Soroptimist International

2023 Advocacy Resource Pack for Delegates

CSW67

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Soroptimist International Resource Pack CSW67

Welcome
Soroptimist International President Maureen Maguire is delighted that you are joining CSW67 either in person or as a virtual attendee. The greater our presence, the greater our influence, especially if we are all thoroughly prepared with knowledge of our key asks and messaging. CSW is our annual opportunity to raise the global voice for women and girls to be heard, to bring forth the issues that matter to us, and to ensure that member states are accountable for the policies they have agreed to implement. Our actions and our voices support the SDG’s and we as an organisation with General Consultative Status must ensure that no one is left behind. Collectively Soroptimists, we have a voice for change and CSW is one of the most important events when we must ensure our voice is heard.

ABOUT CSW
The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) happens every year in March in New York. Representatives from countries, UN entities, and thousands of NGOs meet to discuss some of the most significant challenges facing women and girls across the world. The sixty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women will take place from Mon 06 to Fri 17 March 2023. Due to the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, CSW67 will take place in a hybrid format with limited capacity. Majority of the side events will be in person and parallel events will be mostly virtual.

CSW67 (2023) Themes
- **Priority theme:** Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls
- **Review theme:** Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls (agreed conclusions of the sixty-second session)

There are three ways to attend CSW:
- **CSW online** and attend parallel events online only https://ngocsw67forum.events.whova.com/sign_in
- **CSW lite** - and attend parallel events outside the UN Building. You won’t have a pass to enter the UN Building, which means you won’t be able to attend many side events or the official events, such as the Commission sessions; https://whova.com/portal/registration/ngos1_202303/
- **The full CSW** – Register as a representative of an ECOSOC accredited organisation to gain access to the UN Building. This registration closed 27 Jan 2023
What is UN CSW?
UN CSW is the principal intergovernmental body dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. UN Women is the secretariat, all information regarding CSW can be found on their website unwomen.org.

CSW67 Key Asks:

These 5 key asks have been agreed by many organisations in conjunction with the NGO CSW’s Advocacy Resources Group, of which one is Soroptimist International. Linda Witong, SI Advocacy Advisor advises this group.

1. **Invest in and strengthen gender-responsive policies, programs and laws** that prioritize girls and women in all their diversity. Eliminate the digital gender gap by providing them with critical digital fluency skills, ranging from basic digital literacy to advanced technical skills in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and in information and communications technology (ICT).

2. **Develop international standards and guidelines to address and eliminate the risks to the digital privacy and safety, autonomy, and dignity of women and girls in all their diversity.** Women and girls of all ages are particularly at risk for online abuse, cyberbullying and gender-based violence stemming from the pervasive sexism and misogyny on digital platforms which thwart their fundamental human rights.

3. **Ensure universal access to essential and gender inclusive public and private digital infrastructure** including electricity and frontier data and Artificial Intelligence (AI) innovations to bridge existing digital divides. Guarantee access to digital technologies in rural areas and ensure equal opportunity particularly for older women and women with disabilities to be empowered with ICTs, through not only physical access and skills development, but also design that respects the needs of all people following consultation with those directly affected.

4. **Enhance official development assistance commitments and improve public finance and investments,** as well as leverage private sector partnerships, for universal, affordable, equal and unfettered access to digital technologies for women and girls in all their diversity. This can include, but is not limited to, free device distribution, creation of affordability schemes, and affordable data plans.

5. **Engage with girls and young women in the formulation, design and development of adequately financed policies and programs** that prioritize digital literacy skills, online safety, and STEM education for girls, young women and marginalized groups. Address unequal gender norms, policies and laws and lack of infrastructure that hinder girls’ access, engagement and safety with digital tools, ICT and STEM education.
A schedule of official meetings and updates about CSW67
https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw67-2023/official-meetings

The official sessions are available for viewing on UN WebTV, Facebook and YouTube. A list of side events will also be posted on the UN Women Website. Side events are events sponsored by member states or UN entities. Register for all side events you wish to attend.

- Official events and some side events will be recorded and you can watch them on demand at https://media.un.org/en/webtv

How can you prepare for CSW?

Prepare yourself for CSW by reviewing the official documents for CSW66. They are found on the UN Women website https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw67-2023/official-documents An important report to become familiar with is the Report from the Secretary General, released on 26, January 2023, N2277155.pdf [un.org] This report will be the basis for the Zero Draft. The Zero Draft is prepared by UN Women as the Secretariat of CSW. During CSW negotiations continue with member states in the hopes of reaching Agreed Conclusions that advance the status of women and girls.

NGO’s including Soroptimist International, will provide suggested additions and changes to the draft documents. These proposed changes are shared with members states. Please contact leigh.ellwoodbrown@soroptimistinternational.org if you are on your countries negotiating team or have a link to your country delegation. We can then provide you with the information you need and answer your questions.

