***Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on ways to bridge the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective***

***Submission of Ireland***

***15 February 2017***

**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 gaps) and how they manifest themselves in practice.**

Please see information in response to Question 3 regarding Government initiatives on Internet access.

**2. Please indicate if your Government collected 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 over the last five years. Please indicate if your Government use qualitative and quantitative indicators to assist in monitoring progress regarding the ICT sector and/or on the gender digital divide.**

The Central Statistics Office (CSO), Ireland's national statistical office, compiles a wide range of statistics to meet national, EU and other international requirements. Data on internet usage, including disaggregated data by gender, is available.

Quantitative data on internet use is collected across a range of indicators. While some differences are present, the data does not suggest major divergences in internet usage between males and females. The indicators include frequency of use, use classified by types of internet activities, types of online purchases, and actions taken to protect information online. The latest information is available on the CSO website and published in *Information Society Statistics – Households 2016.[[1]](#footnote-2)*

Information on Irish children’s use of the internet by gender is available in the *Digital Childhoods Working Paper Series* produced as part of the multinational research network *EU Kids Online*.*[[2]](#footnote-3)*

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

A range of Government initiatives are currently being implemented to improve ICT skills and digital literacy.

Ireland’s *ICT Skills Action Plan: Government, Education and Industry working together to make Ireland a global leader in ICT talent 2014 – 2018* includes an enhanced focus on attracting female participants to computing. Ireland’s *Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020: Enhancing Teaching Learning and Assessment published in October 2015[[3]](#footnote-4)* sets out the vision for ICT in education. The Strategy is focused on realising the potential of digital technologies to transform the learning experiences of students. In particular, advice and support are provided to schools, teachers and students to allow the use of ICT as a tool for inclusive learning, regardless of gender, or ability.

Implementation of Ireland’s *National Strategy for Technology-enhanced Learning* commenced in 2016.[[4]](#footnote-5) The strategy includes actions and goals to support the development of digital skills for people of all backgrounds and abilities, including people with disabilities, people disadvantaged due to social or economic circumstances, geography, and older people.

**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 enable technology in order to promote the empowerment of all women and girls? Are there regulatory and supply-side constraints (i.e. 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.)**

It is estimated by the Central Statistics Office that 87% of households had access to the internet at home in 2016. High speed services are available to the majority of properties (over 1.2 million). The Government is seeking to ensure access to quality high speed broadband through *the National Broadband Plan Intervention Strategy* (updated in December 2015).[[5]](#footnote-6)

All public library services and universities in Ireland have computers available which can be used to access the internet. Through the national digital initiative, *eCollege,* access to further education and training is provided for unemployed individuals who cannot participate in skills development at a Further Education and Training College or Centre. In 2015, 12,000 individuals completed online courses around the country. Over 45% of participants were women.

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

Ireland’s *National Digital Strategy* sets out a number of practical actions and steps to encourage and assist more citizens and small businesses to get online. Phase 1 *‘Digital Engagement*’ was launched in July 2013[[6]](#footnote-7) and focuses on Business & Enterprise, Citizen Training and Schools & Education. In line with the *National Digital Strategy*, the *'Getting Citizens Online Programm*e' is focused on encouraging and empowering citizens to participate fully in Ireland's digital economy and society. The Programme includes a grant scheme to fund digital skills training for citizens who have never used the internet.

Ireland’s *National Cyber Security Strategy (2015-2017)* sets out the Government's approach to facilitating the resilient, safe and secure operation of computer networks and associated infrastructure used by Irish citizens and businesses.[[7]](#footnote-8) A key principal is ensuring that Irish citizens’ rights under the Constitution and under the European Convention on Human Rights are preserved at all times.

**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 if the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as other relevant SDGs.**

See information provided in response to Question 3 in relation to Government initiatives to promote ICT skills.

**7. Does your Government have any specific laws or policies to address gender-based violence online? What are the challenges faced 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 National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence (*Cosc*) is responsible for ensuring the delivery of a ‘whole of Government’ response to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. An important element of this response is Ireland’s *Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence 2016-2021*[[8]](#footnote-9). One of the key aims of the Strategy is to hold perpetrators to account.

The Office for Internet Safety (OIS) has primary responsibility for internet safety in Ireland, particularly in relation to combating child pornography. The OIS plays a key role in ensuring a cohesive approach is being taken across Government Departments, State Agencies and other key stakeholders in addressing illegal [content](http://www.internetsafety.ie/website/ois/oisweb.nsf/page/safety-jargon-en#bw-term-30) on the internet.

The *Harmful Communications and Digital Safety Bill 2017* is currently under consideration in the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament).The Bill includes proposals to make stalking, including cyberstalking, and revenge porn criminal offences, as well as to expand the offence of harassment to ensure it includes activity online and on social media.[[9]](#footnote-10)

Ireland’s policy for international development *One World, One Future* identifies gender-based violence (GBV) as a priority area of action. In line with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, Ireland’s second *National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2015–2018* was published in 2015.[[10]](#footnote-11) The Plan seeks to raise awareness of GBV in Ireland and bolster Ireland’s ongoing work on protection from and prevention of GBV.

1. See <http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/isshh/informationsocietystatistics-households2016/> and <http://pdf.cso.ie/www/pdf/20161220090317_Information_Society_Statistics_-_Households_2016_full.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Eukidsonline.net ; see, for example, O'Neill, B., Dinh, T (2013). Children and the internet in Ireland: research and policy perspectives. Digital Childhoods Working Paper Series (No.4). Dublin Institute of Technology <http://arrow.dit.ie/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1032&context=aaschmedcon> and B. O'Neill, T. Dinh (2013) Cyberbullying among 9-16 year olds in Ireland. Digital Childhoods Working Paper Series (No.5). Dublin: Dublin Institute of Technology <http://arrow.dit.ie/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1031&context=cserrep> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. See <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Digital-Strategy-for-Schools-2015-2020.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. <http://www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/TEL_Strategy.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. <http://www.dccae.gov.ie/communications/en-ie/Pages/Publication/Ireland's-Broadband-Intervention-Strategy-update.aspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. <http://www.dccae.gov.ie/communications/Lists/Publications%20Documents/National%20Digital%20Strategy%20July%202013%20compressed.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. <http://www.dccae.gov.ie/communications/SiteCollectionDocuments/Internet-Policy/NationalCyberSecurityStrategy20152017.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. <http://www.cosc.ie/en/COSC/First%20Progress%20Report%20on%20Second%20National%20Strategy.pdf/Files/First%20Progress%20Report%20on%20Second%20National%20Strategy.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. <http://www.oireachtas.ie/viewdoc.asp?DocID=34363&&CatID=59> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. <https://www.dfa.ie/media/dfa/alldfawebsitemedia/ourrolesandpolicies/ourwork/empoweringwomen-peaceandsecurity/Irelands-second-National-Action-Plan-on-Women-Peace-and-Security.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)