**48th session of the Human Rights Council**

**Annual discussion on the integration of a gender perspective throughout the work of the Human Rights Council and that of its mechanisms**

***Theme: The gender digital divide in times of the COVID-19 pandemic***

*Concept note (draft as of 24 September 2021)*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Date and venue:** | **Monday, 27 September 2021, 3 to 5 p.m. Room XX, Palais des Nations, Geneva and online platform (Zoom)** *(will be broadcast live and archived on* [*http://webtv.un.org*](http://webtv.un.org)*)* |
| **Objectives:** | The continuing gender disparities in access to and benefit from information and communications technology (ICT) reflect discrimination faced by women and girls in society, including insufficient financial resources to access ICTs; gender stereotypes that prevent their usage of ICTs; their disproportionate exposure to online harassment and sexual and gender-based violence, among others. Women and girls subjected to intersectional discrimination will often be particularly affected.The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has significantly accelerated the digital transformation and highlighted the potential it has to impact human rights. Yet, greater dependency on ICTs, also bears the risk to further exacerbate the gender digital divide. Mobilization and defence of rights, for instance, has become more dependent on new technologies, changing the work of women human rights defenders. Victims or persons at risk who are not digitally literate or cannot afford the purchase of tools and data, cannot be reached. While the usage of digital communication tools can make voices heard, increase visibility of victims and attention to human rights violations, it also bears risks of surveillance, hacking and online violence. COVID-19 has also shown digital technologies’ potential to fasten access to health services, such as to sexual and reproductive health services, public health initiatives, however, people who are not connected might be excluded. Sexual and gender-based violence offline and online has also spiked during the pandemic. While phone-based support and communication via social media can facilitate communication with and assist victims, lockdown with and observation by their perpetrator, or lack of access to devices has hampered their usage of this tool. **The panel discussion aims:**   * + - * **To foster a deeper understanding** of the impact of COVID-19 on the gender digital divide;       * **To discuss how** the gender digital divide can be overcome in a sustainable and crisis-proof manner, taking into consideration the various underlying contexts in which women and girls live and the intersecting forms of discrimination they are subjected to; * **To explore** how the gender digital divide can better be taken into consideration in concrete crisis response and recovery measures and exchange good practices in this regard; * **To discuss** how the Council and its mechanisms can contribute to making COVID-19 response and recovery measures responsive to the gender digital divide. |
| **Chair:** | **H.E. Ms. Ebyan Mahamed Salah**,Vice-President of the Human Rights Council |
| **Opening statement:** | **Ms. Michelle Bachelet**, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights |
| **Panellists:** | * **Ms. Tlaleng Mofokeng**,Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health * **Ms. Tatiana Vasconcelos**, Disability consultant *(video message)* * **Mr. Jaroslaw Ponder**, Head of the Office for Europe at the International Telecommunication Union(ITU) * **Ms. Lainah Ndiweni**, Legal researcher, Veritas Zimbabwe *(video message)* |
| **Outcome:** | The expected outcomes of this discussion are:   * The Human Rights Council, States and relevant stakeholders will have enhanced understanding of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the gender digital divide and its human rights consequences; * The Human Rights Council, States and relevant stakeholders will learn from shared experiences, new initiatives and successful practices on how crisis response measures can better take into consideration the gender digital divide. |
| **Mandate:** | In 2007, the Human Rights Council adopted [resolution 6/30](http://ap.ohchr.org/Documents/E/HRC/resolutions/A_HRC_RES_6_30.pdf) on integrating the human rights of women throughout the United Nations system, in which it decided to incorporate into its programme of work an annual discussion on the integration of a gender perspective throughout its work and that of its mechanisms, including the evaluation of progress made and challenges experienced.  In this resolution, the Council recognized the importance of examining, from a gender perspective, the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination and conditions of disadvantage, their root causes and consequences and their impact on the advancement of women and the enjoyment by women of all human rights, in order to develop and implement strategies, policies and programmes aimed at the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and to increase the role that women play in the design, implementation and monitoring of gender-sensitive anti-discrimination policies.  The Council further requested all special procedures and other human rights mechanisms of the Human Rights Council and the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee regularly and systematically to integrate a gender perspective into the implementation of their mandate including when examining the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination against women and to include in their reports information on and qualitative analysis of human rights of women and girls. |