The NGO CSW Forum

NGOs and Civil Society come together at the NGO CSW Forum convened by NGO CSW/New York. The Forum is a place for Activists, Women’s Rights Groups and Feminists to come together to collaborate, inspire, inform and engage to provide an opportunity to participate in the processes and CSW sessions. Over the 2 weeks, there are almost 800 events you can attend mostly virtually. Within that number of events, to some more limited capacity will be in-person events. Registration is free and all Soroptimists are urged to attend. To learn more about the Forum and Register https://ngocsw.org/ngocsw67/ NGO CSW67 has put together a very useful Advocacy Toolkit guide, you can view and download it here NGO CSW67 Advocacy Toolkit

Soroptimist International has 5 scheduled parallel events that will be advertised on our website and social media. We encourage you to sign up early. We will also be sponsoring an NGO CSW Handbook advertisement.

- Join the Soroptimist Lab to connect with Soroptimists from around the world and receive the latest CSW information. Learn how https://www.soroptimistinternational.org/introducing-the-soroptimist-lab/

- Don’t forget to check the Soroptimist International website and follow us on social media for the most current information. https://www.soroptimistinternational.org
How to Be Involved

- Know what Soroptimist and your Government stand for!
- Know the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [https://sdgs.un.org/]
- Be familiar with Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) (updated +25) [https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw64-2020]
- Contact your UN Country Mission and share the SI CSW67 Statement (Find their contact details “The UN Blue Book”) [https://www.un.org/dgacm/en/content/protocol/blue-book]
- Have your talking points ready.
- Interact with the CSW process in your region by attending regional meetings, ready for next year.

How to be an Influencer

- Be aware of the SI POSITION PAPERS relative to the 2 CSW67 themes [https://www.soroptimistinternational.org/members-area/si-statements/]
- Download the ADVOCACY GUIDE APP
- Advocacy Training in Negotiations and Women’s Human Rights. [https://ngocsw.org/get-involved/advocacy-guide/]
  Use the details in your downloaded UN BLUE BOOK for your advocacy
- MISSION’S CSW67 STATEMENTS (UN Women Web) [https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw67-2023/official-documents]

SI Social Media Toolkit for your use to promote SI:

[https://www.youtube.com/user/SoropHQ/videos]
[https://twitter.com/SoroptiTweet]
[https://www.instagram.com/soroptimistglobal/]

USE HASHTAGS
#Soroptweet
#CSW67
#aglobalvoiceforwomen
#womensupportingwomen
#openingdoors
Comment from SI Director of Advocacy, Leigh Ellwood-Brown on CSW:

We are Powerful as ONE, let us collectively Advocate Decision Makers and Governments of all levels to made a difference in this world for Women and Girls. UN Women have a target to reach Gender Equality by 2030. From the latest figures released in The Gender Snapshot Report of 2022, it shows the development of humans catching a Moon Pod to the settlements on the Moon, and other major technology steps forward, before we reach full Gender Equality in the next 300 years. This affects the lives of our daughters, our Granddaughters and many more generations of Women and Girls – We need your help, it is Time to make that difference and shorten the timespan to reach Gender Equality!

Who Speaks for Soroptimist International?

The official spokesperson for SI is the International President. UN representatives, the Director of Advocacy and others may make statements that are aligned to our official policy. Individual Soroptimists who wish to speak during parallel events or side events should identify themselves as a member of their club.

Read SI’s CSW67 written statement on the next pages, followed by three appendices:

SI Where We Stand Statements

1. Cyberbullying
2. Rural Women
3. Women and Technology
Soroptimist International CSW67 Written Statement

This statement is presented by Soroptimist International on behalf of its members in 122 countries and our commitment to improving the lives of women and girls in all their diversity.

Soroptimist International and supporting partners believe that access to a quality education through all levels, supported by relevant skills development throughout the life course is both fundamental and a human right to ensuring the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in the digital age. Engagement in digital innovation and technological change starts with education across all forms of literacy and numeracy underpinned by digital and related skills and continues with access to lifelong learning including vocational education.

During the COVID-19 pandemic many people have seen their lives transformed by technology and digitalization. In urban and rural areas around the globe, students and teachers in schools and educational institutions became familiar with online learning and resources. Patterns of learning changed dramatically, often overnight, as there was a determined effort by those in leadership to maintain access for children and young people to enable them to continue to make educational progress. In many cases girls and young women have not benefited from the same digital access as boys and young men, especially in families where access to technology and related hardware is limited. Having only one phone or computer for a whole family often meant that girls’ access was the least concern. In addition, women and girls continue to be denied access to electricity resources to power equipment which has resulted in barriers to learning, prohibiting many girls and women from having the opportunity to progress in all education levels. Added to that, COVID-19 revealed and magnified the widening digital gap between rural and urban communities and what still needs to be done to ensure no one is left behind.

