1 February 2017

**Call for inputs from industry and the tech community, as well as other relevant stakeholders, to a report on “ways to bridge the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective”**

**Deadline 15 February 2017**

Background

On 1 July 2016, the Human Rights Council adopted [Resolution 32/13](http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/RES/32/13) on “The promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet”.

Paragraph 13 of the resolution requests “the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to prepare a report on ways to bridge the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective, in consultation with States, the special procedures of the Human Rights Council, international organizations, national human rights institutions, civil society, industry, technical community and academia and other stakeholders, and to submit it to the Council at its thirty-fifth session” in June 2017.

For the preparation of this report, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) invites inputs from industry and the technical community, as well as from any other organizations engaged in activities related to the gender digital divide. For this purpose we have prepared a questionnaire (please see attached) and would appreciate your responses. Please feel free to address any other issues that may be considered useful for this report. We would also welcome receiving copies of recent reports or publications by your organization on this subject.

Submissions and responses to the questionnaire should be a **maximum of 5 pages** in length, and will be made available for consultation on the OHCHR website.

Please send submissions and responses by **15 February 2017** to registry@ohchr.org with the subject title: "Input to Report on ways to bridge the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective.”

For further information, please see http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WRGS/Pages/WaystoBridgetheGenderDigital.aspx

Questionnaire

For the preparation of this report, OHCHR would appreciate receiving information in response to the following questions:

**The meaning of the digital divide/extent of the problem**

1. Please identify the main obstacles and barriers faced by women and girls to access digital technologies and participate in digital life. Please elaborate on the nature **of** these obstacles and how they manifest themselves in practice (e.g. political, economic, social and legal factors, cultural and religious norms, education and literacy gaps, online violence, bullying and harassment, infrastructural constraints, security, affordability, lack of relevant content).

***Negative and limited portrayal of girls and women in media*** *is a key contributor to persistent stereotypes that impact their participation as social, political and economic actors of first order. This also contributes to over-representation of men in leadership and startup, and under-representation of girls and women in digital and male-dominated fields, in particular. Negative social attitudes and cultural norms very much impact access and use of digital technologies by girls and women, which persist from the the highest level of decision-making to the most local community level, everywhere in the world.*

***Educational systems, family, and civic and religious communities*** *all play a significant role in perpetuating negative stereotypes around STEM subjects which especially impact girls in their teens. At the point when teen boys begin to gain physical and academic parity with girls, a series of emotional, social and even physical factors have an effect on girls that turns them away from STEM studies. Most communities are not aware of the significant changes happening in the lives of teenagers during the period of 11-15 years — not to mention are they educated and equipped to address the resulting manifestations of these changes — which routinely ends with far fewer girls selecting STEM studies, and ultimately careers.*

***Access to female role models in STEM*** *for girls at critical decision-making points like the teenage years is also importnat and lacking.*

1. Does your company/organization consider the impact of its digital products, services, strategies and policies on women and girls?

*Our organisation has inclusive digital transformation as its mission and we therefore promote digital transformation to achieve inclusiveness in all its forms. In addition, we pursue specific actions — in the areas of advocacy and awareness-building, education and skills-development, entrepreneurship and innovation support, and research and consulting — to promote greater participation of girls and women in the digital transformation.*

1. Please indicate if your company/organization collects sex and gender disaggregated data regarding access, use and impact of digital technologies. Is this data openly published and accessible (in accordance with responsible data practices)? If possible, please provide such statistics.

*We rely on data from EUROSTAT and private sector studies with sex and gender disaggregated data regarding access, use and impact of digital technologies, and aggregate and report on primary data collected. We have sought to carry out primary research on this topic on a local and national level but get little support for this from private-sector organisations who have greatest access to important data sources.*

1. Please indicate if your company/organization has set measurable targets for gender equality in access and use of digital technologies and describe those targets and their effect.

*Our organization has external objectives which inform our actions to address the situation of gender equality in access and use of digital technologies. We have targets related to events organised, individuals reached, and women-led, tech-driven projects and enterprises incubated, launched, etc.*

1. How does your company/organization address the needs of diverse members of the female population in terms of accessing and participating in digital technologies, including women and girls belonging to ethnic or linguistic minorities, those living in extreme poverty or of low caste, those living in rural or marginalized urban areas, women and girls with disabilities, lesbian, transgender and intersex persons, elderly women etc.? What can companies/organizations do to ensure access to alternative communications mechanisms for those unable or unwilling to participate in digital technologies?

*We address the needs of diverse members of the female population by engaging in partnerships with grassroots organizations who are directly involved in the targeted communities. This is the best way to increase access and participation by girls and women of different socio-economic, ethnic, language, cultural, religious, sexual and other communities in digital technologies. Such organisations themselves often face the challenges of limited access to digital media and have their own digital media literacy problems. Capacity-building exercises for them and the women who often operate them, is therefore a critical success factor.*

**Human Rights implications of the gender digital divide for women and girls**

1. What is your company/organization doing to ensure that its interventions to bridge the gender digital divide, are based upon, and fully consistent with international human rights, including gender equality? Does it conduct impact assessments and/or consult with civil society, affected communities, and human rights experts? (You may wish to consider some key principles required to adopt a human rights-based approach *viz*.: accountability, equality and non-discrimination, participation, transparency, empowerment, sustainability, etc.).[[1]](#footnote-1)

*Our mission is to promote rights for girls and women through ESTEAM leadership (STEM plus Arts and Entrepreneurship). We therefore track our progress against KPIs for achieving our mission, and in this way, assume we are contributing to realization of the greater goals, though we are not yet in the position to measure this impact.*

1. How does your company/organization encourage the development and use of digital technologies as a resource for the empowerment of women and girls? How does it support the creation of online content, applications and services that reflect women’s needs and/or promote their rights? Does it support women’s rights organizations, women human rights defenders and women environmental activists to use these technologies (for example to access critical information, build knowledge, express thoughts and beliefs, form networks and communities and mobilise for change)? Please provide any relevant examples.