| **Format:** | The panel discussion will be limited to two hours. The opening statement and initial presentations by the panellists will be followed by a two-part interactive discussion and conclusions from the panellists. A maximum of one hour will be set aside for the podium, which will cover the opening statement, panellists’ presentations and their responses to questions and concluding remarks. The remaining hour will be reserved for two segments of interventions from the floor, with each segment consisting of interventions from 12 States and observers, 1 national human rights institution and 2 non-governmental organizations.  The list of speakers for the discussion will be established through the online inscription system and, as per practice, statements by high-level dignitaries and groups of States will be moved to the beginning of the list. Each speaker will have two minutes to raise issues and to ask panellists questions. Delegates who have not been able to take the floor due to time constraints will be able to upload their statements on the online system to be posted on the HRC Extranet. |
| **Background:** | Women and girls form the majority of the estimated 3.7 billion unconnected people. Many groups of women and girls will be particularly affected: For example, indigenous communities are among the least likely to be connected to the Internet and to have the equal opportunity to acquire digital skills. Women and girls with disabilities and adolescents face particular risks and obstacles to access phone-based services. Women and girls who live in rural areas will also often be subjected to limited Internet connectivity and infrastructure and the opportunity to acquire digital skills. Older women are also at risk to be confronted with the assumption that acquiring digital skills is not important for them and they will be left out of programmes in this regard.In an increasingly digitalized world, gender-based discrimination offline and online are inextricably linked. This becomes even more visible in times of crises such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Meaningful empowerment of women and girls requires substantive equality online and offline and sustainably and comprehensively eradicating all forms of gender stereotypes and gender-based discrimination.In its resolutions 41/11 and 47/23, the Council recognized that new and emerging digital technologies can have the potential to support the advancement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. In resolution 47/23, it also recognized the important role of new and emerging digital technologies for an inclusive and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, including by supporting States’ efforts to protect public health, promote inclusive education and bridge digital divides, with particular attention to, inter alia, women and girls.In its resolution 44/12, the Council recognized that the gender digital divide, which includes significant gender disparities in terms of access to and use of information and communications technology, undermines women’s and girls’ full enjoyment of human rights, including the right to freedom of opinion and expression.In resolution 38/7, the Council recognized that violations and abuses of women’s rights online are a growing global concern that hinder the equal exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on the basis of gender, and may deter women from using information and communications technology, which can exacerbate the gender digital divide and widen gender inequalities in society.In resolution 75/202, the General Assembly noted with concern that, while the gender digital divide has narrowed in many regions since 2013, it has widened overall, in particular in the least developed countries and in Africa.In resolution 38/5, the Council expressed deep concern that all forms of discrimination, intimidation, harassment and violence in digital contexts prevent women and girls from fully enjoying their human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to freedom of opinion and expression, the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, and the right to privacy, in accordance with obligations under international law, which hinders their full, equal and effective participation in economic, social, cultural and political affairs and is an impediment to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. The topics covered during the previous Council annual discussions on gender integration can be accessed here:  <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WRGS/Pages/GenderIntegration.aspx> |
| **Background documents:** | * [Human Rights Council resolution 6/30](http://ap.ohchr.org/Documents/E/HRC/resolutions/A_HRC_RES_6_30.pdf) of 14 December 2007 on integrating the human rights of women throughout the United Nations system * [Human Rights Council resolution 47/23](https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/47/23) of 9 July 2021 on new and emerging digital technologies and human rights * [General Assembly resolution 75/202](https://undocs.org/A/RES/75/202) of 29 December 2020 on information and communications technologies for sustainable development * [Human Rights Council resolution 44/12](https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/RES/44/12) of 16 July 2020 on freedom of opinion and expression * [Human Rights Council resolution 41/11](https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/RES/41/11) of 11 July 2019 on new and emerging digital technologies and human rights * [Human Rights Council resolution 38/7](https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/RES/38/7) of 5 July 2018 on the promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet * [Human Rights Council resolution 38/5](https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/RES/38/5) of 5 July 2018 on accelerating efforts to eliminate violence against women and girls: preventing and responding to violence against women and girls in digital contexts * Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet: ways to bridge the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective (2017, [A/HRC/35/9](https://undocs.org/A/HRC/35/9)) |