In addition to COVID – 19 there continue to be the longstanding inherent challenges to girls’ education that need to be addressed. These structural gender barriers that prevent girls from accessing and completing education must be eliminated. They include negative attitudes towards girls’ education; adolescent pregnancy; harmful practices like FGM or early and forced marriage; increases in unpaid care and domestic work; high rates of violence against girls in schools and communities; menstruation stigma and lack of access to menstrual supplies; lack of access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure, including single-sex toilets in schools and WASH facilities in the community.

To harness innovation and technology to empower women and girls, it is vital that law and policy makers responsible for infrastructure are not gender blind. The transformative changes which have resulted from responses to the impact of the pandemic on the workplaces and in the home should continue to be part of the global recovery. Women’s leadership across all sectors is critical for the generation of successful and gender transformative policies and their implementation.

The world is becoming increasingly digital, exposing us to both the vast promise and peril of digital technologies. To maximize the benefits of digital technologies and address the challenges, in 2018-2019
the United Nations Secretary-General convened a High Level Panel on Digital Cooperation. In 2020, based on the Panel’s report and multi-stakeholder consultations, the Secretary-General issued his Roadmap for Digital Cooperation which includes, at its core, a commitment to connect all people to the Internet. This must be the way forward for all countries.

The need to promote digital connectivity is clear and urgent: at the beginning of this Decade of Action more than one-third of the world population, 2.9 billion people, remain offline. In the United Nations designated least developed countries, less than 30 per cent of the population has access to the Internet, according to a 2021 estimate. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the cost of being offline without access to the world-wide web. Connectivity is no longer a luxury but a lifeline for working, learning, keeping in touch and accessing essential services. And among those already online, many face barriers such as lack of skills or access to appropriate equipment which prevent them from fully utilising the potential of connectivity.

In a digital world, women and girls are exposed to both the vast promise and peril of digital technologies. Access and safety are unacceptable barriers to women and girls full participation in the digital world. We must increase online safety and remove barriers so that women and girls are equally represented in shaping our digital future.

A gender lens is needed to assess the effectiveness of programs and transform the whole education system with changes to the curriculum. It must include engaging young women and girls in STEM subjects, as well as providing the basic skills which underpin these areas such as analytical and critical analysis, informatics and data analysis, project management, team working and leadership skills. Young women and girls should leave schools and colleges equipped with the skills to compete in a digital world and take on leadership roles to meet the challenges and crises the world is facing.

The world of work has also changed radically, with many jobs taking a hybrid form with people working from home. This has empowered some women to return to work as workplaces become more flexible, but it also has increased caring burdens on women as they are expected to be workers, caregivers, household managers and teachers, exacerbating traditional gender roles and issues of time poverty which women experience.

For women and girls who do not have access to technology, due to poverty, technological illiteracy, their rural location or other causes, the gender gap has widened inexorably. In certain industrial sectors, some technology has been designed for men so its size, weight and other attributes make it functionally inaccessible for many women. Technology and innovation are never gender neutral – they contribute to existing social and economic challenges and create new ones. Technology is a tool which can empower women and girls, but it must be designed, implemented and regulated in a way which fully recognises the negative, as well as the positive, impacts technology can have on all women and girls.
Specific attention must be paid to those at risk of being left behind, including rural and Indigenous women and girls, those living through conflict, refugees and internally displaced persons and women and girls in care and state institutions. Adaptive technology should be accessible to all those who wish to overcome challenges of mental and physical health barriers.

Soroptimist and its partners support those Member States which have committed to the Global Declaration on Connectivity for Education through the UNESCO ReWirEd campaign. This campaign offers concrete actions for all to pursue under three core principles:

- centre on the most marginalized,
- expand investments in free and high-quality digital education content, and
- move education to digital spaces through pedagogical innovation and change.

In the context of the above we urge all Member States to:

- Increase investments for women and girls in all forms of quality education and lifelong learning,
- Increase funding for, and participation in, programmes to ensure that women in rural communities have meaningful access to relevant and appropriate technology and training, in line with their urban counterparts,
- Provide universal internet access,
- Ensure access to appropriate digital hardware and equipment, software and sources of energy to power equipment in all centres of learning including community hubs,
- Create specific, targeted digital technology programmes to enable women and girls to regain entry into education and vocational training to building forward better for the future,
- Recognise and support a gender inclusive transformative digital and technology related curriculum preparing for future change and challenges, including online security,
- Develop and implement free or affordable digital and digitized skills training programmes which respond to the changing world of work and prepare for effective and timely adaptation, resilience and response at times of global crisis including disaster risk reduction,
- Develop data sources and indicators on gender equality and sustainable development related to the digital evolution. These should include both quantitative and qualitative sources of data, recognizing and monitoring differential data between men and women working in science, technology and other related fields,
- Promote working with CSOs who have on-the-ground experience of the digital and technological needs of women and girls in all their multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination through successfully implementing projects.
Co Sponsors:

