Placing Gender Equality at the Heart of the Global Digital Compact
Taking Forward the Recommendations of CSW67
Executive Summary

One of the greatest challenges of the world's digital transformation today is to address the current gender digital divide. This has become the new face of gender inequality, limiting women's and girls' opportunities to meaningfully and safely access, use, lead and design technology.

This paper aims to build consensus around a gender-transformative Global Digital Compact. A unique opportunity is at hand to influence a key framework to advance women's and girls' rights and empowerment. Realizing gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment pertains to every policy area, including digital governance. Any new digital cooperation framework must have at its core a strong focus on dismantling structural barriers to gender equality.

This paper suggests a **dual track approach.**
1. **The inclusion of a stand-alone goal on gender equality** that elevates three fundamental topics to be prioritized in every dimension of the GDC: TFGBV, education & economic opportunities and leadership.
2. **The robust mainstreaming of gender considerations** across all parts of the framework.

These ideas are not new, however they would constitute a major shift in digital policy and practice and would prevent digital technologies from becoming an incubator of new inequalities.

Adopting a stand-alone goal on gender equality for transformative change

"We the peoples" are better represented in the multilateral system by placing gender equality at the heart of the multilateral architecture. A significant body of research produced for the **sixty-seventh Commission on the Status of Women (CSW67)** showed that progress towards gender equality in technology and innovation continues to be far too slow. A stand-alone goal on gender equality will:

- **Drive the transformation of the structural determinants of gender-based inequality** and reverse the current trends in digital transformation which put the achievement of gender equality at risk.
- **Emphasize the instrumental role gender equality plays** in helping to bring about a digital transformation that benefits everyone.
- **Give visibility to gender equality,** ensuring that all stakeholders can be held **accountable for progress**.

Freedom from technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) and discrimination

TFGBV is spreading rapidly and changing constantly, impacting every aspect of digital governance and forcing women and girls to self-censor, de-platform or reduce their interaction in online spaces.

Outcomes to achieve:
• A policy of zero tolerance in the digital environment for all forms of GBV.
• A strong commitment to improve redress and remedy but also prioritize preventive measures.
• Enhanced international cooperation and policy coherence.

How to do it?
• Develop, amend and expand legislation and policies on TFGBV, with women's rights organizations.
• Public and private sector entities prioritize the prevention, elimination and responses to all forms of TFGBV.
• Create or reinforce public bodies that support people affected by TFGBV and algorithmic discrimination.
• Develop internationally accepted standards and methodologies to measure TFGBV and track its patterns.

Equitable educational and economic opportunities

Women and girls face persistent and profound barriers to thriving in the digital economy and there has been limited public and private sector investment in influencing digital ecosystems' structures.

Outcomes to achieve:
• The elimination of occupational segregation and other structural barriers and the expansion of women's educational and occupational opportunities in emerging STEM fields and ICT.
• Equal opportunities to access education, resources and financial support to thrive in the digital economy.

How to do it?
• Place the responsibility for driving change on those responsible for creating supportive workplaces and educational settings, and put in place accountability mechanisms to ensure that they fulfil their obligations.
• Advance intersectoral working bodies & coordination to drive the development of gender and STEM policies.
• Significantly increase investments in evidence-based initiatives aimed at bridging the gender digital divide.

Equal voice, leadership and participation

Effective governance of digital technologies and data requires that women in all their diversity have a seat at the table, are listened to and can influence decisions made to shape a shared digital future.

Outcomes to achieve
• Gender parity in decision-making roles and the representation of women from different backgrounds.
• Removal of barriers to women's equal access to power, decision-making and leadership in digital cooperation.

How to do it?
• Take concrete measures for the full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership of women.
• Provide funding, sponsorship and training to enhance the professional development and participation of women leaders in the digital age, especially for youth and underrepresented groups.
• Promote institutional shifts to remove exclusionary practices and language.

Mainstreaming gender in all global digital compact themes

The integration of gender perspectives in digital cooperation is often narrowly focused on access or safety issues or the adoption of ex post measures. It typically **overlooks questions of power and inequality** and fails to recognize that technologies are socially shaped by culture. A **feminist perspective on digital governance** considers the economic, social and political circumstances that influence not only the use of digital technologies but also their design and technical content.
Digital technologies can provide new opportunities for women's empowerment but technology on its own cannot address the systemic problems driving the digital gender divide. The serious harm and discrimination against women and girls triggered by new digital technologies have highlighted the need for **transformative changes in digital governance.**

Digital connectivity and capacity-building

Overlaying digital tools and services onto existing social, cultural and economic inequalities and gender stereotypes compounds risks of limiting connectivity for the most marginalized.

Outcomes to achieve
• Efforts to close the gender digital divide are grounded in digital equity.
• Barriers are removed and support provided for non-users and the least connected.
• Everyone is equipped with the knowledge, awareness and skills to leverage connectivity for economic and social empowerment, and digital services are tailored to be accessible and valuable to all.

How to do it?
• Fully implement existing commitments and obligations, including by taking an intersectional approach to gender gaps in digital access and competencies in line with the Agreed Conclusions from CSW67.
• Mainstream gender perspectives in national digital policies, laws, programmes and budgets.
• Assess and address data gaps to measure digital inclusion, including by systematically collecting data disaggregated by sex and by developing new definitions and methodologies.

Digital cooperation to accelerate progress on the sustainable development goals

The development of technological solutions often fails to take into account gender, age, race, locality, disability, income or the sociotechnical infrastructure of low-income countries.

