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United Nations Entity for Gender Equality
and the Empowerment of Women

The role of parliaments in advancing gender equality through technology

A parliamentary event organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women
at the 67th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

7 March 2023, UN Headquarters, ECOSOC Chamber, New York

Chair: President of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians [TBC]

CONCEPT NOTE AND AGENDA

Introduction

Technology is a gateway to accessing information and services, and to participating in all spheres of life. In a context of rapid technological change, parliaments are called upon to foster informed public debate and adopt policies to harness the potential of the increased use of technology while ensuring it respects human rights, harms no one, and leaves no one behind. Technology can be a powerful tool for advancing and achieving gender equality. Still, parliaments must be aware of technology's gendered impacts and accessibility gaps, and adapt policy and working methods accordingly.

To promote concrete measures and parliamentary institutional arrangements on this topic, the IPU and UN Women are organizing their annual Parliamentary Meeting on the occasion of the sixty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 67) on 7 March 2023, on the theme “**The role of parliaments in advancing gender equality through technology**”.

Background

World leaders recognized the importance of technology in the political declaration to mark the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations, particularly the potential of digital technologies to accelerate the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and ensure safe and affordable access for all. Member States also warned that technology could undermine human rights and exacerbate inequality if used improperly or maliciously.¹

The importance of technology for advancing gender equality has been long recognized in the international normative framework. The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action urge governments to improve women's access to technology from an educational and employment perspective and strengthen their role in designing and monitoring technological advances.² The 2020 review of Beijing further recommends “**harnessing technology for gender equality**,” calling upon Member States to, inter alia, implement laws and policies addressing technological risks that may hamper gender equality, including online violence, and enable women's equal participation in the design of technology.³

Parliaments have a crucial role to play in addressing these challenges, such as by promoting the development of effective **policies to create a safe and non-discriminatory online environment**, tackling all forms of online security risk, harassment and bullying, including gender-based abuses, as well as legal frameworks for zero-tolerance against such offenses.⁴

¹ United Nations General Assembly resolution 75/1 (2020).

² Resolution of the 4th World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995, A/CONF.177/20/Rev.1.

³ Review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, E/CN.6/2020/3 (2019).

⁴ IPU 2022 resolution [Leveraging Information and Communication Technology as an enabler for the education sector, including in times of pandemic](#).



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However, **gender gaps** persist in worldwide access, affordability, knowledge, and technology development. In 2022, 63% of women were using the internet, compared with 69% of men.⁵ More men than women earn degrees in information and communications technologies (8.2% versus 1.7%).⁶ In low- and middle-income countries, women are 10% less likely to own a basic mobile phone and 26% less likely to own a smartphone than men.⁷

Technology is also used to facilitate **gender-based violence**, with women and girls experiencing multiple, recurring, and interrelated forms of violence more often than men and boys.⁸ Data collected on the impact of COVID-19 confirmed a shadow pandemic of violence against women exacerbating existing trends of gender-based violence, and exposure of women and girls to sexual exploitation and trafficking.⁹ Security risks come as more new technologies and sophisticated virtual operating tools accelerate and become available; these risks are often gendered and require robust, preventive, and counter strategies.¹⁰

The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated parliaments' digital transformation, marking a period of **innovation in how parliaments work**, particularly with the introduction of remote and hybrid working meetings in plenary and committee. During the pandemic, 84% of parliaments introduced new systems that rely heavily on technology. Although, introducing these systems was unplanned, they have helped parliaments become more flexible, resilient, and innovative – both in their procedures and how they plan for the future.¹¹

Today, much discussion is taking place in parliaments on how hybrid working impacts parliaments' legislative and oversight functions and the public's participation in their work. Parliaments are also considering to what extent hybrid working makes them more modern, gender-sensitive, and family-friendly workplaces – all vital ingredients to advancing gender equality in parliament as outlined in the IPU's 2012 *Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments*,¹² whose vision and commitments were reaffirmed by the Kigali Declaration¹³ adopted by parliaments at the 145th IPU Assembly in October 2022.

Still, the digital transformation currently witnessed across parliaments does not occur in a vacuum. How parliaments approach digital transformation must recognize and address existing gender-based discrimination and inequality patterns or risk being gender-blind. There is a critical window now to mainstream a gender perspective and promote the participation of women and girls in digital technologies' conceptualization, development, and implementation.¹⁴ Narrowing the gender digital divide and adopting new measures for eliminating already alarming trends of violence against women in politics, which are often carried out online,¹⁵ are just some of the issues parliaments must consider as part of their digital transformation.

⁵ Broadband Commission, *The State of Broadband 2022: Accelerating broadband for new realities* (Geneva, 2022).

⁶ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Bridging the digital gender divide: Include, Upskill, Innovate* (Paris, 2018).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ UN Women, *Online and ICT-facilitated violence against women and girls during COVID-19* (2020).

⁹ Report of the United Nations Secretary-General, "[Trafficking in women and girls: crises as a risk multiplier](#)" (2022): 5/16.

¹⁰ Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on online violence against women and girls from a human rights perspective* (A/HRC/38/47, 2018): <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1641160?ln=en>.

¹¹ IPU, [World e-Parliament Report 2022](#).

¹² The vision and political commitment to gender-sensitive parliaments.

¹³ IPU, Kigali Declaration, [Gender equality and gender-sensitive parliaments as drivers of change for a more resilient and peaceful world](#), endorsed by the 145th IPU Assembly (Kigali, 15 October 2022).

