WIDEF

THE TIME IS NOW:

Policy Actions to Close the Gender Digital Divide

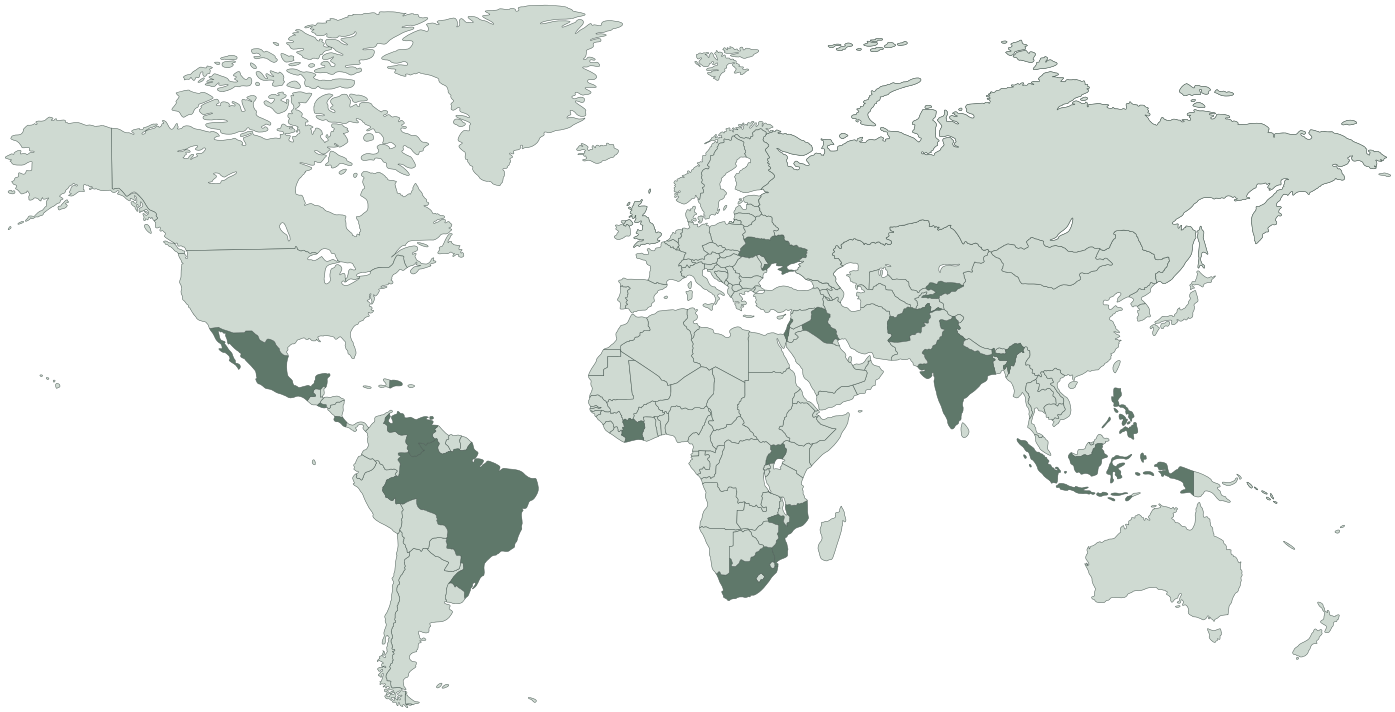
This WiDEF Policy Impact Report was produced by the Women in the Digital Economy Fund consortium, under the direction of Sonia Jorge, Global Digital Inclusion Partnership (GDIP). It was co-authored by Ingrid Brudvig, Jessica Brown, and Talant Sultanov of GDIP, and Madeleine Askham of GSMA. It further benefited from contributions of Christian Pennotti, Maria Rohani, and Revi Sterling of CARE; Waqas Hassan, Onica N. Makwakwa, Jaqueline Pateguana, and Evelyn Namara of GDIP; and Melle Tiel Groenestege and Claire Sibthorpe of GSMA.

The report benefitted from review, comments and guidance from WiDEF donors, including Diana Boncheva-Gooley, Lauren Grubbs, Thomas Koutsky, Hayley Pottle, and Gwen Snyder of USAID; and Zachary Kazzaz of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Copy editing: Jessica Brown, Kenneth Dimalibot, and Noluthando Leonorah Ncube

Layout and design: Kenneth Dimalibot and Roman Esguerra

Table of Contents



The Women in the Digital Economy Fund (WiDEF) is a joint effort between U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to accelerate progress on closing the gender digital divide. WiDEF identifies, directly funds, and accelerates investment in proven solutions to close the gender digital divide, improving women's livelihoods, economic security, and resilience. WiDEF is managed by CARE, the Global Digital Inclusion Partnership, and the GSMA Foundation.

This report is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the USAID. The contents are the responsibility of WiDEF and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

This report is based on research funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The findings and conclusions contained within are those of the WiDEF authors and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

USAID FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

BILL & MELINDA GATES foundation

care

Global Digital Inclusion Partnership

GSMA

Executive Summary

Women's meaningful participation within the digital economy remains one of the most pivotal ways in which we can achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Yet despite global efforts, including through the SDGs, the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW, 2021), and the G20's Leaders' commitment to halve the gender digital divide by 2030 (G20, 2023) progress remains detrimentally slow. In low-income countries, just one-fifth of women have access to the internet compared with one-third of men (ITU, 2023). The gender digital divide is even more pervasive in rural communities. It reflects existing societal gender disparities that, when not addressed comprehensively, will continue to harm women and girls and restrict women's rights to development, thriving livelihoods, and economic participation sustained by a growing digital economy. Closing the gender digital divide is not just about driving access and use of the internet for women, but creating a digital ecosystem that respects and enhances the rights of all people, is responsive to public interest, and is accountable to women's rights.

