File No.: 16/1163#18

January 2017

**Subject: Australian Response to OHCHR Questionnaire pursuant to HRC Resolution 32/13**

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade hereby presents the Australian Government’s response to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights’ (OHCHR) Questionnaire pursuant to Human Rights Council (HRC) Resolution 32/13, regarding ways to bridge the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective.

***Question 1 – Please identify the obstacles and barriers to access the Internet faced by women in your country. Please elaborate on the nature of these obstacles (e.g. social, cultural norms, literacy gap) and how they manifest themselves in practice.***

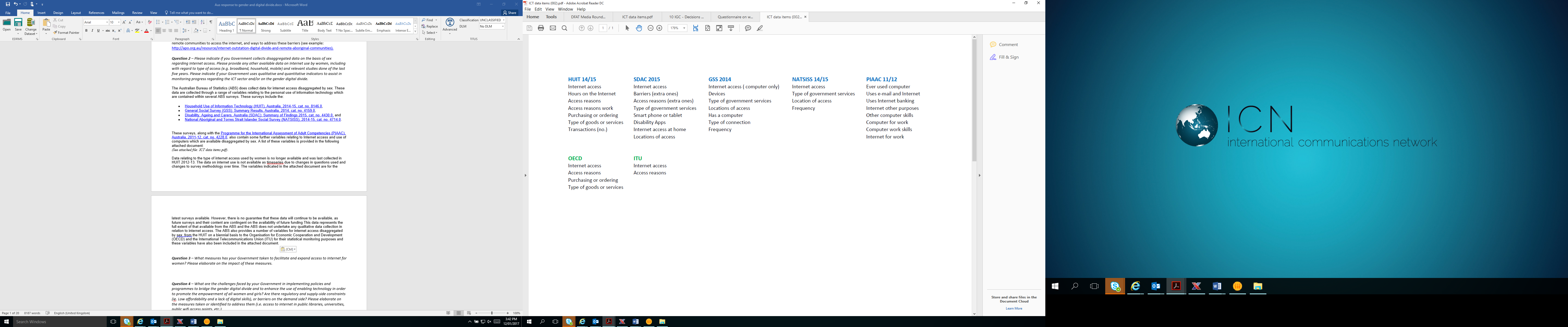
There are no specific gender based boundaries to accessing the internet in Australia. Women do face problems accessing the internet in remote locations, particularly in remote Indigenous communities, though this lack of access affects their male counterparts also. The Department of Communications and the Arts is working to address remote access and affordability through the Mobile Blackspot Programme. There is also current research underway in Australia to understand barriers for remote communities to access the internet, and ways to address these barriers.[[1]](#footnote-1)

***Question 2 – Please indicate if you Government collects disaggregated data on the basis of sex regarding Internet access. Please provide any other available data on Internet use by women, including with regard to type of access (e.g. broadband, household, mobile) and relevant studies done of the last five years. Please indicate if your Government uses qualitative and quantitative indicators to assist in monitoring progress regarding the ICT sector and/or on the gender digital divide.***

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) does collect data for internet access disaggregated by sex. These data are collected through a range of variables relating to the personal use of information technology which are contained within several ABS surveys. These surveys include the:

* Household Use of Information Technology (HUIT), Australia, 2014-15, cat. no. 8146.0;[[2]](#footnote-2)
* General Social Survey (GSS): Summary Results, Australia, 2014, cat. no. 4159.0;[[3]](#footnote-3)
* Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia (SDAC): Summary of Findings 2015, cat. no. 4430.0;[[4]](#footnote-4) and
* National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS), 2014-15, cat. no. 4714.0.[[5]](#footnote-5)

These surveys, along with the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), Australia, 2011-12, cat. no. 4228.0,[[6]](#footnote-6) also contain some further variables relating to Internet access and use of computers which are available disaggregated by sex. See box for list of variables:

  
  
Data relating to the type of internet access used by women is no longer available and was last collected in HUIT 2012-13. The data on internet use is not available as timeseries due to changes in questions used and changes to survey methodology over time. The variables indicated in the attached document are for the latest surveys available. However, there is no guarantee that these data will continue to be available, as future surveys and their content are contingent on the availability of future funding This data represents the full extent of that available from the ABS and the ABS does not undertake any qualitative data collection in relation to internet access. The ABS also provides a number of variables for internet access disaggregated by sex from the HUIT on a biennial basis to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) for their statistical monitoring purposes and these variables have also been included in the attached document.

