of their rights.
  - Reaffirm the role of civil society, including faith-based actors and recognize their expertise in innovation, education, promoting gender justice and the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
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