Bridging the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective: APC submission to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Association for Progressive Communications (APC)
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1. Introduction

The Association for Progressive Communications (APC) welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the work of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and values the focus of the OHCHR on the question of ways to bridge the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective. APC is an international network and non-profit organisation founded in 1990 that works to help ensure everyone has access to a free and open internet to improve lives and create a more just world. APC's Women's Rights Programme, both a programme within APC and a network of women throughout the world, is committed to using technology for women's empowerment. We promote gender equality in the design, implementation, access and use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and in the policy decisions and frameworks that regulate them. APC advocates for internet policy and regulation that enable the promotion and protection of human rights, women's rights and the rights of people of diverse sexualities, particularly when those rights are threatened or violated by states and private sector actors.

The gender digital divide is both a symptom and cause of violations of women's human rights. It is a symptom in that the discrimination that women face on the basis of social and cultural norms is one of the most pronounced causes of the gender digital divide. To put it simply, all disparities in internet access sit in other disparities that women face in society, be they based on location, economic power, age, gender, racial or ethnic origin, social and cultural norms, education, or other factors. It is a cause of violations of women's human rights because the internet can be a critical enabler of human rights, and the gender divide leaves women who are without meaningful internet access less equipped to exercise their human rights and participate in public life/society. Therefore, a human rights-based approach to bridging the gender digital divide must be rooted in principles of accountability, equality and non-discrimination, participation, transparency, empowerment and sustainability, and also address the underlying context in which women live, which involves multiple and intersecting barriers to exercising their human rights.

Note on terminology:[1]

- All references to "women" should be construed as including "girls" and anyone identifying as women, unless otherwise specifically noted. Women of diverse sexualities and gender identities are also included in relevant sections of the submission.

- "Gender" refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialisation processes. They are context- and time-specific, and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in women or men in a given context. Gender is part of broader socio-cultural contexts, intersecting with other factors such as class, race, poverty level, ethnic group and age.

- References to "access" should be construed as referring to "meaningful internet access" (see below) unless otherwise construed.

- "Meaningful internet access" should be construed as pervasive, affordable connectivity (of sufficient quality and speed) to the internet in a manner that enables the user to benefit from internet use, including to participate in the public sphere, exercise human rights, access and create relevant content, engage with people and information for development and well-being,

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[1]Source: www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/index.php?q=filedepot_download/3406/437

etc.; irrespective of the means of such access (i.e. whether via a mobile or other device; whether through private ownership of a device or using a public access facility like a library).

- "Technology-related violence against women" refers to acts of violence against women (VAW) that are committed, abetted or aggravated, in part or fully, by the use of ICTs such as phones, the internet, social media platforms, and email. Online VAW and technology-related VAW should be construed as having the same meaning.

2. The nature of the gender digital divide

The ITU's most recent estimate indicates that the global internet user gender gap has grown from 11% in 2013 to 12% in 2016. Today, internet penetration rates remain higher for men than women in all regions in the world, with the estimated gap between men and women being particularly substantial in least developed countries (LDCs) (31%) and in Africa (23%).[2]

Women's ability to gain meaningful internet access is influenced by factors including location, economic power, age, gender, racial or ethnic origin, social and cultural norms, and education, amongst other things.[3] Disparity and discrimination in these areas translate into specific gender-based challenges and barriers to meaningful access. For example, gender literacy gaps – including digital literacy – result in uneven capacity among women to use the internet for their needs. Bridging the gender digital divide requires bridging not just one digital divide, but multiple digital divides. Likewise, it also requires bridging other underlying and more fundamental gender divides, and as such demands an approach that is located within economic, social, political and cultural contexts that recognise existing inequalities.[4]

The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) Best Practice Forum (BPF) on Gender in 2016 examined barriers to women's access to the internet and participation in online life guided by existing research, and on BPF participants' inputs regarding what barriers they perceive to be important.[5] The list of barriers compiled in the survey was as follows:

- Availability (e.g. women have no broadband access, public internet centres are in spaces that women do not usually have access to).
- Affordability (e.g. insufficient income to pay for data, cannot afford a device).
- Culture and norms (e.g. boys prioritised for technology use at home, online gender-based violence, restrictions to movement).
- Capacity and skills (e.g. literacy gap in reading, lacking in skills and confidence to access the internet or explore technology).