Lack of political leadership, ineffective and siloed approaches in addressing the multiple barriers to women's digital inclusion, and prevailing negative gender norms have all hindered long-term progress. As technology becomes more complex, we are at grave risk of leaving billions of women further behind, excluding them from experiencing and utilizing all that the digital world has to offer.

With the forthcoming adoption of the UN Global Digital Compact (GDC) and the UN Pact of the Future in September 2024, the Women in the Digital Economy Fund (WiDEF) is seizing this unique opportunity to re-energize and mobilize policymakers and the international community behind the women's digital inclusion agenda. Without intentionally addressing the gender digital divide, we will not achieve the broader visions for global digital transformation.

Until policymakers resolutely commit to and consistently implement gender-transformative digital policies, we will not close the gender digital divide. Research by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) in 2023 cited that "gender is referenced in only half of national overarching ICT policies or master plans," revealing major gaps and slow progress across countries to advancing gender equality and ensuring women and girls are not left behind in this digital age (ITU, 2023).

This report supports policymakers to accelerate the adoption of gender-transformative digital policies that directly address the root causes of gender inequalities. It outlines key considerations and clear recommendations around designing such policies by adopting women-centered, locally-driven policies, facilitating collaboration across the digital ecosystem, and ensuring digital inclusion strategies address restrictive social norms and cultural perceptions that prevent women and girls from fully participating in digital spaces. Comprehensive, context-specific, and coordinated policy approaches are essential to bridging the gender digital divide, driving socio-economic growth, and a thriving digital economy.

Key considerations for policymakers when designing gender-transformative policies include:

Adopt a consultative, women-centered, locally-driven approach to policy design and implementation.

Collect and publish sex-disaggregated data on ICT access, adoption, affordability, use, and attitudes. Ensure that policymakers are informed and educated about the gender digital divide and its detrimental impact on entire economies and all citizens.

Facilitate collaboration and coordinated action by diverse stakeholders in the digital ecosystem and across sectors through formal multi-stakeholder mechanisms and platforms.

Ensure digital inclusion strategies are centered in addressing and transforming social norms and cultural perceptions in efforts to overcome gender stereotyping and promote women's full and effective participation in the digital ecosystem.

Adopt time-bound, targeted, evidence-based solutions based on sex-disaggregated data and insights.

Ensure gender-transformative policies are adaptive to emerging technologies, including Artificial Intelligence and the effect they may have on women's digital inclusion.

Adopt a whole-of-government approach to ensure sustained impact.

This report also provides a selection of recent illustrative examples from the global majority and showcases promising signs of progress across five core areas, which WiDEF considers crucial in closing the gender digital divide: access and affordability of internet connectivity, devices and data, women-centered digital products and tools, digital literacy skills, online safety and security, sex-disaggregated data and insights. Each illustrative example presents promising steps with vast potential for impact. Varying degrees of actual implementation, however, also point to the pressing need to overcome common bottlenecks in order to truly advance women's digital inclusion.

Governments, the private sector, civil society, and the international development community must act now to advance women's digital inclusion, and to ensure equal opportunities for women and girls' to connect and participate meaningfully. Failure to act now means that low- and middle-income countries are on track to lose an estimated $500 billion USD in the next five years due to women's digital exclusion (GDIP, 2024).

Three first steps are required for governments to get on the right track—away from exorbitant policy failure and economic losses due to the persistent gender digital divide.

1. **Firstly, urgently reaffirm existing and new commitments to close the gender digital divide.** Where existing normative frameworks have failed to adequately address the gender digital divide, the UN Global Digital Compact has the potential to mobilize political will and new public resources and partnerships—supporting countries to advocate for the allocation of specific funds to tackle digital disparities, emphasizing the critical need to close the gender gap.

2. **Secondly, allocate dedicated financing and resources.** When resources are specifically dedicated to gender equality initiatives, the impact can be transformational—fostering greater participation of women in the digital economy and stimulating broader societal benefits, including increased access to employment, enhanced educational outcomes, and greater innovation, ultimately contributing to sustainable economic development and social equity. Governments, the private sector, and digital development partners all play a crucial role in financing women's digital inclusion.

3. **Thirdly, take bold, concrete actions to close the gender digital divide as part of wider development strategies.** Decision-makers can learn from existing promising practices through illustrative examples presented in this inaugural WiDEF Policy Impact Report, understand how to adapt and scale these to their contexts, and unlock significant social and economic opportunities for women.

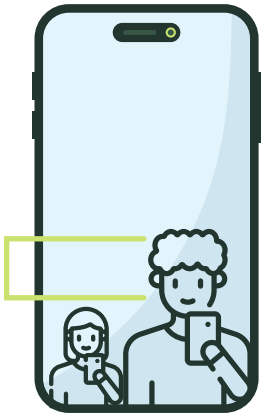
Closing the gender digital divide is achievable, but only if policymakers commit to implementing gender-transformative digital policies and fast-tracking financing solutions to promote women's inclusion in the digital economy. The time to act is now, ensuring millions of women are not left behind and excluded from the digital age.

