

Summary of recommendations

VIENNA DISCUSSION FORUM

4 NOVEMBER 2021



Introduction

UNODC and UNIDO, together with the Permanent Missions of Finland, Norway and Sweden in Vienna, hosted the third annual Vienna Discussion Forum (VDF) on 4 November 2021. The VDF is a platform to discuss gender equality in the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals. In 2021, the event focused on existing challenges regarding women and girls' access to and leadership in Artificial Intelligence, Digital Transformation and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and reflected on how these frontier technologies can provide an opportunity to create an inclusive, sustainable and gender-equal future.

The Forum culminated in the following recommendations:

Digital Transformation and the digital economy

- The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) represents enormous opportunities for creating employment and promoting a more inclusive society, however it is a new process and **a lot of uncertainty remains as to its exact socioeconomic impacts**. With digital means already embedded in many aspects of everyday life, measures need to be taken now towards ensuring 4IR is gender-responsive and to ensure gender mainstreaming.
- As the world further digitalizes, the lack of understanding on existing digital inequalities can perpetuate gender norms and deepen discrimination and marginalization. The international community should make use of the United Nations Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation[1] for recommendations on how to connect, respect and protect everyone in digitalization efforts. **The collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data for evidence-driven policies is critical to address existing inequalities and to prevent gender-blind digitalization.**
- **Closing the gender financing gap**, especially for women entrepreneurs operating in digital transformation, **is essential to ensuring that everyone can contribute to harnessing the benefits of 4IR**. Investors, both private and public, should be encouraged to adopt a gender lens when identifying new investment opportunities[2].

Cybercrime

- Women continue to be targeted and exploited by various forms of online abuse and harassment. ICT[3]-facilitated violence has increased since the start of COVID-19, in what UN Women describes as the “shadow pandemic”[4]. **Ensuring that women and girls are able to equally lead, participate in and benefit from technological transformation** is a step towards eradicating online gender-based violence and will ultimately contribute to new digital spaces being safer for women and men, boys and girls.

- The gender digital divide exposes women and girls at a higher risk to cyber violence. **The different safety needs of women and men online must be understood and must be integrated into the development and design of new technology.**
- **Research and knowledge on addressing systemic cyber violence needs to be strengthened**, including on cyber violence exacerbated by the pandemic, sexual extortion, displaying unsolicited explicit visuals during online meetings and sharing of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse material[5]. This should be combined with strengthened preventive efforts informed by in-depth analysis of offenders and their motivation.
- **Greater awareness on cyber safety and the different impact it has on men and women need to be included throughout educational and training programmes.** Efforts must also be made to **strengthen the online safety skills of women and girls, men and boys.**

Criminal Justice

- During lockdowns brought on by the pandemic, violence against women increased globally, while access to justice became more difficult. This highlighted the need for innovative solutions, leading to the enhanced use of new technologies such as **e-justice mechanisms, digitalization promoting women's access to criminal justice, online helplines or messaging services for victims of gender-based violence.** There must be due diligence to make sure that **increased digitalization does not replicate existing inequalities in accessing justice.** For instance, special attention must be paid to women and girls from marginalized groups to ensure that they have the necessary skills and technology to access such services.

Diversity and inclusion in the workplace and in leadership

- To address the severe lack of diversity in the workforce that invents, designs, develops and disseminates technology, efforts need to be made to **ensure women and girls are encouraged and supported in their studies, skills upgrading/reskilling, career development and throughout their careers in STEM[6] fields, also to reduce their risk of job loss due to increasing automatization.** This has to start with schools, which should be assisted in incorporating digital skills in their curricula to break down stereotypes and to prepare girls and boys for the competencies required from the workforce of the 21st century.

- Efforts should be made to foster enabling conditions to attract, retain and promote women working in the tech sector. **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) strategies need to be adopted** to ensure women, especially those from minority groups (e.g. in terms of ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disabilities or from other marginalized groups), are empowered to lead technological design, and are represented equally in managerial positions.
- Leaders in the digitalization sector need to be encouraged to **learn and develop inclusive leadership skills and made aware of the business case for gender equality** to guarantee strong commitment and achieve institutional change. Learning opportunities should be actively sought to overcome (un)conscious biases.

Partnerships

- **Digital inclusion and cyber equality can only be achieved through partnerships.** Achieving gender equality requires a multidimensional approach, which integrates the expertise and experience of a broad set of stakeholders, including from the international community, the private sector, civil society as well as gender experts, in order to ensure innovative measures are devised for an inclusive 4IR.

Eliminating gender norms and stereotypes

- The voices of young women and girls, especially activists, are often disregarded and dismissed due to sexist attitudes. To safeguard an inclusive and sustainable technological future, **a change of culture is needed to ensure that ageism and gender norms and stereotypes do not undermine the agency of women and girls.**
- To build an inclusive and equal future, **women's experience and expertise need to be included at all levels, including senior levels. Single-sex spaces can no longer be tolerated** – be it on expert panels, developing policies or new technologies – as the risk of replicating inequalities is too great in those settings.
- The involvement and **commitment of men and boys is crucial to making a gender-responsive 4IR a lived reality for all.** With mostly men in positions of power in the tech sector and beyond, they are in a significant position to drive change and foster allyship towards gender equality. Men, especially those in leadership positions, have a vital role to play in **challenging gender stereotypes, sexist jokes and misconduct, and can take simple but meaningful actions such as not speaking on all-men panels.**

FOOTNOTES

[1] A/74/821 (2020), available [here](#).

[2] To learn more, UNIDO has developed a free-of-charge, self-paced online training series on Gender Lens Investing, available [here](#). More information on this course is also contained [here](#).

[3] Abbreviation for “Information and Communication Technology”.

[4] UN Women: [“The Shadow Pandemic: Violence against women during COVID-19”](#); UN Women: [“Online and ICT facilitated violence against women and girls during COVID-19”](#) (2021).

[5] UN Women: [“Online and ICT facilitated violence against women and girls during COVID-19”](#) (2021).

[6] Abbreviation for “science, technology, mathematics and engineering”.

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