

ITU's inputs to the report on the gender digital divide and ways to bridge it

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A) The problem

According to recent statistics, globally, Internet user penetration rate is 12 per cent lower for females than for males. The gap between the two rates is lowest in developed countries (at 2.8 per cent in 2016), significantly higher in developing countries (16.8 per cent), and highest in LDCs (30.9 per cent in 2016). The data suggest that the gap has narrowed in developed countries between 2013 and 2016, while it has widened in developing countries and LDCs.¹

In terms of mobile access, ITU data shows that 95% of the world is now covered by a mobile network. Yet, according to GSMA, 1.7 billion women in low- and middle-income countries do not own a mobile phone. These are just the numbers in terms of access and devices. When we talk about skills, careers and women in leadership roles, the numbers speak volumes.

For example, globally women make up only 6% of app developers. In STEM studies only 18% are graduating with computer science degrees.

The Gender Digital Divide presents real challenges for the tech industry and for development practitioners, but also huge potential for new growth markets.

The business case is clear - companies and governments both have a critical stake to ensure that women have access to Internet and to digital opportunities. Given that 95% of all new jobs will have a digital component, there is a need to ensure that women have the skills to benefit from the digital economy. In fact, future GDP growth depends on having full participation of the workforce, including women.

In line with ITU's Connect 2020 Agenda:

- **ITU commits to advocating for the need of ensuring gender equality online (both at the internal and external level) through awareness campaigns, workshops and mentoring events.**
- **ITU is committed to continue working closely with its partners, Member States and Sector Members to increase the number of ICT capacity building and mentoring programmes and initiatives for women and girls by 2020.**

B) ITU's efforts:

1. Resolution 70 provides a framework for ITU's policies and programmes to mainstream a gender perspective in ITU, and to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women through ICTs. ITU Council 2013 adopted the ITU Gender Equality and Mainstreaming Policy, which has fostered an institutional awareness of the importance of including a gender perspective in ITU's work and served as a basis for key actions in 2015. Under the coordination of the Gender Task Force, key initiatives have been undertaken.

¹ [ICT Facts and Figures 2016](#)

2. ITU participates systematically in inter-agency coordination mechanisms on gender equality and the empowerment of women and participates in SWAP related processes and events.
3. ITU is a member of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) and participates in its various meetings by always pushing forward the use of ICTs as a catalyst for gender equality and the empowerment of women, and harnessing ICTs' access to women and girls to bridge the gender gap.
4. ITU regularly attends UN Women Expert Group Meeting (EGM). ITU has contributed to the objectives of the Group to integrate gender equality and the empowerment of women into any international development frameworks, either in the post-2015 or in addressing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
5. In addition, the ITU Secretary-General is a founding members of the Geneva Gender Champions initiative launched by the Director-General of the UN Office in Geneva, Michael Møller, and US Ambassador Pamela Hamamoto. By becoming a Champion, the Secretary-General committed to the Panel Parity Pledge to ensure gender balance on panels in UN meetings, and also committed to: (a) Adopting positive measures to improve gender balance among ITU staff, and (b) Encouraging gender balance among delegates attending ITU conferences and meetings.
6. In terms of gender distribution in ITU staff, conferences and meetings, the secretariat has tracked and published the number of women delegates attending ITU conference, and ITU HRM Department has monitored the gender balance in staff recruitment and composition. Regarding the activities and programmes of the Union, bridging the gender digital gap is one of the main priorities.
7. ITU continues to promote ICT careers to young girls in order to attract more women into multi-disciplinary ICT careers. The International Girls in ICT Day campaign coordinated by ITU's Development Sector (BDT) and the number of celebrations of International Girls in ICTs 2016 have been growing. Since launching the campaign in 2011, the day has seen more than 7,200 events in 160 countries reaching over 240,000 girls.
8. ITU [research](#) has shown that coding bootcamps have shown promise as a way to prepare young women and men for careers as junior developers. Coding bootcamps also graduate higher percentages of women students than many university programmes. ITU BDT has developed training courses for stakeholders interested in launching their own coding bootcamps.
9. In September 2016, ITU and UN Women launched the [EQUALS](#) initiative aiming to bridge the gender digital divide. The global framework of action focuses on 3 complimentary and cross-cutting areas of action:
 - Access – Ensure that women and girls have access to digital devices and services.
 - Skills – Encourage girls to take up studies in STEM fields. Equip women and girls with the necessary digital skills to prepare them for the job market in today's growing digital economy.
 - Leadership – Promote leadership opportunities for women by encouraging companies to take active role to employ women and promote women's entrepreneurship.
10. Since data gaps represent a significant obstacle to designing effective solutions to close the gender digital divide, EQUALS takes an evidence based approach. The United Nations University Macau will lead the Research Group by coordinating a group of universities and

research institutions such as the members of the Berkman Klein Center of Harvard University.

11. ITU is committed to continue its work with world leaders: industry, international organizations and other entities under the framework of the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development. The Working Group on Digital Gender Divide launched within the Commission and led by Commissioners: Mr Mats Granryd, Director General of GSMA, and Director-General of UNESCO, Ms Irina Bokova, focused on a set of recommendations which can be adopted to help reduce the digital gender gap in internet and broadband access and use.
12. During the 2016 World Radiocommunication Seminar ([WRS-16](#)), the ITU 'Network of Women (NOW) for World Radiocommunication Conferences (WRCs)' initiative was [launched](#) with the aim of empowering women in radiocommunication negotiations. The NOW initiative will encourage gender balance in decision-making bodies, panels, statutory committees and radiocommunication study groups at ITU Radiocommunication Sector events from today until the next World Radiocommunication Conference [2019 \(WRC-19\)](#). The aim of the NOW initiative is to start building capacity early on in the WRC-19 process to encourage a larger participation of women in key roles, to attend, for example, as delegates, chairs, and vice-chairs. [WRCs](#) are major ITU events held every three to four years to review, and, if necessary, revise the [Radio Regulations](#), the international treaty governing the use of the radio-frequency spectrum and the satellite orbits. WRC-19 will take place from 28 October to 22 November 2019 where over 3000+ participants from around the world are expected to attend.
13. The Network of Women (NOW) initiative builds on the success of the 'We Lead' mentoring programme launched by US Federal Communications Commission (FCC) at the World Radiocommunication Conference [2015 \(WRC-15\)](#) and benefits from the experience of 15 years of growing synergy between the communities of women delegates in the radiocommunication sector from the 'Annual Women's Breakfast', to the '[Women's Leadership Workshop](#)' at WRC-15.
ITU – launched the Women in Standardization Expert Group (WISE) at the Telecommunication Standardization Advisory Group (TSAG) conference in February 2016. WISE is dedicated to promoting women in standardization, telecommunication/ICTs and related fields and to recognizing men and women who have made and continue to make remarkable contribution in promoting women and the work of women in these fields. The first WISE event was held on 30 October 2016 at the World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly, in Yasmine Hammamet, Tunisia. The event consisted of a workshop on practical skills for successful negotiations, as part of ITU-T's commitment to promoting equality for men and women delegates attending its meetings and conferences, followed by a panel discussion highlighting the experiences of leading women from the ICT and standardization fields.
14. ITU's data collection includes the possibilities for gender disaggregation for all indicators related to individuals accessing and using ICTs. These indicators can also be gender-disaggregated by age, education, labour force status and occupation. This information feeds analysis and provides solid evidence of women's participation in the information society.
15. ITU presents the data and projects related to gender and ICT on the dedicated website <http://www.itu.int/en/action/gender-equality/Pages/default.aspx> available publicly.