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[2]International Telecommunication Union. (2016). *ICT Facts and Figures 2016*. www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/facts/default.aspx The gender gap estimated by the ITU represents the difference between the internet user penetration rates for males and females relative to the internet user penetration rate for males, expressed as a percentage.

[3]Milek, A., Stork, C., & Gillwald, A. (2011). Engendering communication: A perspective on ICT access and usage in Africa. *Info: The Journal of Policy, Regulation and Strategy for Telecommunications, Information and Media, 13*(3), 125-141.

[4]Van der Spuy, A. (2016). *Overcoming Barriers to Enable Women's Meaningful Internet Access*. Output document – IGF Best Practice Forum on Gender. www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/index.php?q=filedepot_download/3406/437

[5]Ibid. The BPF on gender and access was an open, iterative and bottom-up process in which people from diverse regions and stakeholder groups participated by completing a survey, attending regular virtual meetings, submitting input on the mailing list, sharing reports of relevant/linked events and workshops on gender and access, contributing background research, and participating in facilitated discussions at regional and national IGF meetings and other events. The methodology adopted for the survey referenced here is discussed in detail in Part B of the BPF output document.

- Availability of relevant content (e.g. language issues, lack of content that speaks to women's contexts, gender-related content is censored/restricted).
- Women's participation in decision-making roles pertaining to the internet and/or in the technology sector (e.g. when women are not able to pursue careers in science and technology, when their participation in relevant policy-making fora is restricted).
- Availability of relevant policies (e.g. policies with a gender focus and/or that address women's ability to access and benefit from the internet); and/or other barriers.

The *effect of culture and norms* as a barrier preventing women from accessing and benefiting from the internet was most frequently selected by the BPF's survey respondents (71% of participants selected it as a barrier). Other important barriers were *affordability* (67%), *women's ability to participate in decision-making roles* pertaining to the internet and technology sector (65.3%), lack of *capacity and relevant skills* necessary to access and benefit from the internet (60%), and the availability of *relevant policies* (59%). The availability of relevant *infrastructure* was also important (48% of participants selected it as a barrier), as was the availability of *relevant content and applications* (41%). It should be noted that these factors or barriers are not mutually exclusive, and often relate to and impact on one another.

Further, it is notable that while most of the comments received from survey respondents related to the barriers listed above, another barrier frequently raised relates to threats pertaining to *online abuse and gender-based violence*, as well as ("offline") threats pertaining to the use of ICTs.

We highlight the importance of culture and norms as they are often overlooked and are particularly relevant in the context of the question at hand – how to bridge the gender digital divide *from a human rights perspective*. This is because technology sits in a cultural context. Often the barrier is not as simple as affordability, but economic autonomy, or the way in which women view technology and its relevance. For example, in rural areas, where in some cultures women's groups are strong, a barrier is the lack of recognition of the potential for women's groups to finance their own local connectivity. There is also the fear of harassment and for personal safety, ranging from fear of handset theft, calls from strangers,[6] physical safety when visiting an access point and harassment online, to acceptability for men to check women's phones to exercise control over them.

Cultural norms acting as a barrier to access is one of the areas of barriers where further research has been called for. At a recent workshop,[7] for instance, it was noted that evidence is needed for the ways in which access may be restricted in some areas, including phone bans or village moral policing;[8] how the internet may be used to shape and influence, or change, norms; and the measures that should be used to get and keep women online. In addition, the participants noted, a gender analysis of algorithmic curation is also needed to determine the extent to which content curation affects diversity and reflects cultures and norms.

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[6]To give just one example of the prominence of this factor, the second most popular downloaded app in Kenya is for call blocking. Source: BPF on Gender and Access session at the IGF 2016, held in Guadalajara, Mexico. Video available online at: https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/content/igf-2016-day-2-room-9-bpf-gender-and-access

[7]ISOC and APC Workshop on Mainstreaming Gender in Internet Development in the Asia-Pacific Region, Bangkok, Thailand, 2-4 October 2016. See: www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/filedepot_download/3416/148

[8]Kovacs, A. (2017). *'Chupke, Chupke': Going Behind the Mobile Phone Bans in North India*. Internet Democracy Project. https://genderingsurveillance.internetdemocracy.in/phone_ban

3. Human rights implications of the gender digital divide for women and girls

The human rights implications of the gender digital divide are that women are excluded from participating fully in public and social life, and as such are unable to fully exercise their human rights, online and offline. The gender digital divide exacerbates existing inequality and perpetuates discrimination as ICTs become indispensable to others in society. Without meaningful internet access, women are not able to fully realise a range of human rights, whether civil and political rights – such as freedom of expression, to seek and impart information, to assemble and associate with others freely – or economic, social and cultural rights – such as to pursue their education online, seek health-related information, or find work and advance their economic well-being.