*We encourage the development and use of digital technologies as a resource for the empowerment of women and girls by carrying out four pillars of activity, in order to achieve our mission of “inclusive digital transformation,” that are expressly targeting girls and women with what we call “ESTEAM" skills: STEM plus Arts and Entrepreneurship. These areas of activity are: Awareness-building and Advocacy, Education and Skills Development, Innovation and Entrepreneurship Support, and Research and Consulting.*

1. Does your company/organization take into account the gender and ICT targets contained in the UN Sustainable Development Goals?[[2]](#footnote-2) Please elaborate.

*All of our work has the aim of promoting SDG #5, Gender Equality, by providing access to and skills in ICT for girls and women.*

1. Are you aware of any laws, policies or practices to address technology-related or technology-mediated violence against women and girls (e.g. cyber bullying, hate speech, stalking, sexual harassment, trafficking, manipulation of personal information and images)? Has your company/organization taken any specific actions to protect against, and respond to violence experienced by women and girls via technology platforms (e.g. policies, monitoring of content, providing mechanisms for reporting and redress)?

*We were one of the first global organizations involved in the ITU report on Cyberviolence; we carry out events giving girls and women the tools to themselves develop digitally-driven projects which directly address cyberviolence; and we actively advocate for uptake of the Istanbul Convention.*

1. Does your company/organization facilitate access to remedy in accordance with human rights principles and standards, where human rights harms may be caused or contributed to by connectivity initiatives (e.g. where an individual is threatened by internet-based content, or by illegitimate surveillance, limitations on freedoms of expressions, and other rights)?[[3]](#footnote-3)

*Not at this time.*

1. Has your company/organization considered how Big Data, the Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence and Ambient Intelligence may impact on the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective? Do you see a risk that women and girls may be discriminated against, or excluded by these technologies? Or are they likely to create new opportunities to promote gender equality and empowerment? How can companies/organizations influence design and standards to ensure these technologies are inclusive?

*We actively advocate for our mission, inclusive digital transformation, which directly addresses questions of empowerment, gender equality and the risks and opportunities presented by digital transformation. See for example the paper written by our founder, Cheryl Miller Van Dyck, in celebration of International Women's Day 2017: http://bit.ly/digitaldivideIWD17*

**Possible solutions for bridging the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective**

1. Is your company/organization taking measures to expand equal access and enhance the participation of women and girls in digital technologies as users, content creators, employees, entrepreneurs, innovators and leaders? Please elaborate on any initiatives, programs or other interventions you may be leading or supporting (including to address underlying causes of the gender digital divide).

*This is the very mission of our organization, and as such, we actively take measures to expand equal access and enhance the participation of women and girls in digital technologies as users, content creators, employees, entrepreneurs, innovators and leaders of various kinds. Key activities we organize in this direction are the following:*

***Digital Muse Girl Tech Fest:***  *One-day events targeting girls 11-15yo with ESTEAM skills, role models and tech “playtime”;*

***inQube “Move It Forward” female digital starter weekends:*** *Startup/Hackathon weekends targeting beginner teen and adult women with startup & digital skills for addressing challenges that disproportionately impact girls and women, like cyberviolence, women refugees & asylum-seeking, women in media, etc.;*

***CYPRO:*** *Cyber expert training and job placement for women with work experience;*

*Etc.*

1. Does your company/organization engage in public advocacy or participate in the Internet Governance Forum to promote gender-responsive policies on digital technologies? Do you support processes and mechanisms that enable the full, active and equal participation of women and girls in decision-making about how the Internet is shaped and governed?

*We advocate for a free and open internet especially among girls and women, and to the public at large, and would like to be more actively involved with the IGF on this matter.*

1. How can the industry and tech community be productively engaged in bridging the gender digital divide and improving the lived experience of women and girls online? What should be the responsibilities of different stakeholders to make digital inclusion a reality and ensure meaningful digital opportunities for all?

*There is no limit to how the private sector can be productively engaged in bridging the gender digital divide and improving the lived experience of women and girls online. Our private sector partners share resources —expertise, hardware and software, time, access to finance — with us and with our target girl and women stakeholders in order to deliver the mission and activity areas of DLI. They also sponsor and fund activities that we lead around our mission of inclusive digital transformation. More understanding of the social, political and economic value of inclusive digital transformation will lead to more initiatives that promote diversity among private (and hopefully public) sector organizations, as will the need to remain innovative and competitive in the digital transformation. Aligning these economic demands for companies with the social and political imperatives of girls and women, will undoubtedly result in greater opportunities for the girls and women themselves, which is our overriding concern. We are optimistic that this alignment is occurring, and are fully committed to engaging the required stakeholders to ensure it happens.*

1. Other human rights considerations that could/should be taken into consideration include freedoms of expression, association, religion or belief, freedom from violence, right to education, life, health, identity, an adequate standard of living, to participate in government and in cultural life, promotion of gender equality and rights of non-discrimination, rights of indigenous peoples, minority rights, rights of migrant workers, right to enjoy the benefits of scientific advancement, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For example, Goal 5.b Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women; Goal 9.c Significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, Principles 29 - 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)