***Question 3 – What measures has your Government taken to facilitate and expand access to Internet for women? Please elaborate on the impact of these measures.***

In the field of education, higher education providers must ensure the following as required by the Higher Education Standards Framework (a legislative instrument under the *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011*):

* Learning resources, such as library collections and services, creative works, notes, laboratory facilities, studio sessions, simulations and software, that are specified or recommended for a course of study, relate directly to the learning outcomes, are up to date and, where supplied as part of a course of study, are accessible when needed by students;
* Where learning resources are part of an electronic learning management system, all users have timely access to the system and training is available in use of the system;
* Access to learning resources does not present unexpected barriers, costs or technology requirements for students, including for students with special needs and those who study off campus; and
* Students have access to learning support services that are consistent with the requirements of their course of study, their most of study and the learning needs of student cohorts, including arrangements for supporting and maintaining contact with students who are off campus.

While not targeted at a particular gender, these measures do facilitate access to the internet for women.

The same is true in term of access to the internet for Indigenous women. The government has implemented a range of measures to improve access to the interest which, while not specifically for women, do facilitate and expand access to the internet for women.

In 2009 Australian governments signed the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Public Internet Access which aimed to increase public internet access facilities and training in basic computing and internet use in remote communities.

This has been followed by funding programmes through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy that specifically support telecommunications and digital access in remote regions. The following programmes improve availability, affordability and access for women, youth and men:

* $8.1 million over three years to 2017-18 is supporting and maintaining 245 Community Payphone and 301 WiFi Telephone services in remote Indigenous communities.
  + WiFi fixed satellite telephones are located in communities with a population of less than 50 which do not have reasonable access to a public telephone. WiFi telephones provide free calls to emergency services (000), Australian fixed line phones, and 1800 numbers. All other calls require a prepaid card. With these phones the Government provides up to 20 gigabytes of free data per month per phone, and includes a content filter designed to prevent access to inappropriate and illegal material.
* $6.7 million over three years from 2015-16 for the Remote Indigenous Internet Training activity (RIITa). The activity will provide internet access, training and/or essential internet infrastructure in remote Indigenous communities to address barriers to access.
* Further, additional IAS funding is currently supporting: Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council (Aboriginal Corporation) for computer systems and internet access; and the Nintirri Centre Incorporated to teach basic digital literacy skills in the remote communities of Wakathuni and Bellary in the Pilbara region of WA.

***Question 4 – What are the challenges faced by your Government in implementing policies and programmes to bridge the gender digital divide and to enhance the use of enabling technology in order to promote the empowerment of all women and girls? Are there regulatory and supply-side constraints (ie. Low affordability and a lack of digital skills), or barriers on the demand side? Please elaborate on the measures taken or identified to address them (i.e. access to internet in public libraries, universities, public wifi access points, etc.)***

The challenges are geographical and distance based rather than gender based, but of course, women and girls in remote areas will face challenges.

***Question 5 – Please indicate if a national Internet policy exists in your country and if this policy includes reference to human rights and gender considerations.***

Nil response.

***Question 6 – Please indicate if your Government has developed specific initiatives to eliminate gender disparities in digital literacy by 2030, taking into account goals 4 and 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as other relevant SDGs.***

The Australian Government Department of Education and Training has developed specific projects and initiatives to eliminate gender disparities in digital literacy by 2030, taking into account Goals 4 and 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In particular, through the National Innovation and Science Agenda,[[7]](#footnote-7) the Department is involved in implementing several initiatives related to eliminating gender disparities in digital literacy.

