



CONCEPT NOTE

CSW Joint side event UNESCO SHS & CI Sectors

The Gender Digital Revolution: Addressing ethics of Artificial Intelligence, access to information and gendered online violence – 6 March 2023 (16:45-18:00) - Conference Room 1, Conference Building

The digital revolution offers many opportunities to advance gender equality and women's empowerment but also poses a number of risks and challenges to perpetuate gender stereotypes and gendered violence.

In addition to this, difficulties related to accessing information, misinformation, fake news, as well as gendered online violence is hindering women and girls' participation in the digital world and is becoming a global phenomenon that transcends borders and requires a multilateral response. It is the "most pervasive and pernicious form of gendered censorship".

The proposed side event will discuss possible solutions, as well the implication for policy, in a view to building gender inclusive societies in the digital era. The event will highlight UNESCO policy instruments such as the [UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of AI](#), adopted by all Member States as well as UNESCO [research and recommendations on promoting gender equity in the Right of Access to Information](#) and in addressing gendered online violence against journalists.

The side event will spotlight these different but interlinked issues in two consecutive panels, involving relevant speakers from a different range of constituencies. The first panel will address the question of how to implement policy actions to avoid the reproduction of stereotypes and bias in AI. The second panel will highlight the promotion of gender equity through Access to Information as well as how this links to gendered online violence against journalists.

The joint side event will be moderated by Ms Maria Begoña Lasagabaster, UNESCO, Director, Division for Gender Equality, Cabinet of the Director-General.

NEW policy actions to avoid gender stereotypes and bias in AI (16:45 – 17:15)

➤ BACKGROUND

It is now well established that, without an ethical framework, the development and deployment of Artificial Intelligence (AI) can reproduce inequalities and discrimination present in the real world, and even magnify it. This is a source of concern, given the pervasiveness and the speed at which the technologies are being advanced. Indeed, artificial intelligence is having impact in many fields, from telecommunications and social media to industrial production and the job market.

In this sense, the digital transformation, powered by Artificial Intelligence, is already deepening inequalities, particularly based on gender. For a start, according to the World Economic Forum (2021), 97 million new jobs will emerge by 2025, with a majority requiring skills in AI,

engineering, product development, and emerging programming languages. However, women have remained an untapped resource. Women's presence in STEM is already low (35% of STEM students and 28% of STEM professionals), but the gender gap widens even more in the field of AI. According to the AI Now Institute, just 15% of AI research staff at Facebook and 10% at Google are women. Globally, women make up less than 25% of AI specialists, 14% of people working in cloud computing, and 20% in engineering. Worse yet, this gender gap has remained chronic and static and at these rates, it will take over a century to achieve gender equality in this field.

There are real and significant challenges to ensure that AI does not exacerbate or amplify societal biases, inequalities, and divides. Bias in AI can be generated by simple statistical error or through conscious and unconscious assumptions which programmers make about race, gender, or other ideological concepts and social stereotypes.

It is well known and documented that if AI systems are not developed and applied with a gender perspective, they are likely to reproduce existing discriminatory social norms and create new ones.

That is why UNESCO adopted on 24 November 2021 by standing ovation at the 41st General Conference, the *Recommendation on the Ethics of AI* which establishes a comprehensive framework, based on human-centered principles and values. These include the full respect of human rights, fundamental freedoms, and human dignity; environmental sustainability; and inclusive and fair outcomes. It further calls for concrete actions in a wide array of policy fields including on gender, under Policy Area 6. This is the only international framework on the digital agenda with a gender chapter with clear commitments.

It calls for ensuring the National AI strategies include a gender action plan; that there are dedicated funds from public budgets to finance gender responsive schemes; it calls to ensure gender lens to policies linked to the digital transformation, particularly in the labour markets, to increase representation of women in the digital world and in the STEM careers; that AI systems do not reproduce discrimination and harassment; that they support women entrepreneurship, and that gender gaps are not reproduced in the AI world, among others.

➤ PROPOSAL

The Committee of the Status of Women, and the decision to dedicate the 2023 session to innovation and technological developments provides an excellent opportunity to raise the visibility of UNESCO's work in the field of Artificial Intelligence, particularly to advance gender equality. Therefore, this high-level panel proposes to leverage on the commitments adopted by 193 members at UNESCO to advance gender equality in the digital world and discuss practical ways of implementation. Panellists can focus on the specific policy proposals included in the UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, to accelerate delivery of its provisions on gender. The outcome will be a strong call to deliver on these commitments, through the integration of an Action Plan.

The panellists will share good practices and experiences linked to the definitions of the Recommendation, including effective policies and economic and regulatory incentives aiming at balanced gender representation in all stages of an AI system life cycle, in AI research and development and to encourage female entrepreneurship, representation in AI companies' top management positions, and to counter biases, discrimination and harassment based on gender online.

Furthermore, UNESCO will take the opportunity to launch the "**Women 4 Ethical AI**" project, which was discussed at the last Executive Board, which aims to engage with women in the Artificial Intelligence world, that are pursuing ethical and inclusive outcomes. The Network, different from the many other networks that exists, will not only aim at increasing the presence

of women in the AI world, but will create a basis for women to promote the ethical development of these technologies. UNESCO already has identified a powerful group that could join the event for the launching of the Network.