Outcomes to achieve

• The enhanced efficiency, accountability and transparency of public services and infrastructure through the use of ICT for the benefit of all women and girls, including those who are hardest to reach.
• A whole-of-society approach to build a more inclusive digital environment.
• Standards and practices to reduce the environmental impacts and energy consumption of digitalization.

How to do it?

• Tie funding for public sector programmes, research grants and procurement related to digital technology to obligations to systematically integrate gender analysis, targets and disaggregated data collection.
• Increase investment in the development of digital public goods catering to the needs of all women and girls.
• Put in place building blocks for inclusive and gender-responsive digital public infrastructure.

Upholding human rights

Digital technologies should be developed within a regulatory framework that prioritizes, protects and promotes human rights by default, rather than one that permits abuse or exploitation as part of their business model.

Outcomes to achieve

• The human rights of women and girls are promoted, respected and fulfilled in the conception, design, development, deployment, evaluation and regulation of digital technologies, with adequate safeguards.
• Regulations factor in the voices and experiences of women and girls.

How to do it?

• Identify and eliminate technology-facilitated gender-based discrimination and human rights violations.
• Commit to adopt, expand or amend digital policies, laws and industry standards in full compliance with international human rights norms.
• Adopt a human rights-based approach as standard and mitigate potential risks for women and girls.
• Support the important role of civil society actors in promoting and protecting the human rights and freedoms.

An inclusive, open, secure and shared Internet

A variety of business developments and governmental regulations could put the future of Internet governance model at risk, the GDC is an opportunity to preserve the principles on which the Internet was built.

Outcomes to achieve

• The Internet's universality, integrity and openness are protected and sustained.
• Gender mainstreaming in Internet governance is affirmed along with key principles for an inclusive Internet.

How to do it?

• Commit to systematically assess how Internet governance decisions might impact different groups of people.
• Commit to avoiding Internet shutdowns and actions that would compromise critical infrastructure.
• Promote multistakeholder approaches that address the root causes of gender inequality.
• Promote and preserve cultural and linguistic diversity on the Internet.

Digital trust and security

Fostering a responsible digital transformation requires more than setting cybersecurity standards. It is about having trustworthy digital technologies and service providers who uphold societal expectations and values.

Outcomes to achieve

• Elaborate and implement gender-transformative norms, guidelines and principles relating to the responsible, inclusive and ethical development and use of digital technologies.
• Improved digital resilience among people and organizations, including sufficient knowledge to reduce risks.

How to do it?
• Enhance accountability and transparency, including gender impact assessments and due diligence obligations.
• Strengthen the capacity and active cooperation of public sector actors to effectively address new risks, disputes and regulatory challenges arising from digitalization, especially in transnational contexts.
• Adopt a human-centred approach to cybersecurity, based on gender-, age- and disability-inclusive standards.
• Invest in gender-responsive educational opportunities linked to digital media, ethics and digital citizenship.

Data protection and empowerment
Gender-biased technology and datasets affect individuals but also contributes to setbacks in gender equality and women's empowerment as it creates negative social impacts and harms society at large.

Outcomes to achieve
• Data governance and regulations are interoperable, consistent with international law and the right to privacy.
• Women and girls provide their consent to the collection, processing, use and storage of their personal data.

How to do it?
• Apply gender-responsive standards to data collection, use, sharing, archiving and deletion.
• Adopt regulations to provide high-quality data infrastructure and systems that prevent gender bias.
• Encourage cooperation among regulatory bodies and agencies working on data protection and human rights.
• Develop a gender-transformative Global Data Compact.

Agile governance of AI and other emerging technologies
So far, self-regulation in AI or emerging technologies has resulted in systems or products that do not equally benefit all population groups or prevent harm or unfair treatment, especially for women and girls.

Outcomes to achieve
• An agreed governance mechanism adequately integrates gender perspectives across all dimensions.
• Meaningful transparency and accountability to improve fairness, reliability, safety and interpretability.

How to do it?
• Establish a global multistakeholder governance model and adopt national action plans on AI and equality.
• Adopt regulations on internal and external evaluation for developing and using AI and assess societal impacts.
• Set up liability regimes for harms caused by AI, and prohibit AI systems that do not meet baseline standards.
• Build capacity and take a multidisciplinary approach to ensure all population groups equally benefit from AI.
• Allow access to probe AI models and increase investment in independent research on responsible AI.
• Improve meaningful access to AI, especially for developing economies and marginalized communities.

Global digital commons
Digital technologies are increasingly considered to be essential resources and basic services that should be accessible to and managed in the interests of all to ensure shared participation and prosperity.

Outcomes to achieve
• Digital technologies and data are safeguarded as a collective public good.
• The governance and management of digital technologies and data ensure more equitable outcomes.

How to do it?
• Harness and design digital technologies for the common good and the fair distribution of their benefits.
• Invest in the capacity to develop harmonized and modular frameworks that enable safe digital commons.
• Support communities of practice that foster collaboration and cooperative learning on digital commons.

Without attention to these issues, gender-based inequalities that block the realization of women's rights are rendered invisible. The structural causes of gender-based discrimination and harm are left unchanged – and even amplified and perpetuated by digital tools. **The success of the GDC** will be measured by its capacity to unlock targeted investments in **bridging digital divides and establishing digital governance mechanisms that shape a more equal digital future for all.**