Bridging SDG 4 Target 5 (to eliminate gender disparities in education) and SDG 5 (achieving gender equality), the National Innovation and Science Agenda allows Australia to effectively embrace new ideas in innovation and science, and harness new sources of growth to deliver the next age of economic prosperity in Australia. The Agenda comprises a range of initiatives worth $1.1 billion over four years to tackle the digital divide and increase the participation of all students and the wider community in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and improve their digital literacy. A key element of this Agenda is bridging the gender digital divide and enhancing the use of technology to promote the empowerment of all women and girls. Relevant projects and initiatives include:

*Inspiring all Australians in Digital Literacy and STEM*[[8]](#footnote-8)

Under the ‘Inspiring all Australians in Digital Literacy and STEM’ measure of the National Innovation and Science Agenda, the education portfolio is responsible for administering over $64 million in initiatives to improve the teaching and learning of STEM in our childcare centres and schools. A focus of these initiatives is increasing the engagement of underrepresented groups including girls.

*Innovation and Competitiveness Agenda (IICA)*[[9]](#footnote-9)

Prior to the National Innovation and Science Agenda, $12 million was previously allocated to restore the focus on, and increase student uptake of, STEM subjects in primary and secondary schools, as part of the Industry, Innovation and Competitiveness Agenda (IICA). These initiatives start in the early years and continue through primary and secondary levels.

*Scientists and Mathematicians in Schools (SMiS)*[[10]](#footnote-10)

Aiming to inspire increasing numbers of girls in STEM careers, SMiS provides skilled volunteers with the opportunity to have a positive impact and make a difference to science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) education in primary and secondary Australian schools. This program involves STEM professionals and teachers – including scientists, mathematicians and IT professionals – mentoring and partnering with teachers and classes to bring real-world, contemporary experiences into the classroom, while also promoting understanding of the importance of STEM.

*ICT Summer Schools*

The ICT Summer Schools initiative is funded by the Commonwealth of Australia through the Department of Education and Training. It is part of the National Innovation and Science Agenda’s ‘Inspiring all Australians in digital literacy and STEM’ measure, which aims to increase the participation of all students and the community in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and to improve their digital literacy. The measure has a specific focus on tackling the digital divide to ensure that those students most at risk of falling behind in the digital age are given opportunities to participate and engage at all levels of education. ICT Summer Schools are open to year 9 and 10 students and are targeted at groups typically underrepresented in STEM studies, including young women. This is a six-month program that combines two residential camps and a mentoring program. Mentors are recruited from a variety of ICT backgrounds and together the mentor and student will construct personal goals for the student. This might include discussing study options and career pathways, undertaking further extension work with support from their mentor, developing ideas based on learnings from the camp or working on a project.

*Curious Minds*[[11]](#footnote-11)

This is a hands-on extension and mentoring program for highly capable girls in years 8 and 9 who have an interest in STEM learning areas. Aiming to ignite girls’ passion for STEM, this is a six-month program that combines two residential camps and a mentoring program.

The camps enable the girls to explore all aspects of science, technology, engineering and mathematics through guest lectures, interactive sessions, practicals and field trips. The mentoring program matches each student with a female mentor recruited from a variety of STEM backgrounds and together they construct personal goals for the student. This might include discussing study options and career pathways, undertaking further extension work with support from their mentor, developing ideas based on learnings from the camp or working on a project.

In addition to the NISA projects and initiatives, the Australian Government established the Australian Industry and Skills Committee (AISC) in 2015. AISC was established to provide industry leadership for the Australian Vocational Education and Training system, ensuring it delivers the skills needed for industries to capitalise on opportunities, and respond to challenges, presented by rapidly changing information and communication technologies. The AISC’s work ensures that training packages and supporting infrastructure are gender-inclusive, widely accessible and future-oriented. The AISC plays an important role in developing an inclusive workforce which is suitably skilled and resourced to meet increasing digital demand.

***Question 7 – Does your Government have any specific laws or policies to address gender-based violence online? What are the challenges faces by your Government to ensure accountability of perpetrators of human rights violations committed against persons for exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms on the internet?***

The Australian government recognises that image based abuse (known colloquially as ‘revenge porn’) is a serious and growing problem in Australia, facilitated in part by technological advances and increasing use of social media. ‘Revenge porn’ involves sharing private sexual images and recordings of a person without their consent. Images are most often shared online, though there are other avenues through which they can be shared. It can have a significant impact on a victim, psychologically and physically, as well as being damaging to their reputation and standing.

