

Written Statement for the 67th session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2023.

Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

Innovation and technological change, and in particular advancing digitalization, are transforming all areas of society. They can be an opportunity for gender equality. However, achieved progress is at risk if innovation, technological change and digitalization do not include a gender perspective, since they are not gender-neutral.

The pandemic has led to regression

The Corona pandemic has reinforced existing gender inequalities and made them more visible. The working world has changed massively, especially for women. Access to fast Internet and efficient devices has become more important, for women working in home offices as well as for children during home schooling. Existing inequalities in the distribution of resources, knowledge and access to digitalization have also become more noticeable. The dissolution of boundaries between work and private life has increased the traditional distribution of roles in families, especially in unpaid care work.

Digital Gender Gap

Those who start their own company in the digital industry help determine which innovations are launched on the market. However, 70 percent of all startups in this sector are run by all-male teams. This is mainly due to old role models and the lack of work-life balance.

But even in established companies, women are hopelessly underrepresented in decision-making bodies, technology development and application development. The same applies to the proportion in the so-called STEM professions (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math). Structural disadvantages and traditional roles make access to digital technologies difficult. As long as access to fast Internet and modern end devices is not guaranteed, women and girls cannot make use of technologies equally.

The development of artificial intelligence (AI) and algorithms, as well as apps, microchips and other technological innovations are not gender-neutral. They can be gender discriminatory if they are created exclusively by men and women are insufficiently involved in the design of these technologies.

Hate and violence on the Internet

Hate and discrimination against women on the Internet have increased enormously - but this is not being responded to adequately. Men try to threaten, intimidate and degrade women with sexist and misogynist comments on the Internet and social media, but also with rape and death threats.

The digital transformation needs a gender perspective

UN Women National Committee Germany demands effective measures to give digitalization a gender perspective, to ensure the participation of women and girls, and to avoid discrimination:

- Securing and promoting access for women and girls to digital technologies, fast Internet and efficient end devices. Women and girls must be able to participate equally in the use, development, design and application of digital offerings.
- Women and girls must also be able to acquire digital skills at school to promote gender-equitable access to digitalization.
- Designing digital education and training programs in a gender-sensitive manner is crucial as well as ensuring the compatibility of family, career and education.
- Reducing the underrepresentation of women in STEM subjects and professions, and especially in tech companies by changing societal role models and by creating a women- and family-friendly work and corporate culture in the digital economy. The increased flexibility of work patterns, together with the active advancement of women, must promote the equitable distribution of leadership positions and representation in digital professions.
- Strengthening initiatives and projects that contribute to breaking down social role models, such as Klischeefrei, Girls Day, YouCodeGirls. They encourage girls and young women to make their career choices free of gender stereotypes.
- Promoting female founders and their access to capital.
- Increasing the representation of women in digital professions.
- Ensuring work-life balance and a fair distribution of unpaid care work, even in the home-office. Subject to the appropriate framework conditions, mobile working can improve the work-life balance as well as the gender-equal distribution of care and domestic work.
- Working conditions in home office require legal, collective and company (occupational safety) regulations and standards for mobile employment and new forms of work.
- Algorithms and artificial intelligence need gender-equitable development and application. Artificial intelligence must not reproduce stereotypes and structural discrimination, for example, when parental leave is included as an interruption in the Curriculum Vitae leading to a disadvantage in personnel selection or the granting of loans. Therefore, decision criteria must be transparent, verifiable, and clear guidelines for the application of artificial

intelligence and algorithms must be established.

- Violence on the Internet must not be tolerated. Strengthening efforts to combat discrimination and violence against women online, nationally and internationally, are important. Digital violence must be classified and punished in the same way as direct violence. In the case of cyber violence, the available legal instruments of the criminal code must be used for the benefit of those affected. If they do not, they must be created.

UN Women National Committee Germany demands the realization of comprehensive gender justice at all levels and in all parts of the world. This involves the inclusion of women in the global digital transformation. Women and girls must also benefit from advancing digitalization so that the gender gap can be closed. This requires coordinated political action and a strategy for all areas of gender equality.