Associated Country Women of the World
Dominican Leadership Conference
Federation of American Women’s Clubs Overseas (FAWCO)
Graduate Women International
Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary-Loreto Generalate
International Alliance of Women
International Convocation of Unitarian Universalist Women
International Council of Women CIF
International Federation of Business and Professional Women
International Health Awareness Network
International Presentation Association
Kırmızı Biber Derneği
Latter-Day Saint Charities
Make Mothers Matter
National Alliance of Women’s Organizations UK
NGO Committee on Aging-Vienna
Pan Pacific South East Asia Women’s Association
Sisters of Charity Federation
International Presentation Association
Red Dot Foundation
UNANIMA International
Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund, Inc.
Widow Rights International
Women for Water Partnership
Zonta International
APPENDIX A SI Where We Stand Statement: Cyberbullying

Where Things Stand...

The right of girls to be protected from such crimes as cyberbullying was originally enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of a Child. In 2014, in view of a UN report which addressed the potential risks of violence against children regarding ICT’s and the internet, the UN General Assembly, in resolution 69/158, recognised that bullying, including cyberbullying, could have a negative impact on the rights of children and called for a report to be prepared regarding protecting children from bullying. In 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development added a specific target “to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children” (target 16.2) and, under Sustainable Development Goal 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education, highlighted the importance of the promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence (target 4.7), as well as the provision of child, gender, and disability sensitive facilities and safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all (indicator 4.a).

Recent Agreed Conclusions (CSW 66 E/CN.6/2022/L.7; CSW 65 E/CN.6/2021/L.3), U.N. Resolutions, (UNRES 77/201 December 2022), U.N. Secretary General reports (A/73/265 (2018) A/71/213 (2016)), annual reports of the Special Rapporteur on Child Protection (2021), Council of European Guidelines (2018), a European Strategy for a Better Internet for Kids (2022), Recommendations by CEDAW (CEDAW/C/GC/36 (2017)) and the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC/C/GC/25) children’s rights in relation to the digital environment (2022, see also GR/C/16 (2013)) have all recently upheld this right. Cyberbullying has also been viewed to violate other rights as well, such as children’s right to non-discrimination (Article 2), freedom of expression (Article 13), and privacy (Article 16), to name a few.

These critical times and the impact of multiple global crises continue to demonstrate that, whilst digital and new technologies offer many positive opportunities for women and girls, gender-related online violence, including cyberbullying, represents one of the adverse consequences of technology and has become a topic of increasing societal concern as it is presenting new risks and threats. To begin with, the COVID-19 Pandemic has made girls and young women more vulnerable to being exposed to cyberbullying as they are spending more time on digital devices and are often not aware of the risks they take when they communicate online. E.g. The pandemic has exacerbated girls exposure to the risk of all forms of violence and harassment, including in digital contexts, inter alia peer-to-peer sexual harassment and cyberbullying, child sexual exploitation and abuse, child grooming, trafficking in persons, hate speech, stigmatisation, racism, xenophobia and multiple and
intersecting forms of discrimination. Recent studies show how a 106 per cent increase in reports of suspected child sexual exploitation globally was recorded during the pandemic. Cyberbullying has increased and “self-generated” imagery/online material has spiked, with 95 per cent of the content being from girls in early adolescence aged 11–13.

Children, especially girls, are also increasing as a target of cybercrimes. Over 99 per cent of the online reports received by CyberTipline in 2021 related to suspected child sexual abuse material. There are also numerous reports on the increase in risks of cyberbullying and child abuse. Mafia networks have also been known to take advantage of the economic needs of families by grooming children and exploiting them through sexting and sextortion. It has also been noted with concern that children who are marginalised or in vulnerable situations, who face stigmatisation, discrimination or exclusion, are also being disproportionately affected by bullying, both online and offline, and that bullying often includes a gender dimension which can be associated with sexual and gender-based violence, stereotyping, and negative social norms that affect all boys and girls. Girls with low esteem suffering from isolation, psychological problems, and anorexia are falling victim to men with sexual intentions, in particular on the internet.