The Gender Digital Divide—What's at Stake?

*The internet has the **power to transform livelihoods**, **increase economic security** and **build resilience**, especially for women in marginalized communities.*

Despite the fact that the internet is inherently an open, non-exclusive, and decentralized technology, globally, there remains an entrenched and significant gender digital divide, with 244 million more men than women using the internet in 2023 (ITU, 2023). While multiple stakeholders have made concerted efforts to close this gap, disparities based on key factors such as geography, educational level, gender and economic status persist (GDIP, 2024).

While this is a global issue, regional differences exist. Of the 785 million women who are still not using mobile internet in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), around 60% live in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa (GSMA, 2024). In low-income countries, just 20% of women use the internet, compared with 34% of men (ITU, 2023). The divide is not only pervasive across regions, but also within countries. Rural communities worldwide remain significantly more unconnected, underconnected, and left behind (GDIP, 2024). This disparity continues to exist despite the visible impact of women driving innovation and solutions to some of the world's most pressing challenges. It is vital that women can use digital technologies at their disposal to enhance and meet their life needs. Barriers to connectivity are not limited to broadband coverage, as factors such as affordability (particularly of devices and data packages) skills, relevant, content, and digital safety also contribute to what is known as the "usage gap" (GSMA, 2024).



244 million

more men than women using the internet in 2023. In low-income countries, just 20% of women use the internet, compared with 34% of men. (ITU, 2023).

The social, economic, and human development costs of the gender digital divide are significant. The gender digital divide has a direct and negative effect on global development, and inhibits global goals of creating inclusive societies and economies (Banyan Global, USAID, 2020). The gender digital divide significantly hampers global economic growth, with low- and middle-income countries on track to lose an estimated $500 billion USD in the next five years due to women's digital exclusion (GDIP, 2024). For context, this is double Nigeria's forecasted annual GDP for 2024 (IMF, 2024).

Closing the divide would result not only in more equitable access to the internet but also provide women and girls with exponentially more opportunities. The internet and emerging technologies could help women to be more connected, and provide access to critical life-saving information and services, including health, education, financial services, income generation, and livelihood opportunities. Digital inclusion is vital to advancing gender equality and ensuring women and girls are not left behind in this digital age (Banyan Global, USAID, 2024).

The gender digital divide is not solely, or even primarily, a technological issue. It is a result of systemic social-cultural, political, economic, and gender inequalities. These manifest in discrimination and restrictive gender norms: society's expectations of how women and girls should behave and engage in their communities. This limits or restricts their expression, access to information and participation in the public sphere, creating gender biases that further limit women's economic participation, including when it comes to the access and use of digital technologies. For example, across the LMICs surveyed by the GSMA, lack of family approval was reported as a barrier preventing girls and women from using mobile phones and mobile internet, to differing degrees (GSMA, 2022). Their access to the internet may be limited to specific applications or content as a result of social or cultural norms and safety concerns and in more conservative settings women can face restrictions to social connections outside the family (GSMA, 2024). The barriers that prevent women from being digitally included are, in many ways, the same ones that prevent gender equality across societies and economies more broadly.

Addressing the multiple barriers to women's inclusion

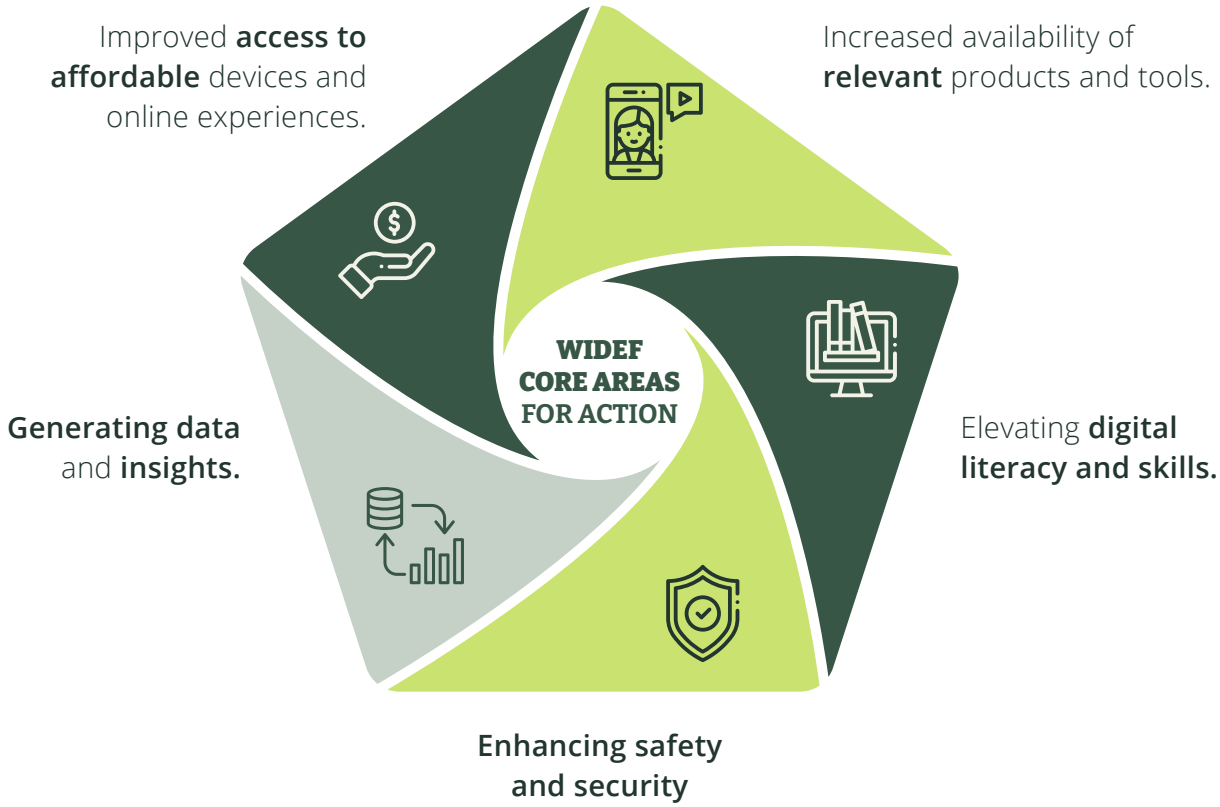
In the digital age, the internet can be a key enabler of women's rights and gender equality; however multiple barriers prevent this from happening. These barriers exacerbate low confidence levels, trust issues, and the perceived lack of relevance of the internet, services, and the benefits afforded by digital technology among women. Closing the gender digital divide by addressing these interlinked barriers would not only result in more equitable access to the internet, but would also provide women and girls with exponentially more opportunities.

