Position Paper

Women and Technology: Safety, Inclusion and Voice in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

September 2026

Scope of this Paper

This paper sets out Soroptimist International's position on the impact of digital technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), on the human rights of all women and girls, in all their diversity. It considers both the opportunities and the risks of digital transformation within Soroptimist International's five strategic pillars: Education, Empowerment, Environment, Health, and Violence against Women and Girls. It is grounded in international human rights law and in commitments adopted by Member States within the United Nations system.

Current Global Overview

Unprecedented speed, unequal benefits. Over the lifetime of the 2030 Agenda, internet use has risen from 40 to 74 percent of the world's population,[1] reaching 6 billion people in 2025.[2] The internet took fifteen years to reach one billion people; AI reached that milestone in two.[3] More than one billion people now use conversational AI every week.[4] These technologies open real opportunities for all women and girls in education, health care, employment and civic life. Yet safeguards, institutions and accountability mechanisms have not kept pace.

A persistent gender digital divide. In 2025, 77 percent of men used the internet, compared with 71 percent of women. That is a gap of about 280 million people, and global gender parity has not improved since 2019.[2] The divide is widest where

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connectivity is lowest. In the least developed countries, 29 percent of women were online in 2024, against 41 percent of men.[5]

Access alone does not guarantee safe and meaningful use. Data on digital skills remain scarce, and where they exist, the share of users with at least basic skills ranges from 16 to 74 percent.[2] Women are only 35 percent of STEM graduates, a share unchanged for a decade, and hold fewer than one in four science, engineering and ICT jobs.[6] They account for just 12 percent of AI researchers and 6 percent of professional software developers.[7]

AI as an amplifier of inequality and harm. AI systems learn from data that reflect existing discrimination. UNESCO found that widely used large language models portrayed women in domestic roles up to four times as often as men.[8] The Independent International Scientific Panel on AI confirms that AI-generated child sexual abuse material and deepfake-enabled sexual violence now circulate more frequently, disproportionately harming women and children.[4]

Between 90 and 95 percent of online deepfakes are non-consensual pornographic images, and around 90 percent of these depict women.[9] Girls are increasingly targeted. In 11 countries, at least 1.2 million children had their images manipulated into sexually explicit deepfakes within a single year.[10] The effects on work are also gendered: employed women are nearly twice as likely as men to hold jobs at high risk of automation by generative AI.[5]

Violence across the online–offline continuum. Technology-facilitated violence against women and girls (TF VAWG) covers acts carried out, facilitated, aggravated or amplified through digital tools that cause, or are likely to cause, physical, sexual, psychological, social, political or economic harm.[11] It affects an estimated 16 to 58 percent of all women and girls.[12] It includes harassment, cyberstalking, doxing, sextortion, grooming, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, deepfakes and gendered disinformation.

Online and offline violence form a single continuum. Abuse that begins online spills into physical spaces, and abuse that begins offline is continued and amplified online. As UN Women's Executive Director has stated, "what begins online doesn't stay online."[13]

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The silencing effect. Women in leadership, business and politics face deepfakes, coordinated harassment and gendered disinformation meant to drive them out of public life. One in four women journalists report online threats of physical violence.[13] The chilling effect reaches far beyond public figures. It targets any woman or girl who speaks out, stands out, or is shamed for her body or appearance. Many self-censor or withdraw altogether, narrowing their participation in public and democratic life.

Health and well-being. The harm to health falls heavily on adolescent girls. Problematic social media use among adolescents in Europe, Central Asia and Canada rose from 7 to 11 percent between 2018 and 2022, with girls more affected than boys (13 against 9 percent).[14] The Scientific Panel on AI has linked sycophantic AI behaviour to severe mental health incidents, including deaths.[4] Yet while more than one billion people live with mental health conditions, the median government allocation to mental health is still about 2 percent of health budgets.[15]

Gaps in law, data and financing.

Three structural gaps undermine an effective response:

- **Law.** Fewer than 40 percent of countries protect women by law from cyber harassment or cyberstalking, leaving 1.8 billion all women and girls without legal protection.[13]
- **Data.** UN Women and WHO convened experts to agree a common definition of TF VAWG in 2023.[11] There is still no internationally agreed statistical framework, and the UN Statistical Commission has asked UN Women, WHO and UNFPA to develop one.[16] Adolescent girls risk falling between statistics designed for children and those designed for women. As AI is increasingly used to estimate missing figures, these gaps risk being masked rather than closed.
- **Financing.** Official development assistance fell by a record 23.1 percent in 2025.[1] Funding cuts are threatening efforts to end violence against all women and girls,[17] and only one in four countries adequately tracks public allocations for gender equality.[1]

With four years remaining until 2030, just over a third of SDG targets are on track, and none of the gender equality targets is.[1]

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The International Normative Framework

The rights at stake are not new, and the commitments needed to protect them already exist. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child apply online as they do offline. CEDAW General Recommendation No. 40 (2024) sets 50:50 parity as the standard for all decision-making systems, including digital ones.[18] General Comment No. 25 (2021) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child defines children's rights in the digital environment.

The Beijing Platform for Action already committed States to increase women's participation in and access to new technologies of communication (critical area J) and to eliminate discrimination against girls in education and skills (critical area L). The Beijing+30 Action Agenda now places a digital revolution for all women and girls first among its six priority actions.[19]

Member States have since built on these foundations:

- The CSW67 agreed conclusions (2023) on innovation, technological change and education in the digital age.[20]
- General Assembly resolution 79/152 (2024) on violence against women and girls in the digital environment.[21]
- The Global Digital Compact (2024), which commits Member States to close the gender digital divide and to eliminate violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, that occurs through or is amplified by technology.[22]
- Resolution 79/325 (2025), which establishes the Scientific Panel on AI and the Global Dialogue on AI Governance.[23]
- The WSIS+20 outcome (2025).[24]
- The CSW70 agreed conclusions (2026), with new commitments on digital justice and AI governance.[25]

These commitments are anchored in the 2030 Agenda, notably SDG targets 4.4, 5.2, 5.b and 9.c.