It has also been noted with concern that children who are marginalised or in vulnerable situations, who face stigmatisation, discrimination, or exclusion, are also being disproportionately affected by bullying, both online and offline; E.g. *Children perceived to be different from the majority are at a higher risk of cyberbullying*. According to a survey conducted in 13 states in the USA, 61% of children said they were cyberbullied because of their appearance. Other reasons for being cyberbullied, according to children in the USA, are perceived intelligence (one quarter), race or sexuality (one seventh), and religion (one tenth). According to UNESCO in 2021, other parts of the world were also affected: 1 in 2 children aged 11-18 surveyed in 11 European countries, 6 in 10 children aged 13-17 in the USA, and 1 in 3 primary and secondary school students surveyed in South Africa reported they experienced cyberbullying; at the same time, 44% of the children surveyed in 11 European countries who had been cyberbullied before lockdown said it happened even more during lockdowns in 2020.

According to a 2021 report by the UN Special Rapporteur on Child Protection regarding a study of young people aged 9 to 16 years which involved seven countries (including Ireland), they found that 26% of girls and 17% of boys had experienced bullying online. Further, 35% of girls aged 13-16 had encountered content such as hate messages, anorexic or bulimic content (14%), self-harm sites (9%), and sites discussing suicide 8%. Cyberbullying can cause profound harm as it can affect the child victim at any time, quickly reaching a wide audience, allowing technology to perpetuate cyberbullying threats as messages that may be posted and reposted over time. Bullying and cyberbullying can also easily feed into each other, forming a continuum of damaging behaviour.

These threats need to be urgently addressed as it is affecting a high percentage of women and girls and compromising their health, their emotional, psychological and physical well-being, their academic work as well as safety as children and young people who are victims of cyberbullying or other forms of online violence are usually also victimised in person. In addition, potential long-term effects include their individual ability to realise their own potential as cyberbullying is associated with long-lasting consequences that continue into adulthood.
And Where Things Need to Go...

Fundamental Action

Human rights and women’s rights which are protected offline must also be protected online. This must be balanced with respect for the right to freedom of expression and the right to privacy and data protection. States must protect and fulfil a child’s right to an effective remedy if their human rights and fundamental freedoms have been infringed in the digital environment.

States must fulfill their obligation to provide effective remedies and reparations for violations of the rights of a woman or girl, including by third parties such as business enterprises. This should include provisions which call for penalties, compensation, judicial action, and measures to promote recovery after harm caused or contributed to by third parties. Meeting this obligation entails having in place gender-sensitive mechanisms – criminal, civil, or administrative – that are known by women and girls and their representatives, that are also prompt, genuinely available, and accessible, and that provide adequate reparation for harm suffered... In all cases, women and girls should have recourse to independent and impartial justice, or judicial review of administrative proceedings.

States should also establish monitoring mechanisms for the investigation of rights violations, with a view to improving accountability of ICT and other relevant companies; this should occur alongside a strengthening of regulatory agencies’ responsibility for the development of standards relevant to children’s rights and ICTs, including implementing fast and effective procedures for removal of prejudicial or harmful material involving women and girls.

Additional Action

- Within their jurisdiction, Member States should prohibit and criminalise online violence against women and girls, in particular the non-consensual distribution of intimate images, online harassment, and stalking.

- Member States should adopt or adapt (as appropriate) legislative measures to hold perpetrators liable and allow women and girls who are victims to pursue legal action. Such legislative measures should be applicable also to threats of releasing harmful information or content online.

- Member States should provide victims with legal recourse and appropriate legal aid in order that they may pursue a relevant course of action against the perpetrator.

- Member States should provide reparation measures such as restitution, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition.
Where Soroptimist International Stands...

We urge Member States, with support from the United Nations and its agencies to:

- Ensure that their present legal frameworks adequately protect all women and girls’ human rights online, including the right to life free from violence, freedom of expression and access to information, and the right to privacy and data protection.

- Take effective measures to prevent the publication of harmful material that comprises gender-based violence against women or girls, and for their removal on an urgent basis.

- Provide protective measures and services for victims of online gender-based violence.

- Inform children and teenagers about the risks of taking, or allowing others to take, intimate images, and that the dissemination of such images is a form of gender-based violence and a crime. Girls should also learn about safety on social media platforms and the Internet, and how to protect their own privacy online.

- We urge all corporate organisations providing internet platforms to Commit to eradicating online gender-based violence.

- Allocate resources to information and education campaigns on preventing ICT facilitated violence against women and girls.

- Promote a ‘human rights for all’ based digital security system across their platforms.

- Adopt transparent complaint mechanisms for cases of online and ICT-facilitated violence against women and girls ensuring these are easily accessible for reporting and requesting removal of harmful content.

Resources

Annual Report of the Special Rapporteur on Child Protection

Releasing children’s potential and minimising risks

February 2023
APPENDIX B: SI Where We Stand Statement: Women and Technology

Where Things Stand...

The 67th session of the Commission on the Status of Women will take place from 6 to 17 March 2023 with the priority theme of "Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls".