Closing the gender digital divide would not only transform the lives of women and girls around the globe, it would transform the global economy.

It is essential to design gender transformative digital policies to address the multiple barriers that prevent women's digital inclusion and ability to reach meaningful connectivity. This includes a comprehensive and holistic approach across the five core areas outlined below, as well as particular attention to discriminatory gendered social norms and behaviors. Ensuring digital inclusion strategies center on addressing and transforming social norms and cultural perceptions is crucial in efforts to overcome gender stereotyping and increase women's full, effective, and meaningful participation in the digital ecosystem.

Definition: "Meaningful connectivity" is a level of connectivity that allows users to enjoy a safe, satisfying, enriching and productive online experience at an affordable cost (ITU, 2022).
Source: UN Framework for Meaningful Connectivity Background Paper (2022)

Anchored in the UN's Framework for Meaningful Connectivity (ITU, 2024), WiDEF calls for the adoption of gender-transformative policies which encompass five core areas that can act as enablers to achieve meaningful connectivity. Below we provide a brief overview of the barriers as well as WiDEF's approaches to address these barriers (Banyana Global, USAID, 2020).



Barrier	WIDEF Core Area for Action
Access and Affordability Access to and affordability of devices and data remains a key challenge, with women earning lower wages globally, and having less decision-making power over the discretionary allocation of household resources. Women are more restricted in their mobility than men and experience time poverty due to competing household priorities. They tend to be self-employed with fluctuating income. This also impacts their ability to access devices which could improve their income.	Improving access and affordability could be achieved through accelerated connectivity efforts and delivering internet-enabled devices into the hands of women. Devices and services, including digital finance and data, should be affordable, reliable, secure, and accessible.
Relevance For women to adopt and use digital products and tools, these must be tailored to their needs and fit seamlessly into their everyday lives. The existing or perceived lack of relevance of the internet and specific products and tools acts as a significant barrier to women's adoption of the internet. The issue of relevance is intertwined with other challenges such as high connection costs, lack of time to access and use the internet due to caregiving responsibilities (UN Women, 2023), limited digital skills, low confidence and know-how with technology, poor connectivity (eg. slow speed), and experience or perceived risk of online harms (GDIP, 2024).	Increasing women-centered relevant digital products and tools tailored toward women in rural, remote, and resource-constrained areas could be made possible through the incentivization of government agencies, the private sector, civil society, and other stakeholders to develop content, tools, educational opportunities, and products for all women.
Digital Literacy and Skills Many women report lack of the necessary skills, know-how and confidence to access and navigate online platforms, making the internet inaccessible and intimidating. This gap in digital literacy not only limits women and girls' ability to benefit from digital resources but also reinforces a cycle of exclusion where women are less likely to seek internet access due to fears of inadequacy, or discriminatory gender norms which limit their educational abilities and prospects in using digital devices. Women generally have less free time available to attend skill-building activities due to daily income-generating activities and care work (GDIP, 2024).	Integrating digital and media literacy skills and gender-responsive learning and development into education curricula and non-formal, public education initiatives could be facilitated through sensitization campaigns and investment in capacity development and knowledge-sharing activities.