Women are more likely than men to be victims of image based abuse. It comprises one part of a broader phenomenon of technology-facilitated abuse and can be a form of violence against women, domestic and family violence or sexual abuse.

The Australian Government is pursuing a comprehensive suite of measures to combat image based abuse, including:

* The Third Action Plan of *the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022* (the National Plan), which recognises the need to respond to the sharing of intimate images without consent. Funding has been allocated under the Third Action Plan to the Office of the Children’s eSafety Commissioner to receive and act upon complaints of image based abuse;
* A mechanism to quickly remove intimate images posted online without consent;
* The expansion and renaming of the Office of the Children’s eSafety Commissioner to take on responsibility for online safety issues affecting adults, including the non‑consensual sharing of intimate images; and
* The development of an online reporting tool by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner which to allow victims to report incidents and access support. The reporting tool is expected to be launched in 2017. This portal will allow victims to access tangible advice, information and preventative education that can empower victims to make informed choices as well as offering a mechanism of control to manage an escalating incident.

The Office of the eSafety Commissioner manages the existing eSafetyWomen website, which was launched in April 2016 and is funded through the Australian Government’s Women's Safety Package. The website offers practical advice, videos and support to help women manage technology risks and engage confidently online and forms part of the Government’s Women’s Safety Package to Stop the Violence.[[12]](#footnote-12)

In early 2017, the Australian Government will conduct public consultation on a proposed civil penalties regime targeted at both perpetrators and sites that host intimate images shared without consent. Civil penalties can provide victims with recourse to the removal of the intimate images. The proposed civil penalties regime may build on the work of the reporting tool, pending the outcome of the public consultation process

The Australian Government is working with Australian state and territory governments to develop principles for nationally consistent criminal offences relating to the non-consensual sharing of intimate images. The principles will send a strong message to potential offenders that this behaviour will not be tolerated in any Australian jurisdiction and that legal consequences will follow.

There are criminal offences intended to target online violence more broadly within Part 10.6 of the *Criminal Code 1995 (Cth)*, although they are not specifically based on gender. The Australian Government is also undertaking significant policy work and initiatives to combat technology facilitated abuse against women, such as public awareness and education initiatives, enhanced reporting mechanisms, and a review of legal recourse to victims. For example, a current priority for Australian Governments is the development of principles for nationally consistent criminalisation of the non-consensual sharing of intimate images.

Other Australian Government initiatives that address gender-based violence online include the Office of the eSafety Commissioner’s work to protect Australian children from cyberbullying harm. The Office provides a range of up-to-date information and resources, couples with a comprehensive complaints scheme to assist children and young people who experience serious cyberbullying. Key information on the website includes:

* CyberReport, an online avenue to report and remove illegal content;
* Complaints system that encompasses key organisations for children to talk to and provide advice and strategies for dealing with these issues;
* iParent – provides strategies for parents for keeping young people safe online; and
* a range of classroom resources, school policies including how to implement them and general esafety information.

The Department of Education and Training also has a Parent Engagement website and Learning Potential app.[[13]](#footnote-13) It has tips for parents of children of all ages facing online bullying and bullying more generally.

1. See example: <http://apo.org.au/resource/internet-outstation-digital-divide-and-remote-aboriginal-communities> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/8146.0> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4159.0> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4430.0> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mf/4714.0> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4228.0Main+Features12011-12?OpenDocument> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See <http://www.education.gov.au/inspiring-all-australians-digital-literacy-and-stem> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See <https://www.education.gov.au/inspiring-all-australians-digital-literacy-and-stem> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See <https://industry.gov.au/industry/Pages/Industry-Innovation-and-Competitiveness-Agenda.aspx#header> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See <http://www.scientistsinschools.edu.au/> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See <https://www.asi.edu.au/programs/curious-minds/what-is-curious-minds/> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See <http://www.esafety.gov.au> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See <https://www.learningpotential.gov.au/online-bullying-what-you-can-do-to-help> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)