It is important to note that even when women are able to access the internet affordably and have the skills to do so, they may not be fully able to use it to exercise their rights because of cultural norms, in particular, deeply rooted societal discrimination against women, and the policies and practices of states and the private sector. This is also part of the gender digital divide, and is critical to address in order to bridge the divide from a human rights perspective.

3.1. Censorship

When addressing the gender digital divide, it is critical to not just consider access for "who", but access to "what", in other words, content that is meaningful and empowering. If a woman does not see the value of using the internet, she will not take it on. The internet has become a critical space for women to access relevant information, which is often unavailable to them offline due to social and cultural norms – for example, information on sexual health and reproductive rights. Yet increasingly, this information is being dubbed obscene and then censored online too. A human rights-based approach to bridging the gender digital divide requires ensuring that women have access to all information online, to make informed and vital choices about their lives and to fully exercise their rights enshrined by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). And at the same time, women also need public access spaces that are gender sensitive and able to provide guidance in accessing online content for them without fear or prejudice.

The private sector is playing an influential role in this regard. A recent report from UNESCO indicated that state policies, laws and regulations – to varying degrees – are inadequately aligned with the state's duty to facilitate and support intermediaries' respect for freedom of expression.[9]

In fact, rather than fulfilling their obligations under the Ruggie Principles,[10] states often make it difficult or impossible for companies to respect human rights online by imposing legal and regulatory frameworks that are incompatible with the right to freedom of expression as defined under international human rights law. As a result, some states are effectively extending the restrictive environments for freedom of expression that exist offline to the online sphere by enlisting or coercing the private sector. In addition, through their own terms of service and community guidelines, the private sector often takes measures that negatively impact freedom of expression online and access to information beyond what is strictly

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[9]UNESCO. (2015). *Fostering Freedom Online: The Role of Internet Intermediaries*.
unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002311/231162e.pdf

[10]UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.
www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR_EN.pdf

required from them under law.[11] In both the cases of state regulation and the private sector's own policies, information that is relevant and vital to women is restricted according to notions of obscenity and morality that are based on deeply entrenched societal views on women and their place in society.

As noted above, culture and norms act as a significant barrier to women's expression online, often causing a chilling effect where women's ability to express themselves online is concerned. In the words of one BPF respondent, referring to the situation in Kenya and the East African region in general, "Women are expected to act, dress, communicate in a certain way which is often determined by society, religion, culture among other things. This has caused a lot of women to censor their expression online to the extent that some prefer not to get online at all."[12]

3.2. Violence against women online

Acts of gender-based violence that are committed, abetted or aggravated, in part or fully, by the use of ICTs such as phones, the internet, social media platforms and email are violations of women's fundamental human rights. They also act as a significant barrier to women's use of the internet. Threats enabled by ICT use and threats pertaining to online abuse and violence were not explicitly listed in the survey as a separate barrier; however, many survey respondents highlighted this as a significant other barrier in the open-ended question pertaining to barriers. It was similarly noted as the third most important barrier to mobile phone ownership and usage and a key concern for women by the GSMA,[13] and highlighted as a "worrying new development" by the Broadband Commission Working Group on Broadband and Gender in 2013.[14]

APC's own research has found that violence against women and girls online – such as cyberstalking, cyberbullying, harassment and misogynist speech – limits their ability to take advantage of the opportunities that ICTs provide for the full realisation of women's human rights, including freedom of expression.[15] Just as violence is used to silence, control and keep women out of public spaces offline, women's and girls' experiences online reflect the same pattern. Women human rights defenders face particular threats online, including cyberstalking, violation of privacy, censorship, and hacking of email accounts, mobile phones and other electronic devices, with a view to discrediting them and/or inciting other violations and abuses against them.