Barrier	WIDEF Core Area for Action
Safety and Security Concerns Women face unparalleled surveillance, technology-facilitated gender-based violence, harassment, infringements on privacy, and threats to digital user protection, leading many to face a punishing trade-off between participation in the digital economy and access to human/women's rights. The gender-based violence that many women face also inhibits uptake of the internet and digital tools. Digital tools make it possible to extend threats and acts of gender-based violence across online and offline spaces.	Enhancing safety and security as more women enter the digital economy requires strengthened legislation and policies that recognize, prevent, and punish acts of technology-facilitated gender-based violence and online harassment. This should be done alongside consumer financial protection, data protection, cybersecurity, and fraud prevention, ensuring that all policies uphold an intersectional, human rights/digital rights-based approach.
Lack of Data Available to Inform Digital Gender Policies Countries continue to lack nationally representative sex-disaggregated data in the ICT sector. Sex-disaggregated data on internet access and use, meaningful connectivity, financial inclusion, and gig work is needed to inform digital gender policies and develop targeted solutions. Without a comprehensive evidence base policymakers are left in the dark as to which women and which communities remain unconnected.	Generating data and insights through collaborations for responsible data use is also essential, as it addresses data gaps and enables the ongoing monitoring of the gender digital divide. This can be achieved through the expansion of sex-disaggregated data collection, focusing on factors that influence gender disparities in internet adoption. Sex-disaggregated data, analyzed based on specific demographic intersectionalities, is critical for ongoing monitoring and closing the gender digital divide.

Building on the already established, community based, national, regional, and global efforts to close the gender digital divide, WiDEF aims to catalyze progress in the above five core areas. Leveraging the expertise, experience and connections of the WiDEF consortium partners (CARE, GDIP, and GSMA) and donors (USAID and Gates Foundation) it will bring together diverse stakeholders to reshape an enabling digital ecosystem; and provide a renewed sense of direction on the key areas and actions needed to have an impact. A critical factor in WiDEF's success is promoting an enabling policy and regulatory environment that encourages the testing of promising approaches and supports the scale up of proven solutions.

Key Considerations for Designing Gender-Transformative Policies for Inclusive Digital Economies

The cost of women's digital exclusion is evident. To achieve the goals of digital equality for sustainable development, policymakers need to adopt tailored, gender-transformative policies to close the gender digital divide. This includes an intentional and deliberate effort to embed a gender perspective across all digital-related policy formulation and implementation.

In this report, we present an overview of key considerations and promising practices that policymakers must adopt. These examples showcase how the integration of gender in ICT policies may be achieved to successfully deliver on new and existing commitments to close the gender digital divide.

Definition: Gender-transformative policies refers to *"solutions that directly aim to transform power dynamics and structures that maintain gender inequalities. Goes beyond the "symptoms" of gender inequality to address the norms, attitudes, behaviors and social systems that underlie them"* (UN Women, 2023).

Designing for women's inclusion

A consultative, women-centered, locally-driven approach to policy design and implementation. Designing relevant and inclusive solutions that reach women requires an intersectional lens; consulting with women in all their diversity and understanding how multiple forms of discrimination may simultaneously impact their experiences. This must be from the beginning and throughout policy development. Centering women in the design of policies will ensure that solutions are contextual, relevant and appropriate to meet women's needs; crucial to facilitating the use of mobile devices, particularly smartphones, internet, digital finance, and other technologies to make a positive impact in women's lives. Policy interventions must be tailored to women in different contexts, including in rural, remote and resource-constrained areas; and to reach women who are illiterate or have low literacy levels. Outreach can be done, for example, by leveraging innovative video and audio platforms and offline solutions to reach unconnected women.

Compile and publish national sex-disaggregated data on ICT access, adoption, affordability, use, attitudes, financial inclusion, and digital jobs from both public and private sectors. Sex-disaggregated data is vital to inform meaningful solutions. The collection of sex-disaggregated data must become a regular and embedded practice in policy-making across sectors, and must be integrated as part of the national census and public data collection efforts. Sex-disaggregated data must not be an "after-thought" but a core component to designing meaningful, effective, and impactful policies. Sex-disaggregated data is not only important to monitor and assess the impact of initiatives on women, or to meet gender targets - it is a necessary prerequisite to effectively formulate, influence, and develop policies to be

relevant and meaningful. Sex-disaggregated data is also crucial for policymakers to make the case for "why closing the gender digital divide matters", to effectively secure funding for initiatives and to sustain programs. The private sector also plays a critical role in supporting sex-disaggregated data collection to be able to deliver more relevant and effective products and services to women and to reach a wider and more inclusive customer base.

Facilitate collaboration and coordinated action by diverse stakeholders in the digital ecosystem and across sectors through formal multi-stakeholder mechanisms and platforms. Closing the gender digital divide will only happen if all members of the digital ecosystem step up and take action, from government policymakers to regulators, donors, the private sector, technical community, civil society, and international organizations working in the diverse digital economy space. We need to reshape the digital ecosystem towards inclusive digital development and multi-stakeholder collaboration if we are to fully address the challenges that lead to women's digital exclusion. Critically, policymakers must ensure that women and girls are formally consulted and their voices and perspectives embedded into digital and cross-sectoral policy-making—ensuring policies and strategies around the digital economy, but also, gender, education, health, and others, are coordinated and responsive to the realities of women and girls trying to improve their lives.

Ensure digital inclusion strategies focus on transforming social norms and cultural perceptions to overcome gender stereotyping and promote women's full participation in the digital ecosystem. This includes collaborating and working with different powerholders and gatekeepers through consultative and co-leadership models, including men and boys, families, communities, governments, political decision-makers including parliamentarians and judges, faith leaders, media, and others to help raise awareness of the benefits of digital access, and help women and girls feel safe, confident, and empowered to use digital technologies and platforms. This may include sensitization campaigns, educational outreach, and local leadership leading narrative change through community-based solutions.

