Commission on the Status of Women  
67th session  
Tuesday 7th of March 11:30 – 1:00pm, Conference Room 1, UNHQ

Fostering women entrepreneurship in the technology and digital sectors

Background

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. In the context of the CSW this side event is organized by the European Delegation to the UN and the Permanent Mission of the People’s Republic of China to the UN.

The digital revolution brings immense potential to improve social and economic outcomes for women, increasing the female labor force participation, broadening the employment options for women, and also promoting the proportion of female entrepreneurship. According to the survey, in China, women have made up 55% of the population doing business online¹. The digital economy has also created 57 million female jobs in digital trade, e-commerce, live streaming and other fields in China, which brought a large amount of digital gender dividend and expanded the value of women in the labor market².³. This year marks the European Year of Skills: the EU has increased investments in digital skills and vocational training related to STEM fields. Within the EU, we have set ambitious targets in the EU’s Path to a Digital Decade. For instance, we are committed to double the number of employed ICT specialists by 2023 to 20M, with increased convergence between women and men.

Yet, it also poses the risk of perpetuating existing patterns of gender inequality. Despite a number of important initiatives, a significant digital gender gap remains, limiting the equitable realization of the benefits of digital transformation across high, low and middle-income countries. According to UNESCO, only 35% of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) students in higher education globally are women, which points to the persisting obstacles to women’s equal participation in the tech and digital sectors.⁴ The Digital Education Action Plan of the European Commission reports that only 30% of entrepreneurs and 32% of economic leaders in the EU are women. Furthermore, only 15% of tech sector employees in the EU are women.⁵ In China, over 70% of start-ups surveyed said they had “one or more” women in such roles.⁶

¹ http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2019-09/19/content_5431327.htm  
² https://caijing.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202203/04/WS62221d8fba3107be497a092f8.html  
³ http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2019-09/19/content_5431327.htm  
While digital technologies bring unprecedented opportunities for women empowerment and inclusion around the world, they can also entail significant risks, and exacerbate the gender gap and gender digital divide. Thus, it is crucial to foster women participation, empowerment, employment and entrepreneurship in the technology and digital sectors. Avoiding further exclusion and encouraging equal participation of women in these sectors, ensuring that human-centered digital technologies contribute to the empowerment of women and enhance gender equality will be a key challenge in the coming years. This is also essential in order to reach the Sustainable Development Goal 5, including target 5.b to ‘Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women’.

The technology and digital sectors offer various opportunities for women entrepreneurs to unlock their economic potential and provide more room for the growth of "her power" in the digital economy, but also carry risks of human rights violations such as online violence and discrimination. Young women and girls, especially those in vulnerable situations and those in public life are particularly vulnerable to online violence and harassment. Safe digital spaces and tech sectors and adequate digital technology skills are urgently needed to foster women entrepreneurship everywhere and to close the gender gap. Significant work is required to remove existing barriers, including related to discrimination, access to finance and education. This event will offer the opportunity to raise awareness about women entrepreneurship in the tech and digital sectors, refer to concrete examples and success stories, and discuss best practices and potential developments for the future.

**Purpose of the side event**

Technology is a key driver for gender equality. Unfortunately, women are still too often underrepresented in the technology sector and that is why it is crucial to celebrate and empower women entrepreneurs in the technology and digital sectors all over the world. They have the potential to drive change in the tech world and pave the way towards accelerating gender equality. The conference will invite women entrepreneurs, academics, NGO representatives and other guests from various fields to share their experience and best practices in the tech and digital tech sectors.

- How can the international community support women entrepreneurship in the tech and digital sectors? What are the ongoing global initiatives in this sphere?
- How can governments, and tech and digital sectors, offer safe spaces for women entrepreneurs while putting human rights and inclusivity at the center of their policies, and ensure addressing and removing barriers for all women and girls, including those in vulnerable situations?
- What is the future of women entrepreneurship? What are good and concrete practices that can be shared and duplicated when it comes to strengthening women entrepreneurship in the tech and digital sectors?
- How can women entrepreneurs in the tech and digital sectors empower other women and help close the gender gap in these sectors? How can men and boys better be engaged to promote women empowerment in this sector?

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8 https://www.undp.org/china/blog/designing-fairer-future-why-women-tech-are-key-more-equal-world.
How can we educate, equip and empower women and girls with the necessary skills, confidence and opportunities to succeed in STEM career fields such as the technology and digital sectors?

**Agenda**

- **Opening remarks:**
  - H.E. Stella Ronner, EU Ambassador for Gender Equality and Diversity
  - H.E. Ms. Lin Yi, Vice-Chairperson of the National Working Committee on Children and Women under the State Council of China

- **Panel discussion:**
  - UN representative: Ms Chidi King, Lead, Gender, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, International Labour Organization (ILO)
  - Women entrepreneurs:
    - Ms. Niamh Donnelly, Co-Founder of Akara Robotics, winner of the 2022 EU Prize for Innovation
    - Ms. Liangyan, General Manager of Anhui Yuanchen Environmental Protection S&T Co., Ltd.
  - Civil society representatives:
    - Ms. Zhang Yunlan, president of Qindao Kutesmart Co., Ltd., the executive director of the Women Entrepreneurs Chamber of Commerce of the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce (ACFIC), and the executive Chairman of the fourth council of the Textile and Garment Chamber
    - Ms. Catalina Escobar, Co-Founder and Strategy Director, MAKIAIA

- **Closing / Q&A**