As a consequence, women and girls self-censor, reduce participation or withdraw from platforms and technology they are using all together. In addition, the normalisation of violent behaviour and the culture that tolerates violence against women that social media perpetuates and facilitates at rapid speed, work to reinforce sexist and violent attitudes, and contribute to norms and behaviour that make online spaces hostile towards women. Analysis of cases from APC's Take Back The Tech! mapping project[16] showed that

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[11]Agence France-Presse. (2016, 20 October). Facebook bans 'offensive' Swedish breast cancer awareness video. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/oct/20/facebook-bans-swedish-breast-cancer-awareness-video-for-being-offensive

[12]Sylvia Musalagani (Kenya), quoted in Van der Spuy, A. (2016). Op. cit.

[13]GSMA. (2015). *Bridging the Gender Gap: Mobile access and usage in low- and middle-income countries*. www.gsma.com/connectedwomen/wpcontent/uploads/2015/02/GSM0001_02252015_GSMAReport_FINAL-WEB-spreads.pdf

[14]Broadband Commission Working Group on Broadband and Gender. (2013). *Doubling Digital Opportunities: Enhancing the Inclusion of Women & Girls in the Information Society*. www.broadbandcommission.org/documents/working-groups/bb-doubling-digital-2013.pdf

[15]genderit.org/onlinevaw

[16]https://www.takebackthetech.net/mapit

the harms resulting from technology-related VAW include emotional or psychological harm, harm to reputation, physical harm, sexual harm, invasion of privacy, loss of identity, limitation of mobility, censorship, and loss of property.

APC's in-depth research in seven countries[17] found that national laws are not efficient and they fail to recognise the continuum of violence that women experience offline and online. In addition, police are less likely to record cases of poor and marginalised women facing technology-related VAW. As a result, a culture of impunity prevailed in the countries studied. The research found that access to the internet itself enables survivors of technology-related violence to claim their rights, without relying on the state. It is important to note that the ability to use the internet anonymously, which is often seen as a barrier in addressing online VAW in terms of identifying the perpetrator, is seen as an important tool for survivors who wish to reenter online spaces with the possibility of avoiding a recurrence of violence.

Due to increased visibility of the issue, legislation has been emerging in a number of jurisdictions to address online VAW. Some trends that APC identified from analysing four such pieces of legislation include the need to provide practical avenues of redress, such as protection orders, that were not previously cognisable within the criminal or civil law frameworks. Importantly, all of the legislation reviewed recognised that harm caused by harassment online includes emotional distress, even if there is no actual physical harm. The emerging legislation studied also reflects the increasing need for internet and communications intermediaries to play a role in preventing and rectifying online violence, harassment and bullying.[18]

Most legislation examined in the research did not impose criminal liability, which is undesirable from a freedom of expression perspective, but instead placed a burden on service providers to respond to requests for information about the identity of the harasser, to cease providing service upon the order of a court, and even to remove offensive content when service providers become aware of its presence on their sites.

A number of freedom of expression concerns have emerged in the legislation studied. In Nova Scotia, these concerns related to the broad powers of a court to prevent internet access or confiscate technologies; in California, initial opposition to the amendment resulted in a considerable narrowing of the offence to apply only where there was an agreement between parties that the image was to remain private. The free expression implications are perhaps the most significant in the case of New Zealand – the proposed legislation seeks to "civilise" online communications by preventing, for example, grossly offensive, indecent or obscene digital expression. In doing so, the legislation seeks to apply different standards to online communication and expression than to offline communication and expression. On one hand, the legislation recognises the unique nature of digital communications – the speed with which they are promulgated and proliferate, the inability to permanently erase them, and the insulating nature of anonymous communications that can promote offensive or violent behaviour. The fact that the potential for harm can be attributed differently to digital technologies than offline speech is seen as a basis for treating electronic communications differently. On the other hand, however, the legislation also applies a

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[17]The research consisted of mapping domestic legal remedies through literature review and conducting in-depth interviews to gather women's and girls' experiences of accessing justice and compiling case studies in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Mexico, Pakistan and the Philippines. See: www.genderit.org/sites/default/upload/flow_domestic_legal_remedies.pdf

[18]Nyst, C. (2014). *Technology-related violence against women: Recent legislative trends.* Association for Progressive Communications*.* www.genderit.org/sites/default/upload/flowresearch_cnyst_legtrend_ln.pdf

number of subjective and general standards to all digital communications, which, depending on a court's interpretation, could be applied in ways that limit free expression and could undermine the free flow of information.