Adopt time-bound, evidence-based targets based on sex-disaggregated data and insights. Collecting sex-disaggregated data across multiple social and economic metrics will enable policymakers to target specific demographics or groups of women with their digital inclusion strategies. Collecting gender data will inform best practice and enable greater impact, sustainability, and scalability, while addressing the root causes of digital inequality. Generating this evidence base of sex-disaggregated data and insights requires collaboration amongst stakeholders in the digital ecosystem to assess and address data gaps that hinder continuous monitoring of the gender digital divide. This requires expanding the collection and responsible use of digital inclusion data, prioritizing sex-disaggregated age, geography, economic status, and disability-associated data. Data and insights must also seek to ask and answer new questions about social norms and factors that influence gender disparities in internet adoption. Women-centric evaluation methodologies must be used to measure the impact of relevant policies and initiatives.

Ensure that gender-transformative policies are adaptive to emerging technologies, including Artificial Intelligence, and address the potential impact these technologies may have on women's digital inclusion. Gender-transformative policies must deeply understand how emerging technologies facilitate or inhibit progress in closing the gender digital divide and, in some cases, increase barriers to women's internet adoption. Policies must also be equipped to mitigate the potential negative impacts of emerging technologies, including Artificial Intelligence (AI). Emerging technologies, such as AI, often inadvertently reinforce gender norms and stereotypes, which can worsen women's digital exclusion and socio-economic marginalization (Women At The Table, 2024). For instance, AI systems frequently rely on data points that do not represent women and marginalized groups' experiences adequately, or that reinforce historical bias. The pace at which these developments evolve warrants urgent action to ensure that the gender digital divide is closed. If AI models continue to be heavily informed by male experiences and forgo the intentional inclusion of women's experiences, they will contribute to further exclusion and inequality in increasingly digital economies.

Adopt a whole-of-government approach to ensure there is sustained impact. Gender-transformative digital policies must transcend ministerial portfolios and apply across policy silos. For women's digital inclusion strategies to be successfully implemented, a cross-government approach is needed. From ministries of health, education, gender, social protection, and finance, to communications and technology, to central banks and state agencies, there must be a collaborative and coordinated effort that addresses the wide-ranging barriers that prevent women's internet access.

*"In order to ensure the effectiveness of these policies, policy makers should actively engage with women and women's organizations to ensure that their voices are heard and perspectives included in policy design and implementation. By including women in the decision-making process, policy makers can better understand the specific challenges faced by women and tailor solutions to meet their needs. Ultimately, promoting digital financial inclusion for women requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the multifaceted barriers they face and empowers them to participate fully in the digital economy." (World Bank, 2024)**

* World Bank. "Promoting Women's Digital Financial Inclusion: Overcoming Barriers and Fostering Gender Equality. A Toolkit for Practitioners."

Progress and Implementation in the Five WiDEF Core Areas - Illustrative Examples

This collection of illustrative examples includes a compilation of recent country-level policy and programming examples, presented here to share approaches taken in global majority countries to address the gender digital divide. These case studies document promising practices for decision makers to learn about diverse approaches taken across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, to consider if and how such policies and initiatives may be customized to local contexts, and to inspire immediate action by policy makers on the next steps forward.

Recognizing that while the full impact of initiatives in some cases is yet to be realized, valuable insights can still be gained from the examples' conceptualization and implementation. Not all of the following examples are policy initiatives or government-initiated, but they still provide useful lessons and contribute to a supportive, collaborative, and enabling policy ecosystem. More activities and projects like these must be prioritized and funded in the future to reach the critical mass needed to move along the continuum from 'promising' solutions to those 'proven' to be impactful in closing the gender digital divide. Focusing on promising practices allows us to learn from relevant projects and initiatives to give policymakers an accurate picture and representation of the opportunities and challenges impacting the digital divide today.

Making Sex-Disaggregated Data Public to Address the Gender Digital Divide

It is important to note that, across the initiatives reviewed in this report, sex-disaggregated data is often not publicly available. Public communication on digital inclusion initiatives - their existence, success, and lessons learned - is important for all stakeholders to not only document the possibilities for support available to the public, but also to exchange lessons learned within and across countries. Communication is a vital component for policymakers to garner public interest, partnerships, and future resources. Policymakers, media, and researchers must be sensitive in documenting women's experiences of harm, like technology-facilitated abuse, while ensuring ethical consent and protecting privacy, safety, and security.

Successful gender-transformative policies have at least three key elements which are integral to their existence, evolution, sustainability, and success. These elements were evident across the examples reviewed:

Committed leadership

Multi-stakeholder consultation

Targeted interventions informed by sex-disaggregated data

Affordability and Accessibility[2]

Dominican Republic

Targeting women-led households through INDOTEL's Social Digital Basket Initiative in the Dominican Republic

Stage/ Timescale: 2021-2022

What: Instituto Dominicano de las Telecomunicaciones (INDOTEL) designed the Social Digital Basket pilot as part of the Biannual Plan 2021-2022 'Connect the Unconnected' to provide a partial subsidy of internet service and a smartphone to low-income and female heads of households (BNamericas, 2021). INDOTEL identified via national statistics that the majority of the country's impoverished and unconnected households are women-headed households. The initiative supported 2,000 women heads of household with a subsidized smartphone and data package that allowed women to sustain and grow their businesses. The program was renewed through 2024 and went on to support an additional 4,300 women heads of household in 38 municipal areas (EL Caribe, 2024). Although the number may not seem to be high on a national level, this is still a substantial figure given that the beneficiaries represent the most impoverished communities.