➤ **High level Panel**

- Gabriela Ramos, ADG/SHS UNESCO.
- Alondra Nelson, Deputy of the Technology office of President Biden.
- Silvia Díaz Acosta. Minister of Science, Technology, Knowledge and Innovation, Chile
- Alessandra Sala. Sr. Director of AI and Data Science at Shutterstock and Global President of Women in AI
- Sandra Urrutia. Minister of Technologies of Information and Communications, Colombia.

➤ **Partnerships**

- Telefonica. Telefonica is leading the Network of the private sector in Ibero-America to promote the implementation of the UNESCO AI Recommendation and its operation
- The governments of the United States, (Alondra Nelson developed the Bill of Rights in the US, and we have worked with her in the World Science Forum) Chile (Country which will be hosting the first Summit of High Authorities of AI to implement the Regional Council for the implementation of the "Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence") Argentina (Country leading the negotiations on the main outcome/agreed conclusions of the CSW, which will help us include a reference of the Recommendation), Namibia (considering the leadership of its Minister of Higher Education, Training and Innovation in the implementation of the Recommendation), and Colombia (Country already implementing the UNESCO AI Recommendation which can show good practices).
- ITU.
- Women in AI (a nonprofit do-tank working towards gender-inclusive AI that benefits global society. Sala is its president and a person already working in AI)

➤ **Audience**

The target audience are policy makers, policy research producers and think tanks/research institutes, NGOs, associations or interest groups, donor organizations, academics, universities, or members of policy teams and advisors in government. It is also target to private companies small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and startups working on ethics of AI, and that develop and implement solutions based on AI and machine learning.

Geographically, the panel will be addressed not only to those stakeholders already implementing policy actions in AI and are involved in producing, commissioning and using policy research in AI. We also hope the panel may be of relevance to developing countries; many cases and our experience of working in Africa reveal important challenges in these contexts.

Panel 2

Promoting gender responsive policies to guarantee women's right of access to information in the digital age and combatting gendered online violence (17:15 – 18:00)

➤ BACKGROUND

24
countries

reported on good
practices

in promoting gender
equality in access to
information

Nearly 260 million fewer women have access to the Internet than men - effectively shutting them off from **their right to access vital information to make informed decisions**. The formulation of information requests, through digital means, enables the reduction of poverty, and meaningful participation of women in society as champions of innovation and change.

According to a UNESCO/ICFJ study, 73% of surveyed women journalists have experienced gendered online violence. 30% of respondents answered that they engaged in some form of self-censorship online. Gendered online violence against journalists negatively impacts the plurality of information available online.

In UNESCO's annual survey on Access to Information, **24 Member States reported in 2022 on the promotion of gender equality in access to information legislation implementation**, including through digital means. Women are less likely to demand and receive access to information using online forms and mobile applications yet are perhaps the most in need. Challenges faced by women in

exercising the right to information include poverty, lack of awareness of the right to information and where/how to make requests to access information, fear, including fear of asking for information or cultural constraints.

And yet access information, could allow women to take advantage of opportunities to transform their lives, families, and communities; making more effective decisions, for example with relation to education, crop production, land ownership and health care; enabling women to know and exercise their full range of rights, helping women to participate more fully in public.

Women journalists specifically rely on accessing information to fulfil their professional duties of bringing information to the public. Access to information is critical in order to enhance the role of journalists as watchdogs of relevant policies particularly crucial to foster women's rights, such as policies related to sexual and reproductive rights, fight against gender-based violence or women's participation in politics. At the same time, women journalists are exposed to high levels of online violence, in some cases leading to self-censorship and thereby threatening that a plurality of voices is portrayed in the media. If women journalists are pushed out of online discourses and the access to information, specifically on gender equality themes is hampered, gender equality is threatened.

➤ PROPOSAL

To discuss the role of digital technologies in promoting gender equality via Access to Information and Freedom of Expression, UNESCO will organize a panel during the 67th session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

The panel will aim to discuss the ways to strengthen advocacy for gender equity in the rights of access to information and freedom of expression in the digital space.

UNESCO produces research and evidence-based policy advice and recommendations on gender equity and access to information and safety of journalists. The policy brief on promoting [Gender Equity in the Right of Access to Information](#) investigates international and national mechanisms to help overcome the obstacles that women face in exercising their right to information, including in the digital space. “[The Chilling](#)” research project is the most comprehensive study existing today investigating the scope and impact of gendered online violence against journalists on freedom of expression and also includes [recommendations to different stakeholders on how to combat gendered online violence](#).



The panel will discuss the urgent need to address gendered violence online while also exploring how access to information can be leveraged further to promote gender equity. It will highlight the societal impacts of gendered violence and discrimination while discussing ways forward on how to address them.

➤ Panel

- Opening remarks by UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information Mr Tawfik Jelassi (video message);
- UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression Ms Irene Khan;
- Carter Centre Director of the Rule of Law Program, Ms Laura Neuman;
- Senior Reporter of Guardian US and interviewee for “The Chilling”, study on gendered online violence against journalists by UNESCO & ICFJ, Ms Julia Carrie Wong

➤ **Partnerships**

The panel will draw on the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls, Women's Major Group for the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality and other intergovernmental mechanisms.

➤ **Audience**

The discussion will aim at institutions and practitioners in the field of access to information and freedom of expression including information commissioners, and other representative of governments. At the same time, the discussion will be highly relevant for civil society organizations active in the field and specifically, with a focus on gender equality. Lastly, the discussions will be relevant for media houses, journalists and representative of internet platforms.