

## The Netherlands' Civil Society Priorities for the Agreed Conclusions

67th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, 6-17 March 2023



Digital transformations in recent decades have a major impact on our daily lives, and a profound effect on gender equality and the rights of women and girls<sup>1</sup> worldwide. Innovation, technology, and (digital) education provide great potential and opportunities for gender equality, but also risks and pitfalls. In the context of increasing online gender-based violence, the increasing use of algorithms and Artificial Intelligence (AI), and increasing gender gaps in (access to) digital knowledge and skills, Dutch civil society formulates the following priorities for the Agreed Conclusions.

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<sup>1</sup> When we mention women and girls, we always refer to women and girls in all their diversity, including underrepresented, rural, indigenous, or displaced women and girls, widows, women with disabilities, and LGBTQI+ persons. This acknowledges the difference in experience and identities of women and girls of all ages, ethnicities, religions, cultural backgrounds, sexualities, gender identities, socio-economic status, disabilities, etcetera.

## 1. Invest in gender-transformative and climate-just technology, innovations, and education

Inequalities in the digital world reflect existing structural inequalities. A gender-transformative approach in technology, innovation and (digital) education is essential to challenge existing structural (gender) inequalities and power imbalances. Such an approach prioritizes the needs, knowledge and experiences of women and girls in all their diversity and centralizes their role as change agents. A climate-just<sup>2</sup> approach is crucial, because digital infrastructures are vulnerable to climate change, -conflicts and -disasters. Women and girls in all their diversity benefit most from (digital) technologies when these do not have a negative impact on the climate and living environment.

### *The agreed conclusions should therefore:*

Call upon Member States to implement policies, legislation and programs that ensure that technological developments and innovations contribute to achieving the SDGs and prevent (digital) technology and innovations from having a negative impact on human rights by:

- collecting, analyzing and reporting **high-quality disaggregated and intersectional gender data on the possibilities, opportunities and impact of technology and innovation**, while **safeguarding privacy and human rights**, and addressing differences and inequalities in the specific needs, opportunities and situations of women and girls in all their diversity.
- countering **(gender) bias in data, AI and algorithms** by, among other things, transparency about the use of AI and algorithms, investigating and combating bias in data on which AI and algorithms are based, and promoting diversity within organizations that develop or use AI and algorithms. This also requires that privacy, human rights and democratic values are safeguarded.
- developing **international standards and guidelines** to guarantee the rights, privacy, dignity, and autonomy of girls and women in all their diversity in the digital environment. **'Digital gatekeepers' such as governments, companies and (digital) platforms** must comply with these guidelines to prevent any negative impact their products and services may have on women and girls.
- developing **policies** to ensure that technological developments and innovations **prevent and counteract the unequal impact of climate change, environmental degradation and disasters** on women and girls in all their diversity.
- ensuring that governments, NGOs, researchers, and companies use **inclusive co-creative and participatory methods** to develop and implement new, clean, and gender-transformative technologies.

## 2. Strengthen and improve safe access to, and availability of (digital) education, digital infrastructures, technology and innovation for women and girls in all their diversity

There is a growing gender gap in digital access, skills, literacy, and education. Access to, and availability of digital infrastructures, services, technologies and innovations, and digital and technical education for women and girls is hampered by, among other things, a lack of physical accessibility, affordability, (access to and the acquisition of) knowledge and skills, and social norms. Specific groups of women and girls experience these restrictions differently, depending on factors such as age, having a disability, socio-economic status, living in rural or conflict areas, education, sexual orientation and ethnic, religious and gender identities.

### *The agreed conclusions should therefore call upon Member States to:*

- **close the digital gender gap**, by granting women and girls in all their diversity **equal, unrestricted, affordable, and safe<sup>3</sup> access** to knowledge, resources, financing, control, and ownership of (digital) technologies, innovations, and education.
- **guarantee financial, physical, and safe access to (digital) quality education** at all levels that meets the specific needs of women and girls in all their diversity and that contributes to their digital skills, resilience and self-reliance.
- **not censor** online expressions and content, including information on **sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and sexual well-being**, and **actively counter the spread of mis- and disinformation**.

<sup>2</sup> A climate-just approach addresses the unequal impact and outcomes of climate change on different groups of people and urges a just division, fair sharing, and equitable distribution of the burdens of climate change and its mitigation.

<sup>3</sup> This means that the physical safety, privacy, and human rights (including SRHR) of women and girls in all their diversity should be guaranteed.

- critically evaluate and hold accountable states, companies and organizations that exclude groups of women, including sex workers, or that restrict the fundamental and democratic rights and freedoms of women and girls.

### 3. Eliminate (online and technology-facilitated) sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and discrimination

When women and girls are online, they are more likely than men to experience sexual and gender-based digital violence such as sexual harassment, (physical) threats, cyberstalking, sextortion, hate campaigns, and misogyny. In addition, online SGBV is related to SGBV in the offline world. At the same time, the safety of women and girls should not be used as a pretext for restricting their (digital) rights.

*The agreed conclusions should therefore call upon Member States to:*

- develop policies, systems and tools to detect risk factors and underlying causes of (online) SGBV**, in order to **prevent SGBV**. Counteracting (negative) stereotypes, and unequal power relations and dependency relationships plays a crucial role in this. Specific attention should be paid to the role and responsibility of men and boys in preventing and combating (online) SGBV.
- improve and enforce laws and regulations on online and technology-facilitated SGBV**. Ratify the ILO Convention No. 190 and provide freely available, accessible, and effective help to victims of (online) SGBV<sup>4</sup>.
- respect and protect the online freedom of expression, autonomy, privacy, and safety** of women and girls in all their diversity.
- protect groups at particular risk**, such as (female) activists, politicians, defenders of gender equality and LGBTQI+ rights, Women Human Rights Defenders, and journalists **against (online) SGBV and persecution**.

### 4. Ensure full, equal and meaningful participation of women and girls in STEM, ICT and R&D sectors and in decision making processes at all levels

Women and girls are strongly underrepresented in (decision making) positions and careers in technical, ICT and R&D sectors. As a result, these sectors lack the knowledge, expertise and influence of women and girls. As a result, products and services do not sufficiently match the knowledge and needs of women and girls in all their diversity, in particular women and girls with fewer opportunities and privileges, in rural areas, in the global South, and indigenous women and girls. Moreover, it reproduces or reinforces existing inequalities.

*The agreed conclusions should therefore call upon Member States to:*

- challenge gender stereotypes and social norms** underlying the (digital) gender gap and the underrepresentation of women and girls in STEM, ICT and R&D at all levels. Among others, by increasing finance to (local) feminist, women's and youth(-led) organizations and by using female role models in male-dominated sectors.
- close the digital gender gap by improving **digital skills and literacy of women and girls** in all their diversity (see also recommendation 2) and achieving **equal representation, and inclusion**, of girls and women working in STEM, ICT and R&D sectors and training.
- promote **equal representation of women in leadership positions** in STEM, ICT and R&D sectors, by introducing quotas for women in leadership positions at all levels of education, science, government, and business.
- increase support for gender-transformative technologies and innovations by, among other things, **making Gender Impact Assessments and Gender Equality Plans mandatory** as a requirement **for financing** public and private (research) programs and organisations.

<sup>4</sup> For concrete actions see GREVIO General Recommendation No. 1 on the digital dimension of violence against women.