

Aiming for a transformative future: The Power of Digital Education for
Empowering Adolescent Girls in the Arab Region

9 March, 11.30-12.45

CR-A at UNHQ

Background:

The Arab region is faced with unprecedented challenges as it tackles the devastating socio-economic effects of COVID-19, now intensified by a global food, energy and finance crisis precipitated by the war in Ukraine. The socio-economic downturn fueled by the pandemic further exacerbated the socioeconomic virus within the region which is plagued by severe domestic, economic, and political crises. The protracted interstate and intrastate conflicts continue to fuel poverty, underdevelopment, illiteracy, inequality, poor education and health, and many other serious socioeconomic problems within the region. Though the pandemic has greatly impacted all populations, women in the region, are particularly vulnerable exacerbating existing gender inequalities.

Recovery efforts to rebuild from the socio-economic impact of the pandemic also represents an opportunity for more increased focus on building a more resilient future. The Arab region, like the rest of the world, is undergoing a profound transformation of society, industry, and economy due to the rapid advancements of the technological and digital sectors. These developments, however, risk leaving women behind due to a persisting gendered digital divide that hinders women's abilities to access essential services, navigate the digital world safely and efficiently, participate in the digital economy, and access the free flow of data and information.

Increasing evidence shows the role technology can play in empowering women and girls, and in promoting gender equality by facilitating and enhancing their access to resources, including information, services and capacity-building initiatives. Technology not only has the power to circumvent or transform existing norms and stereotypes, but it can significantly help to empower women and girls by increasing their access to essential services and opportunities. For instance, technology can be used to help combat violence against women by enhancing the security of women and girls, increase their agency by organizing campaigns to raise women's voices and engage in decision-making and political processes; support women's engagement in income generating activities as well as increase their access to information and financial services; and health information.

A 2020 Blogpost from the Arab Barometer, sharing data from its latest survey, highlighted that while internet penetration has increased the rates of internet usage greatly differ along demographic lines. The International Telecommunication Union indicates that when compared to other world regions the gap between men and women with respect to the internet penetration rate is largest across Arab States. Women in particular face immense barriers to full participation in the digital sphere. Cultural norms, gender roles, biases, and stereotypes often dissuade and even prevent women from accessing the internet, gaining digital literacy, and participating in the digital economy or society.

While the gender digital divide is estimated to be the highest in the Arab Region and Asia,¹ the post-pandemic world has displayed the opportunities created by technology to expand opportunities, accelerate upward social mobility, facilitate and scale up both information and access to essential services.

Objectives

The IsDB and the UNFPA are co-organizing a side event to showcase efforts being made by some leading organizations within the Arab region to harness technology for a more equitable and prosperous future in the Arab region.

Structure

The event will be a round table discussion providing a platform for sector stakeholders to share best practices on:

- policy developments in the Arab region to manage the use of technology to promote the rights of women and girls and address growing challenges in the Arab region
- integrating technology to scale up the delivery of essential services in the Arab region

Moderator - Rafif Alam, Senior Gender Specialist, IsDB

Panelists:

- **Dr. Soukeina Bouraoui** - Director Centre of Arab Women for Training & Research (*CAWTAR*)
- **Dr. Salma Al-Nims** - Chief, Section on Gender Equality (*UNESCWA*)
- **Susanne Mikhail** - Regional Director RO Arab States (*UN WOMEN*)
- **Frederika Meijer** - UNFPA Egypt Country Representative (*UNFPA*)

¹ Bridging the gender digital divide in the Arab Region, Mona Farid Badran: ([PDF](#)) [Bridging the gender digital divide in the Arab Region \(researchgate.net\)](#)