Aside from the risk of overly broad limitations on freedom of expression, some authorities respond to online VAW by seeking to limit women's access to the internet. Recent research from the Internet Democracy Project in India examines the practice of some local councils (or Punjarat) that have banned mobile phone usage by young and/or unmarried women on the basis that women and girls need to be protected from online abuse.[19] The fact that there is a generalised perception of threat pertaining to the internet therefore tends to be used as an excuse for preventing women and girls from accessing the internet in the country.

A dimension of VAW that is particularly relevant in relation to efforts to bridge the gender digital divide, although it does not take place through ICTs, relates to the challenges faced by women in rural areas. They may find the internet especially difficult to access, particularly in areas where access is only available outside the home or in unsafe locations, and/or where social or cultural norms and safety concerns may restrict women's freedom of movement.

Some positive common elements that emerged from APC's research on legislation include: the use of a consultative process in designing the legislation; utilising/amending existing legal frameworks vs. creating new laws; focus on redress over criminalisation, which seems to be the most effective, efficient and meaningful way of aiding victims of violence online and ensuring that justice is achieved; the use of protection orders to address online VAW, which provide a practical means of halting violence without requiring victims to become embroiled in lengthy and demanding criminal processes; and creating a dedicated agency to receive and investigate complaints.

4. Possible solutions for bridging the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective

Approaches to ending the gender digital divide must go hand in hand with efforts to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women, and to address the economic, cultural, political and social barriers that women face in society.

4.1. APC's policy advocacy work to end the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective

APC believes that to meet women's needs, especially those of women in the South, women's rights organisations must engage in spaces where decisions about access and infrastructure are made, and influence decisions that address economics as well as the cultural and social norms that are barriers to access for women and girls. Through better access to information, debates, discussions and networks of peers that ICTs provide, women can be better equipped to challenge patriarchy and work towards a more just and equal society.[20] Through our engagement in these spaces, we aim to advance the following policy positions, which relate to bridging the gender divide from a human rights perspective.

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[19]Kovacs, A. (2017). Op. cit.

[20]APC. (2015). *How technology issues impact women's rights: 10 points on Section J*.
www.genderit.org/sites/default/upload/sectionj_10points_apc.pdf

APC actively engages in public advocacy to promote gender-responsive policies on digital technologies, including the global IGF, where we serve on the Multistakeholder Advisory Group, co-convene the BPF on gender and access,[21] and participate actively in the Dynamic Coalitions on gender, on public access in libraries, and on community connectivity,[22] as well as the intersessional initiative on connecting the next billion.[23] APC also participates actively in and/or helps organise regional IGFs, in particular the African IGF, the Asia Pacific regional IGF, and the Latin American and Caribbean IGF.[24] APC and its members also participate in national IGFs. Other relevant policy spaces and initiatives in which APC is active include: the Broadband Commission Working Group on the Digital Gender Divide,[25] the UN Action Plan to Close the Digital Gender Gap,[26] UNESCO's Global Alliance on Media and Gender, the World Summit on the Information Society Forum, the ITU, and the Commission on the Status of Women.

Below are some key recommendations that guide our policy advocacy work in this areas:

Recommendations to states on expanding affordable access[27]

- Representative and gender-disaggregated data should be gathered in a consistent and rigorous manner to reach a better understanding of the factors shaping women's access to and ability to benefit from meaningful internet access in diverse contexts.

- National broadband plans or other policies should be designed to specifically overcome gender inequalities in access.

- Investment in public access facilities should be increased, in particular public access strategies that emphasise women's needs,[28] and awareness of the value of these facilities should be raised among disenfranchised groups.

- More effective radio spectrum management is needed, including allowing innovative uses of spectrum and new dynamic spectrum-sharing techniques such as TV white space (TVWS).

- Women's participation in community and municipally owned small-scale local communications infrastructure should be encouraged and supported, and licence categories should be made available for this type of service.

- Public funds, dig-once policies and utility infrastructure should be utilised to ensure that national fibre networks are extended into remote and sparsely populated areas.

Recommendations to states on internet governance and regulation

- Increase women's participation in decision-making processes at national and international levels on internet governance, infrastructure planning and regulation, and technology development.

