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**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": implementation of
strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern
and further actions and initiatives**

Interactive expert panel on innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls

Chair's summary

1.   On 14 March 2023, the Commission on the Status of Women held an interactive expert panel discussion on "Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls". Participants exchanged views, experiences and insights on the topic, with a focus on addressing the need to close the gender gap and ensure that everyone, including women and girls with disabilities and those living in rural areas, has equal access to information and opportunities. The Vice-Chair of the Commission, Antje Leendertse (Germany), opened the interactive dialogue by highlighting the relevance of technology in the advancement of health and education while also warning about the perpetuation of gender biases and inequalities through the use of digital tools.

2.   The six members of the expert panel were the following: the Executive Director of Research ICT Africa, Alison Gillwald; the Rector of the Business and Technology University of Georgia, Nino Enukidze; the Co-Founder and Managing Director of Superrr Lab, Elisa Lindinger; the Executive Director of IT for Change, Anita Gurumurthy; the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, Reem Alsalem; and the Secretary-General for Human Rights, Community Gerontology, Gender and Care Policies of the National Institute of Social Services for Retirees and Pensioners of Argentina, Mónica Roqué. Representatives of 16 Member States, the European Union and 6 civil society organizations engaged in the discussion with the panel members.

Context

3.   Innovations in digital technology have significant potential to enhance the lives of women and girls by enabling access to information, education and skills, creating job and entrepreneurial opportunities and improving access to health care. However, globally, 259 million fewer women have access to the Internet than men, underscoring existing gender disparities, which have been further amplified by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. This has resulted in uneven digital transformation. Women and girls are still not fully participating in the global digital society, highlighting the need for initiatives aimed at bridging the digital gender gap and ensuring inclusive, safe and affordable online connectivity.

4.   Although access to the Internet and data allows for enhanced opportunities and better social and economic outcomes, digital platforms convey gender biases and perpetuate inequalities. Women, girls and disabled and marginalized individuals are exposed to discrimination, misinformation and online violence. Digital skills and equal access to knowledge will enable women and girls to make informed decisions about their rights and to meaningfully participate in a technology-driven society. There is a need for intersectional and gender-responsive approaches that will challenge traditional gender stereotypes and social norms.

Bridging the knowledge and gender gap to advance gender equality in the context of innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age

5.   Realizing human rights for women and girls is critical to enable them to actively engage in digital transformation and technological adaptation. It is vital to ensure the inclusion of women and girls, in particular women in rural areas, women with disabilities and indigenous women, in the decision-making process. The participation of women and girls in the digital space needs to be promoted if we are to ensure that technological change brings about women's empowerment and gender equality.

6.   As digital platforms and innovation play a role in attaining sustainable development, promoting greater female enrolment in science and technology programmes is essential. Challenging the prevalence of men in those professions will contribute to bridging the digital gender gap and removing gender biases in careers related to science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Women should be involved in all stages of the creation, development and governance of technology to ensure their meaningful participation in a digitally driven society and to achieve gender equality.

7.   Addressing online platform mechanisms and structures that exacerbate sexual and gender-based violence is a priority. In addition to not conveying stereotypes and gender biases, digital tools should be safe, free of harassment, cyberbullying and discrimination and accessible to all, regardless of their gender or background. National policies need to be focused on greater security and the deconstruction of gender biases and stereotypes to prevent the perpetuation of such violence.

8.   National policies need to be focused on prioritizing training in information and communications technology to ensure that everyone has access to and can use digital tools. Bridging the gender gap between rural and urban areas by establishing such mechanisms as digital solidarity funds can lead to new opportunities for women and girls and enhance their access to education, training and professional opportunities.

9.   In the current digital age, the meaningful participation of all women and girls is contingent upon access to the Internet and technological devices. Only through full access to information, data and knowledge can women and girls make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive rights and contribute to technological leadership and digital innovation. There is a need for collective action from

Governments, civil society organizations, the industry and individuals to ensure an intergenerational and intersectional approach to the digital revolution.

The way forward

10. Participants called for: the establishment of a digital solidarity fund and nationally representative surveys on the use of digital tools; collaboration among public and private sectors, civil society organizations, academia and educational institutions to create a better future; the development of regulations to ensure accountability on digital platforms as a way to prevent harmful content; the development of transparent and human rights-based policies on access to and use of digital platforms; the establishment of global rules for algorithms and the use of digital fingerprinting to take down violence-oriented content, and cross-border accountability for platform governance; the promotion of critical thinking and education to empower girls and adolescents to negotiate the public space; and the use of an intersectional approach to include marginalized groups, such as rural women, disabled women, older women and the LGBTQ+ community. Countries were called upon to consider including older persons in their digital inclusion programmes, and calls were made to address the lack of research on gender-based violence against older women.