Who: Dominican Republic's ICT and telecommunication regulator, INDOTEL

Why is this a promising practice? This initiative is informed by national data that recognizes the high numbers of women-headed households in the country; and found that impoverished households and unconnected households are more likely to be women-headed. The intervention is based on data-driven evidence on the importance of investing in women not only to close the digital divide but also to address economic inequalities.

[2] Note that some of these examples are cross-cutting across themes - although they are reflected under Access and Affordability, several also address Digital Literacy and Skills

Uganda

Equipping rural households with solar-powered tablets, data, and digital literacy training through Uganda's Universal Service and Access Fund (UCUSAF)

Stage/ Timescale: Initiated in 2021 - Ongoing

What: In Uganda, thousands of low-income rural households received solar-powered tablets preloaded with data under UCUSAF, as proof of concept on the role of ICTs in eradicating household poverty. By December 2023, it reached 54 districts and 10,706 households nationwide, with a notable impact on women and children's digital skills and access to educational resources (GDIP, 2024).

Women received disproportionate gains from this program primarily because the tablets were intended for household use and were enforced to remain at home. Women in the participating communities often spend more time at home, so had greater access to these devices, to leverage it for their benefit. The availability of the devices at home provided women with the tools necessary to expand their economic activities and maintain vital social connections with family and friends. The Rural Household Devices Project aims to bridge the digital divide by addressing affordability barriers, including low smartphone and device ownership and access to data, to promote the usage of ICTs in selected villages and households, and influence adoption into the wider community. The project has enhanced digital literacy by providing training and has increased access to information for economic and livelihood opportunities, spurring health, education, and lifestyle changes (GDIP, 2024). The initiative positively impacted the socioeconomic landscape of selected communities, with transformative outcomes in education, economic activities, and internet connectivity. Two-thirds of participants reported increased income due to the use of the tablet for business activity. The benefits of saved time and money are widely reported (GDIP, 2024).

Who: Uganda Communications Universal Services and Access Fund (UCUSAF)

Why is this a promising practice? This is an example of a Universal Service and Access Fund (USAF) that has invested in community-centered connectivity and digital inclusion in targeted underserved areas, based on the commitment of its leadership. This highlights the opportunity for policymakers to leverage USAFs to resource and fund community access, and to commit to the use of USAFs for affordable access, digital literacy, and relevant content to the unconnected. The program provides a direct subsidy and digital skills training to rural communities where lack of connectivity and affordability creates extreme barriers to digital inclusion, especially for large households. The program has enabled access and affordability of devices and data. It has also provoked a wider awareness and perceived value of ICTs for education and livelihoods.

Brazil

Brazil's $5 billion USD collaborative investment strategy spurs digital transformation and meaningful connectivity in its remote regions

Stage/ Timescale: 2023-2026

What: Brazil has been actively working to enhance its digital infrastructure, particularly in remote regions, through the installation of Wi-Fi networks and connectivity. With a $5 billion USD (R$28 billion BRL) investment dedicated to addressing connectivity issues, especially in the Amazon, the country aims to promote digital inclusion and bridge the digital divide. These public funds are expected to attract additional private financing. This targeted investment is expected to drive economic growth and social development across the country. The program is informed by research and analysis conducted on the state of meaningful connectivity in the country, which provides a comprehensive picture of current inequalities and gaps by gender, race, socio-economic status, location and more. Furthermore, as part of its Strategy for Digital Transformation, the government has initiated various programs including support to educators in integrating technologies in schools and into teaching methods to enhance student learning. Advisory services are available to assist small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in their technology investments (WEF, 2024).

Who: Ministry of Communications and Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation

Why is this a promising practice? The Brazilian Government's Growth Acceleration Program (PAC) is an example of a policy of investing into the improvement of digital inclusion and connectivity (Digital Watch Observatory, 2023). Collaboration among government ministries, educational institutions, and industry stakeholders is a key aspect of Brazil's strategy. This collaboration supports the alignment of technology strategies with education initiatives, fostering an enabling environment for skills development.

Relevant Products and Tools

Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Ecuador, Venezuela, Ukraine and Palestine

Virtual Safe Spaces co-created by women and girls

Stage/ Timescale: Initiated pilot in Iraq and Lebanon in 2018; live platform expanded to 7 countries and scaling to 15 by the end of 2024

What: Laaha[3] UNICEF's virtual safe space, has reached over 350,000 women and girls globally, providing vital information on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) through 120+ modules in seven languages. Developed with input from over 500 users, Laaha ensures safety with anonymous browsing, quick exit buttons, and no data collection. It features a moderated user forum for community support and an interactive chatbot for personalized guidance. Laaha's comprehensive, user-centered design offers a secure and empowering environment, effectively addressing online and offline safety concerns.

