2022– 2023 Biennium

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 the lives of all women and girls 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 all 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 women and girls 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 all women and girls in the fields of technology, action must be taken by Member States, the private sector and civil society. Together we must ensure that all human rights are realised, including the equal involvement of all 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, Member States must improve national statistical offices and other relevant parties to properly collect, analyse, and disseminate sex and age disaggregated data. In doing so, Member States can then produce gender statistics throughout all censuses that will better enable them to implement and monitor policies designed to aid all women and girls.

Furthermore, Member 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.

Soroptimist International 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 all 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 Member 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.

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