Human development in recent decades has been accompanied by rapid changes in technology and an increasing proliferation of digitised devices and services. The pace of change is accelerating due to digitalisation and frontier technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, biotechnology, and nanotechnology. It is evident that frontier technologies will further widen inequalities and create new inequalities as men are still more likely than women to study STEM subjects.

Since 1975, the UN has sought a more equal representation of the sexes regarding the advantages derived from the introduction of new technologies in how we live, communicate, work, and learn. The UN has repeatedly called upon governments, the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation, the International Labour Organisation and other relevant United Nations organisations, to:

a. Devise instruments and tools to involve women in the design and implementation of their programs and projects.

b. Ensure policies that:
   - Guarantee equal access to education,
   - Eliminate gender disparities in education,
   - Encourage education and vocational training in the fields of science and technology for all women and girls.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, women and girls had access to affordable devices and broadband networks yet did not have the requisite skills to take advantage of this technology to improve their lives. The result? The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the cost of being offline for women and girls in today’s technology-saturated societies as digital literacy and STEM have moved from being optional to essential for them.
Women and girls are now facing what is described as digital poverty: “The inability to interact with the online world fully when and where and how an individual needs to” and they are increasingly being left behind globally as gender gaps regarding digital literacy and STEM education continue to grow. These gaps are apparent from the lowest skill proficiency levels with the divides growing further along the skills spectrum until, once one arrived at the frontiers of technology, the gaps have become an ocean making existing inequities regarding poverty, race, gender, age, ability, and income worse.

A global effort was undertaken with the presentation the 2020 Report of the Secretary-General: Road Map for Digital Cooperation. The report emphasises the complex nature of the emerging digital society and its impact on every aspect of human development, societal and personal.

In 2020, on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Governments pledged to harness the potential of technology and innovation to improve women’s and girls’ lives and to close the development divide and the digital divide, including the gender digital divide, as well as address the risks and challenges emerging from the use of technologies.

In July 2021, the Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on the promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the internet, including issues related to access, shutdowns and encryption.

During the sixteenth meeting of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in December 2021, best practice forums on cybersecurity and on gender and digital rights were established.

Despite nearly 50 years of meetings, conferences, policy discussions, reports, etc., the status of women’s presence in the fields of technology is far from parity:

- 259 million more men than women used the Internet in 2022.
- On average women held only 23% of those occupations such as coding and research and development in leading technology companies.
- 60% of the cases of technology-related violence against women were not investigated by authorities.
- Of all the Wikipedia editors online globally, between 84 and 91% percent of them are male.
- Women occupy 27% of the top management jobs in media companies and 35% of the workforce in newsrooms.
- Women in tech are paid at least 28 percent less than men with the same education, years of experience, and age.

And Where Things Need to Go...

Soroptimist International and other civil-society partners believe that women and girls must have full, equal and effective participation and decision-making in public life. The needs for digital equality and digital cooperation as well as dispelling damaging gender constructs
involving women and technology remain. The training of girls and women in new technologies is essential.

Digital literacy and STEM are no longer a luxury but are lifelines for working, learning, keeping in touch and accessing essential services. New technologies are changing the structure of labour markets which provide new and different employment opportunities yet require women and girls to have skills ranging from basic digital fluency to advanced technical skills in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and in information and communications technology. In many countries the level of education of girls and women continues to be much lower than that of boys and men, particularly in technical fields.

In 2022, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) acknowledged that new and emerging digital technologies have an impact on women’s employment opportunities and can accelerate progress towards achieving gender equality as well as bridge digital divides countries. The Commission emphasised the importance of promoting:

a. digital literacy
b. equal and affordable access to the internet, mobile devices as well as information and communication technologies for all women and girls
c. equal access for all women and girls to digital training, capacity-building, forecasting and preparedness, including early warning systems
d. science, technology and innovation strategies to reduce patterns of inequality

The Commission noted with concern that new technological developments can perpetuate existing patterns of inequality and discrimination, including the algorithms used in artificial intelligence-based solutions.

Fundamental Action

To empower women and girls in the fields of technology, action must be taken by States, the private sector and civil society. Together we must ensure that all human rights are realised, including the equal involvement of women and girls in the economic, social, cultural, and political development of communities.

All member States must fully implement previous human rights agreements and comply with the requirements of the Committee of the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

To achieve the SDGs that support women and girls in technology, States must improve national statistical offices and other relevant parties to properly collect, analyse, and disseminate sex and age disaggregated data. In doing so, States can then produce gender statistics throughout all censuses that will better enable them to implement and monitor policies designed to aid women and girls.
Furthermore, States are to recognise the value of data available from civil society.

**Further Action Required…**

Policies and programmes are to take a life-course approach to education and employment of women and girls in technical fields, recognising and understanding that access to learning is a human right at all ages.