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Soroptimist International's Position

Soroptimist International believes that technology must expand the rights, safety and opportunities of all women and girls, not put them at risk. Today it does both, and the harms are outpacing the response. As UNDP's 2025 Human Development Report stresses, the impact of AI is not predetermined; it will be shaped by the choices people and institutions make.[26]

Our position is clear. All women and girls must be safe online, included in the digital world on equal terms, and able to exercise full, equal, effective and meaningful participation and leadership in the decisions that shape technology. This requires a human rights-based, gender-responsive and intersectional approach across the entire life cycle of technology. Safety must be built in by design, not added after harm occurs. Accountability must rest with those who design, deploy and profit from technology, not with the all women and girls it harms. These commitments already exist. What is needed now is implementation, financing and accountability at the speed at which technology moves.

Soroptimist International Calls to Action

Soroptimist International calls upon Member States, the private sector (in particular technology companies and AI developers) and the United Nations system, in partnership with civil society and women's rights organisations, to implement existing commitments fully and without delay, and in particular to:

Education

- Integrate digital, media, AI and online-safety literacy into curricula from the earliest years for all girls, fully including girls in rural and remote areas and girls with disabilities.
- Eliminate gender stereotypes in education and career guidance, and adopt targeted measures to increase girls' enrolment, retention and completion in STEM and ICT, in line with the Beijing Platform for Action and the CSW67 agreed conclusions.

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- Invest in schools, teachers and community-based programmes, including those led by women's organisations, and train educators to recognise and respond to technology-facilitated abuse.
- Guarantee in law and policy every girl's right to become safely and confidently digitally literate.
- Support parents and caregivers, including through early learning programmes.

Empowerment

- Close the gender digital divide in access, affordability, skills and meaningful use, with time-bound targets and disaggregated monitoring, as committed in the Global Digital Compact and the WSIS+20 outcome.
- Achieve 50:50 parity in the design, leadership and governance of technology, including AI, in line with CEDAW General Recommendation No. 40.
- Adopt gender-responsive labour market and social protection measures, including reskilling, for women whose jobs are most exposed to automation.
- Prevent algorithmic discrimination in recruitment, pay and promotion.
- Build on the Coalition for Children's Rights and Protection in the Age of AI (Geneva, July 2026) and its commitment that children's views shape the AI systems affecting them,[27] and extend this principle to adolescent girls and young women.
- Ensure that all women and girls know their rights and have accessible channels to report violations committed through technology and to obtain remedy.

Environment

- Ensure women's participation and leadership in digital and AI solutions for climate action and disaster risk reduction.
- Use meaningful connectivity to give all women and girls access to climate information, early warning systems and green livelihoods.[5]
- Support the Secretary-General's AI Environmental Transparency Initiative, including full disclosure of carbon, water and land footprints and a transition to renewable energy.[28] Consult meaningfully with the women and communities who host AI infrastructure.

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Health

- Recognise TF VAWG as a public health concern and invest in gender-responsive mental health and psychosocial services for all women and girls.[15]
- Protect children from AI-driven harms, including grooming, manipulative design, emotional dependence on AI companions and AI-generated sexual imagery.
- Address body image, harassment, sleep disruption and problematic use through evidence-based prevention in schools, health services and on platforms.
- Ensure that AI in health care is trained and validated on disaggregated data and governed in line with WHO guidance on AI for health.
- Guarantee that all women and girls have accessible and assistive technologies and the individual support needed to live full, independent lives.

Violence Against Women and Girls

- Adopt, implement and fund legislation that criminalises all forms of TF VAWG, including sexual deepfakes, drawing on UN Women's model legislative guidance[29] and promising practices worldwide.[13]
- Hold platforms and AI developers accountable through safety-by-design and human rights-by-design obligations, independent audits, transparency, and rapid removal of harmful content, in line with General Assembly resolution 79/152.
- Endorse and implement the Secretary-General's AI Child Safety Pledge. This means:
    - child-specific safety testing and independent oversight before any AI system reaches children;
    - zero tolerance for AI-generated sexual images of children, which must be detected, reported and removed;
    - connecting every child in crisis to real human support.[3]
- Expand legal definitions of child sexual abuse material to cover AI-generated content.[10]
- Support an internationally agreed statistical framework on TF VAWG, and collect disaggregated data so that adolescent girls are no longer invisible.[16]

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- Fund specialist, survivor-centred services and provide sustained, flexible funding to women's rights organisations.
- Train police, justice and healthcare actors to respond to TF VAWG.[29]
- Ensure that workplace technologies, including algorithmic management tools, prevent rather than enable discrimination and abuse.

Cross-Cutting: Governance, Data and Financing

- Mainstream a gender perspective in the Scientific Panel on AI and the Global Dialogue on AI Governance, ahead of the 2027 Dialogue in New York.
- Enable meaningful participation of the 118 countries currently absent from AI governance,[30] and of women's civil society organisations within them.
- Apply gender-responsive budgeting to digital and AI investment and protect gender equality financing as aid declines.

Soroptimist International's Commitment

Through its representatives to the UN and global network of clubs, Soroptimist International will advance these calls to action at the Commission on the Status of Women, the Human Rights Council, the Global Dialogue on AI Governance, the AI for Good Global Summit and the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence.

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