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[21]www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/content/best-practice-forums-4

[22]www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/content/dynamic-coalitions-4

[23]intgovforum.org/cms/policy-options-for-connection-the-next-billion

[24]www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/content/regional-igf-initiatives

[25]broadbandcommission.org/workinggroups/Pages/digital-gender-divide.aspx

[26]https://www.itu.int/en/action/gender-equality/Documents/ActionPlan.pdf

[27]APC. (2016). *Ending digital exclusion: Why the access divide persists and how to close it*. Association for Progressive Communications. https://www.apc.org/en/system/files/APC_EndingDigitalExclusion.pdf

[28]The importance of ensuring that public access facilities (e.g. libraries or other centres enabling women to access the internet in rural areas or when they cannot afford their own data and/or devices) is becoming increasingly well recognised. The need to ensure that such facilities have sufficient numbers of women staff has also been stressed, along with the need to use such facilities to also overcome other barriers, such as expanding digital literacy skills.

- Respect and protect women's freedom of expression online, including by refraining from censoring online expression and content relating to women's sexual and reproductive health.
- Adopt measures and legislation that protect women's right to freedom from violence and offer means of swift redress for survivors, without infringing on freedom of expression and the right to information.
- Allocate adequate budgets to address online VAW, including by providing training for law enforcement, legal staff, victim advocates and educators.
- Build awareness of the implications of technology-related VAW among users, internet service providers and social networking platforms.

Recommendations to the private sector on preventing violence against women online

The private sector has the responsibility to respect human rights, including preventing online VAW that might take place on their platforms and protecting women's freedom of expression. Under the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights,[29] the private sector is required to conduct due diligence to prevent human rights violations and to provide access to remedy.

APC sees a need to move beyond the discussion of liability and towards one of responsibility. Liability denotes a restrictive approach that endangers the free and open nature of the internet and implies a risk-based consideration; responsibility infers a role defined by empowerment, positive action, and leadership. Therefore, we recommend promoting the important role of intermediaries in fostering positive attitudes and accountability online in a way that does not lead to state manipulation or co-option.[30]

Some steps the private sector should take to fulfill their responsibility to respect the right of women to freedom of expression online in the context of online harassment:[31]

- Inclusion of gender-based violence, including hate speech, in community guidelines and a commitment to women's freedom of expression from social media platforms.
- Establish reporting systems that are trustworthy, accountable to those who use them, accessible, predictable, equitable, transparent and rights-compatible.
- Report on the occurrence of, and response to, reports of violence against women in transparency reports.
- Track how effective responses to issues of violence against women are, either by tracking indicators or seeking feedback from affected stakeholders.
- Meaningfully engage in consultation with women, either by soliciting the input of users or by engaging women's rights groups and activists, to understand the potential adverse impacts of the company's services on women's rights.

4.2. Our work on women's rights and internet access

APC engages in a range of activities – research, monitoring, policy advocacy, campaigning and capacity building – aimed at:

- Extending affordable and reliable internet access to all people.

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[29]www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR_EN.pdf

[30]Nyst, C. (2013, 26 November). Towards internet intermediary responsibility. *GenderIT.org*. www.genderit.org/feminist-talk/towards-internet-intermediary-responsibility

[31]www.genderit.org/onlinevaw/corporations

- Creating safe digital spaces that protect everyone's right to participate in online spaces freely, without harassment or threat to safety.
- Realising women's rights to shape, define, participate in, use and share knowledge, information and ICTs.
- Addressing the intersection between women's human rights and the internet, especially VAW.
- Recognising women's historical and critical participation in and contribution to the development of ICTs.

The Feminist Principles of the Internet

APC, together with 50 activists and advocates working in sexual rights, women's rights, VAW, and internet rights, developed the Feminist Principles of the Internet (FPIs)[32] to provide a framework for a feminist internet that works towards empowering more women and queer persons – in all our diversities – to fully enjoy our rights, engage in pleasure and play, and dismantle patriarchy. This integrates our different realities, contexts and specificities – including age, disabilities, sexualities, gender identities and expressions, socioeconomic locations, political and religious beliefs, ethnic origins, and racial markers. While all of the principles contained in the FPIs are relevant guidance for policies to develop an enabling environment for women's rights online, the following principles are most critical for the subject at hand – bridging the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective:

- Access: A feminist internet starts with enabling more women and queer persons to enjoy universal, acceptable, affordable, unconditional, open, meaningful and equal access to the internet.
- Information: We support and protect unrestricted access to information relevant to women and queer persons, particularly information on sexual and reproductive health and rights, pleasure, safe abortion, access to justice, and LGBTIQ issues. This includes diversity in languages, abilities, interests and contexts.
- Usage: Women and queer persons have the right to code, design, adapt and critically and sustainably use ICTs and reclaim technology as a platform for creativity and expression, as well as to challenge the cultures of sexism and discrimination in all spaces.
- Governance: We believe in challenging the patriarchal spaces and processes that control internet governance, as well as putting more feminists and queers at the decision-making tables. We want to democratise policy making affecting the internet as well as diffuse ownership of and power in global and local networks.
- Violence: We call on all internet stakeholders, including internet users, policy makers and the private sector, to address the issue of online harassment and technology-related violence. The attacks, threats, intimidation and policing experienced by women and queers are real, harmful and alarming, and are part of the broader issue of gender-based violence. It is our collective responsibility to address and end this.