SI calls upon Member States to:

- Support policies and programmes which compromise a combination of “five A’s”: availability, affordability, awareness, accessibility, and ability for effective use.

- Invest in providing countrywide access to electricity and broadband internet access to bridge gender and generational gaps.

- Invest in education, training and skills development through the life course that reduces gender-based sectoral and occupational segregation and promotes women in non-traditional employment and sectors, especially in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

- Develop digital skills – Education and training programmes should be inclusive and specifically involve women and girls.

- Develop, amend and expand legislation and policies and strengthen their implementation to prevent and eliminate acts of technology-facilitated gender-based violence, with the meaningful participation of survivors of violence, all women and women’s organisations, including survivor-informed responses and fast-track processes to facilitate the swift removal of illegal, harmful or non-consensual content.

- Ensure the full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership of all women in digital cooperation and ICT and data governance.

- To continue to take all appropriate measures to prevent and protect girls and women, both in person and in digital contexts, from all forms of violence, such as bullying, including cyberbullying, by promptly responding to such acts, and to provide appropriate support to those affected by and involved in bullying.

**Where Soroptimist International Stands…**

These are the principles that Soroptimist International strongly supports and will advocate for on behalf of all women and girls to ensure their voices are heard and respected.

SI will:
• work to educate and empower women and girls in the fields of technology

• work to educate the public to understand that a “woman’s place is in the digital revolution” to empower women in their economical, social, cultural or political development in order to withstand the epic changes in the automation and digitalisation of the world

• work with all relevant actors, including UN bodies and agencies, UN Member States, NGOs, civil society and the private sector to make States more accountable for developing, amending and expanding legislation and policies to strengthen the implementation to prevent and eliminate acts of technology-facilitated gender-based violence, with the meaningful participation of survivors of violence, young women and women’s organisations

• work with other NGOs and civil society to advocate for the establishment of mandatory requirements for impact assessments and due diligence mechanisms to identify, prevent and mitigate societal risks and the negative impacts of digital technology on women and girls, especially by including affected groups, women’s rights organisations and human rights experts

SI calls upon all parties to expedite efforts across all sustainable development measures and activities to achieve girls’ and women’s full participation in the fields of technology through a human-rights based approach at whatever life stage they have reached.

Soroptimist International supports the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through its Federations, Unions, Regions Clubs, by working on the ground with partner organisations and UN agencies to Educate, Empower and Enable women and girls everywhere.

February 2023
APPENDIX C: SI Where We Stand Statement: Rural Women

SI Where We Stand Statement
Rural Women
Approved Version February 2023

Where Things Stand...

In 2023, the UN Secretary General has reviewed whether or not implementation of the agreed conclusions of the sixty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which dealt with the challenges that rural women faced, had been successful. As to women in general, it was observed that the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 5 (Gender Equality), by 2030, appeared increasingly unlikely for a number of reasons – including the fact that less than half the data needed to monitor progress was available.

The UN Secretary General’s observations regarding the implementation of CSW 64’s outcome document regarding rural women and girls was even more troubling. It was observed that long before the COVID-19 and Ukraine crises, rural women and girls were at a greater risk of rising poverty, food insecurity, violence, and exclusion in the context of the escalating consequences of the environment and climate emergencies, the lingering impacts of the great recession, as well as the deep persistence of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

In 2022, almost every global gender and development indicator with available data continued to show that rural women lagged behind rural men and urban women. They have joined others in facing cascading crises in the forms of the lingering impacts of the pandemic and sluggish recovery in many countries which was only intensified by rising inflation and the effects of the war in Ukraine.

The UN Secretary General gave specific examples regarding how rural women and girls continued to be negatively impacted in 2022. Forty three per cent of the world’s population, or more than 3 billion people, including women and girls, live in rural areas. Eighty per cent of the world’s extreme poor, which also includes many women and girls, are also located in these rural areas. An estimated 2.5 billion people rely on agricultural livelihoods with approximately 1.5 billion people, including poor women and girls, living in smallholder households with heightened vulnerability to the effects of economic, environmental, and climate shocks, and the disruptions in supply chains and unprecedented price rises for food, fuel and fertiliser brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. These effects have all had disproportionate gendered impacts, pushing rural women and girls even further behind.

The unforeseen impacts of the pandemic have resulted in 1.6 million learners leaving school and an estimated 11 million girls at risk of not returning in addition to the 130 million girls who were already out of school. Girls from the poorest households and in rural areas have been left behind. The
difference in upper secondary school completion rates between the poorest rural girls and the richest urban girls ranges from 11.5 to 72.2 per cent in 29 countries with recent data. The chances of rural girls completing primary and secondary education continue to be jeopardised not only by poverty but also by additional burdens such as the need to spend precious time on unpaid care and domestic work and the lack of improved drinking water or electricity in their households.