¹⁴ Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), *Women's full and effective participation in decision-making in public life* (E/CN.6/2021/L.3, 2021).

¹⁵ A landmark [2016 IPU survey of women parliamentarians worldwide](#) revealed that 82% had been subject to psychological violence, whether it was sexist remarks, threats or harassment. Online sexist attacks are also highly prevalent according to two other IPU studies, especially in Europe, where 58% of respondents had experienced such attacks.



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Objectives

The Meeting on **“The role of parliaments in advancing gender equality through technology”** will provide an opportunity to bring a parliamentary perspective into the CSW67 discussions by showcasing parliamentary engagement in harnessing technology to advance gender equality in parliaments and broader society. Members of parliament from around the world will share promising practices for empowering women and girls through technology, removing structural obstacles that hinder their access to it, and addressing risks such as technology-facilitated violence against women and girls. Participants will exchange with their peers and experts on how to deepen their work in these areas and harness technology’s potential for making parliamentary working modalities more inclusive and gender-sensitive.

Date and Time

The parliamentary meeting will be held in person on United Nations Headquarters’ premises, in the ECOSOC Chamber, on 7 March 2023.

Interpretation will be provided in Arabic, English, French, and Spanish.



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Agenda

Moderator [TBC]

10:00 – 10:25 **Opening Remarks**

- Chair of the Parliamentary Meeting – introduction
- IPU opening remarks
- UN Women opening remarks

10:25 – 12:40 **Session 1: Empowering women and girls through technology, including in decision-making processes**

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and in particular SDG 5 on gender equality requires bold and transformative actions. Based on current trajectories, existing interventions will not be sufficient to achieve gender equality in all areas of the SDGs by the 2030 deadline. It is vital to consider how rapidly-developing technology can help advance and address barriers to gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

This session will explore how parliaments can drive change and support the removal of obstacles that prevent or limit women's and girls' access to technology. It will also focus on how the potential of technology can be harnessed to advance gender equality in areas such as education, the economy and political decision-making. This includes adapting parliament's working methods through technology, such as opening up for more gender-inclusive participation and family-friendly hybrid work arrangements. Following introductory presentations, a moderated debate will invite panellists and participants to respond to the following guiding questions regarding parliamentary action:

- How can parliaments promote and protect equal access to technology for women and men in society? *(For example, regulating affordable and monopoly-free access to the Internet, ensuring available infrastructure for connectivity throughout the country.)*
- What are the good practices of parliaments in promoting access of women and girls in STEM education (science, technology, engineering, and math)?
- How can parliaments facilitate women's access to the labour market through technology? *(For example, through measures to promote women's leadership and entrepreneurship in technology, as well as skills development and life-long learning.)*
- In parliaments, how can technology, including information and communication technologies (ICTs), help advance gender equality internally and support the work of women and men parliamentarians? *(For example, online/hybrid sessions, remote voting, measuring and analyzing speaking time for women and men MPs.)*
- How can parliaments use technology to open up to all constituents, including women and girls, and ensure their decision-making processes fully include a broad range of views?

12:40 – 13:00 **The state of women's representation in political decision-making**

Participants will be briefed on the latest data and resources on women in politics and on gender quotas. These include the IPU report *Women in Parliament in 2022: The year in review* and the IPU-UN Women map *Women in Politics: 2023*, to be launched on the occasion of International Women's Day. A presentation on legislated gender quotas will also be delivered, including an introduction to the new UN Gender Quota Portal.



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13:00 – 15:00 **Lunch Break**

15:00 – 17:00 **Session 2: Addressing online and technology-facilitated gender-based violence, including in the public and political spheres**

The root cause of gender-based violence against women, including violence facilitated by technology and perpetrated online, is gender inequality. Online gender-based violence is part of a continuum of violence against women and girls. It can manifest as sexual harassment, threats, bullying, smear campaigns, sexist hate speech, and blackmail. Social media are increasingly seen to facilitate intimidation and violence by providing a platform for defamatory remarks, images, or threats to intimidate and exercise control over women to undermine their free expression and exclude them as a group from public life. Online violence can negatively affect the health and well-being of women and girls and have severe economic, social and political impacts.¹⁶ Perpetrators can be partners, ex-partners, colleagues, schoolmates, or anonymous individuals. Some women are particularly exposed, such as young women and girls, women facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, women politicians, women's rights defenders, journalists, and other public figures.

The session will explore the role parliaments can play in addressing online and technology-facilitated gender-based violence and discrimination through legal reforms and collaboration with women's rights organizations and tech companies, including when it comes to technology-facilitated violence targeting women MPs or parliamentary staff. Following introductory presentations, a moderated debate will invite panellists and parliamentarians to respond to the following guiding questions:

- What examples of legislation or standards are in place that specifically address violence against women and girls in digital contexts? What are the models of active engagement of legislators with women's rights or girls' organizations to develop laws and policies on online safety of women and girls that fully meet their specific needs?
- Are there promising practices for ensuring accountability and active engagement of tech companies in addressing online and technology-facilitated gender-based violence and discrimination?
- What actions have parliaments taken to address online and technology-facilitated violence and discrimination involving members of parliament, including gender-based violence?
- Has the increased use of technology by members and staff of parliament been accompanied by the development of measures such as targeted training, codes of conduct, and dedicated mechanisms for complaint and support in case of online violence?

17:00 – 17:15 **Wrap up by the Chair and the moderator**

¹⁶ UN Women, *Accelerating efforts to tackle online and technology facilitated violence against women and girls (VAWG)*, 2022