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[32]feministinternet.net/en The principles were drafted at the first "Imagine a Feminist Internet" meeting that took place in Malaysia in April 2014, convened by APC. It was designed as an adapted open space, where topics were identified, prioritised and discussed collectively.

Gender and Internet Governance Exchange

In 2015, APC began convening Gender and Internet Governance Exchanges (gigXs)[33] in Asia, Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) with women's rights, internet rights and sexual rights activists to discuss and build awareness and understanding of the relationship between gender, women's rights and internet governance. GigXs build the skills and confidence of women's rights and sexual rights activists and organisations in Asia, Africa and LAC to advocate strategically for laws, policies and regulations of the internet that improve women's lives and that contribute to women's social, economic and cultural empowerment. Building the capacity of these advocates aims at ultimately challenging the patriarchal outlook and development of technology and highlighting the importance of mainstreaming gender concerns in the governance of the internet to the technological community, decision makers, and internet and communication rights advocates.

Feminist Tech Exchange

APC has held Feminist Tech Exchanges (FTXs)[34] since 2008. FTXs aim to bring together unusual suspects to ask different kinds of questions, and share experiences, expertise and knowledge in creative encounters to deepen understanding of and develop solutions to issues of violence, discrimination and censorship that threaten the safety, integrity and potential of the internet as a transformative space. FTXs feature hands-on workshops and the exchange of ideas and resources around issues of human rights, feminism and the internet.

Take Back the Tech!

Take Back the Tech! (TBTT)[35] is a collaborative campaign to reclaim ICTs to end violence against women. The campaign calls on all ICT users – especially women and girls – to take control of technology and strategically use any ICT platform at hand (mobile phones, instant messengers, blogs, websites, digital cameras, email, podcasts and more) for activism against gender-based violence. Take Back the Tech! plans several campaigns throughout the year, with the biggest being the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence (25 November – 10 December each year). Creative, strategic actions explore different aspects of VAW and ICT.[36]

Take Back the Tech! was initiated by APC's Women's Rights Programme. Since the campaign began in 2006, it has been taken up, adapted and owned by individuals, groups, networks and organisations in countries such as Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Cambodia, Canada, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Germany, India, Kenya, Macedonia, Malaysia, Mexico, Pakistan, the Philippines, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda, the United Kingdom, the United States and Uruguay. The Take Back the Tech! map[37] has been used to document hundreds of cases.

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[33]gigx.events.apc.org

[34]https://www.apc.org/en/node/8041

[35]https://www.takebackthetech.net Take Back the Tech! has received such honours as the 2016 Womanity Award for the Prevention of Violence Against Women, the inaugural GEM-TECH award from UN Women and the International Telecommunication Union for Efforts to Reduce Threats Online and Building Women's Confidence and Security in the Use of ICTs, the 2015 Bobs People's Choice Award for Best Online Activism in English and a Prix Ars Electronic Honorary Mention for Digital Communities.

[36]Take Back the Tech! runs smaller campaigns at various points in the year. Previous campaigns include The Day We Fight Back (against state surveillance), Love in the Time of the Internet, Imagine a Feminist Internet and What Are You Doing About VAW, which targeted the private sector.

[37]https://www.takebackthetech.net/mapit

Looking ahead

Looking ahead, APC is undertaking a global mapping of actors and initiatives working on gender and ICTs to identify key issues and gaps, which includes a focus on access. APC's Global Information Society Watch[38] 2017 edition will be on community access networks, which will include a gender perspective. This edition is expected to contain 60 country reports and five thematic reports on various aspects of access and development and will be launched during IGF 2017.

APC is developing a community connectivity access project, with research and advocacy components, which will include a gender perspective to understand barriers, opportunities and best practices to foster the growth of new models for the provision of local access which address affordability and coverage barriers.

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[38]giswatch.org