The situation of women in rural areas is challenging. Rural women and girls suffer disproportionately from gender-based discrimination, they face greater pressure than their urban peers to adhere to traditional practices and customs. Their opportunities are limited by the broader development context and by specific local factors, such as isolation and remoteness.

**Poverty.** Gender inequality is a major cause and effect of hunger and poverty. It is estimated that 60% of chronically hungry people are women and girls. 80% of the world’s poor live in rural areas and work mainly in farming, often for the needs of family, or simply subsistence. Women living in rural areas suffer disproportionately from poverty, far worse than rural men or those living in cities.

**Agriculture.** On average, women make up about 43% of the agricultural labour force in developing countries. If women had the same access to productive resources as men, for example land, livestock, and mechanical equipment, they could increase yields on their farms by 20% to 30%, raising total agricultural output in these countries by 2.5 to 4%. This would reduce the number of hungry people in the world by around 12 to 17%.

**Water and sanitation.** Women in sub-Saharan Africa collectively spend about 40 billion hours a year collecting water. This negatively impacts women’s employment and girl’s educational opportunities. There is still far less access to clean or improved water sources in rural areas than in urban areas.

**Education.** Rural girls are more likely to be out of school than those who live in urban areas. Lack of education can lead to limited access to employment and income, as well as exclusion from political and civic leadership, leaving women and girls behind. Girls forced into early marriage may not have access to continuing education; if secondary education is available to girls, they may regularly be missing it due to lack of adequate toilet facilities or taboos around menstruation.

**Natural disasters, climate change, and conflict.** Rural women’s health, education and livelihoods can be undermined by natural disasters, climate change, and conflict more so than men. Land titles are more likely to be held by men. This means that following a disaster, if a woman is widowed, she cannot independently claim state-offered reconstruction funds. Women can also be more at risk from natural disasters and flooding, as often boys and not girls are taught to swim at an early age.

**And Where Things Need to Go...**

**Fundamental Action**

To empower rural women and girls, action must be taken by States, the private sector and civil society. Together we must ensure that all human rights are realised, including the equal involvement of women and girls in the economic, social, cultural, and political development of communities.

All member States must fully implement previous human rights agreements and comply with the requirements of CEDAW.
To achieve the SDGs that support rural women and girls, States must first improve national statistical offices and other relevant parties to properly collect, analyse, and disseminate sex and age disaggregated data. In doing so, States can then produce gender statistics throughout all censuses that will better enable them to implement and monitor policies designed to aid rural women and girls. Furthermore, States must recognise the value of data available from civil society.

**Further Action Required...**

Policies and programmes should take a life-course approach to education and employment for rural women and girls, recognising and understanding that access to learning is a human right at all ages and that women and girls living in rural areas have different learning needs at different times in their lives.

Work with local partners to ensure gender appropriate and sensitive sanitation facilities.

Develop policies and programmes that involve women in the management and provision of accessible, safe, and effective water and sanitation resources. Support policies and programmes which provide rural women and girls with finance and land security, as well as securing a place in decision-making forums at all levels, encouraging more female leadership in organisations pertaining to food and agriculture through mentoring opportunities and training.

**Where Soroptimist International Stands...**

These are the principles that Soroptimist International strongly supports and will advocate for on behalf of Women and Girls in rural areas:

Soroptimist International urges governments, civil society, the private sector, and other relevant partners to support the recommendations contained in the Secretary General's 2023 report E/CN.6/2023/4. Soroptimist International believes that the following require priority measures for action to enable rural women and girls to achieve gender equality and empowerment:

**Poverty.** Member States and government at all levels must be encouraged to provide women with support through economic and social policies aimed at the eradication of rural poverty, ensuring that social protection is available for the most vulnerable.

**Agriculture.** Enable women to participate as equal contributors in agricultural and non-farm sectors, providing full and equal rights to land and inheritance, improvement of skills and capacity building through Internet and digital technologies, technical, and vocational training, and access to financial and other resources for entrepreneurship.

**Water and Sanitation.** Engage women in the development of appropriate infrastructures for access to clean and safe water and energy resources, and support the improvement of provision of safe sanitation facilities, especially for educational and health institutions.

**Education.** Quality education must be accessible beyond primary stages, and now include Internet and digital technologies as such an education can be regarded as one of the major pillars of social protection, offering women and girls the opportunity to fulfil their potential, engage in social
entrepreneurship or find meaningful employment. Recognise the fundamental importance of educating rural women and girls to achieve gender equality, enabling them to regularly and safely attend educational institutions.

Soroptimist International supports the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through its Federations, Unions, Regions Clubs, by working on the ground with partner organisations and UN agencies to Educate, Empower, and Enable women and girls everywhere.

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