Who: UNICEF and partners

Why is this a promising practice? This initiative is a strong example of providing tools and services relevant to girls and women by inviting them to co-create and engage with the platform from the very beginning. It responds directly to the needs and requests of the end users as it continues to evolve and scale. Safety-by-design was also built in from the start, ensuring the platform remains a virtual safe space even as it grows and expands to include multiple ways of engagement including through moderated forums, podcasts, games, and videos (UNICEF, 2021). While not a policy imperative, initiatives such as these could benefit from government funding and collaboration to overcome safety concerns, ensure digital platforms are relevant, and encourage greater internet adoption among girls and women.

[3] Laaha. "Country Selector." Accessed September 5, 2024. https://laaha.org/country-selector

Kyrgyzstan

Sanarip Insan[4] - promoting equal opportunities for women in rural Kyrgyzstan through digital services and digital skills trainings

Stage/ Timescale: The project implementation is completed, but monitoring and evaluation is ongoing

What: The project (a) increased social and economic opportunities for youth and women by providing trainings on preparing them for active involvement in the digital economy through e-commerce and e-tourism trainings and on access to Digital Public Infrastructure (DPIs) and Digital Public Goods (DPGs); and (b) improved their resilience to emerging risks and threats, through digital and media literacy skills. As a result, 2.5 million people viewed educational videos on TV, 150,000 students and 10,000 teachers received access to materials through online educational platforms. In partnership with the GSMA Foundation, the MISTT mobile literacy training was translated into Kyrgyz and Russian, localized, printed into physical textbooks, made available electronically, and distributed via TV and radio (GSMA, 2023). As the outcome of in-person training on e-commerce and e-tourism, about 500 new jobs were created by women entrepreneurs in rural areas. Some of the provinces which had no guest house listings on hospitality platforms such as Booking and Airbnb now have several new businesses registered. Some of the businesses that operated only offline, saw their incomes increase two-three fold after going online. This pilot demonstrated that even in certain contexts, basic digital skills training can have a major impact on lives. Many women and youth learned how to access digital government services through DPIs such as Tunduk Interoperability Platform, based on Estonian X-Road and Tunduk Digital Services App. There is a need for more of such activities especially in rural areas with focus on vulnerable communities, including women and youth.

Who: Internet Society (ISOC) Kyrgyz Chapter in partnership with government agencies

Why is this a promising practice? A case of a multi stakeholder cooperation of the government agencies, local municipalities, development partners, private sector, and civil society

[4] Internet Society Kyrgyz Chapter. "Sanarip Insan." Accessed September 5, 2024 .https://isoc.kg/sanaripinsan/

Digital Literacy and Skills

Ghana

Digital literacy program with gender targets and community sensitization in Ghana

Stage/ Timescale: Ongoing

What: Ghana Investment Fund for Electronic Communications (GIFEC) facilitates the implementation of universal access in underserved communities by delivering connectivity, establishing community ICT centers, and providing digital literacy and skills training as part of the institution's policy priorities. The ITU awarded GIFEC for excellence in providing innovative ICT solutions with social impact (Citi Newsroom, 2018). The government remains committed to implementing ICT capacity building programs as one of three top policy priority areas for GIFEC, along with Rural Connectivity and the Cyberlab Program. GIFEC was motivated to address gender issues in its implementation of programs based on research and data on the gender digital divide, and buy-in from the ministry and its policy directive. Project implementation involves direct involvement of community leaders and engaging with local artisanal associations (e.g. dressmakers, mechanics, hairdressers) and local NGOs to identify beneficiaries, reaching a gender quota. Sensitization of community members in rural areas has led to greater support for digital skills initiatives.[5] The digital skills curriculum is created and delivered based on content that reflects women's local realities, and it is delivered in safe spaces that provide childcare. Over 14,000 women and girls were trained, and the majority of the girls who participated pursued further ICT and STEM studies in secondary and tertiary education (Asaase Radio, 2023).

Who: Ghana Investment Fund for Electronic Communications (GIFEC)

Why is this a promising practice? This is an example of a government policy of supporting ICT capacity building programs with gender targets through dedicated financing mechanisms such as the GIFEC, Rural Connectivity, and the Cyberlab Program. GIFEC was motivated to address gender issues in its implementation of programs. A case of innovative ICT solutions with social impact. A key success factor has been the intentional and direct involvement of community leaders, local associations, NGOs, and power holders to drive sensitization campaigns and increase women and girls' involvement in programs; delivering content that is tailored to local women's daily realities.

[5] Based on interview with GIFEC

Indonesia

The National Movement on Digital Literacy #Siberkreasi for achieving gender equality in Indonesia with a focus on "positive uses" of the internet

Stage/ Timescale: 2017 - Ongoing

What: The National Movement on Digital Literacy #Siberkreasi is a pioneering initiative by the Indonesian government aimed at promoting digital literacy among all citizens including women. The program places importance on digital skills and seeks to empower women with the knowledge and tools to navigate the digital landscape effectively. It includes a combination of training sessions, workshops, and educational resources that cater specifically to the needs of women, enabling women to harness the power of technology for personal and professional growth. By prioritizing digital literacy, the Indonesian government is not only fostering greater economic opportunities for women but also strengthening their participation in various aspects of society. Through this campaign, women are gaining the confidence to engage with technology, get information, and connect with others in an increasingly digital world. The Indonesia Digital Literacy Campaign recognizes the pivotal role of digital literacy in achieving gender equality. The program also focuses on "positive uses of the internet" to counter hate speech, bullying, online harassment, etc. From the government side, the solution relies on establishing and adopting a systematic national movement on digital literacy that endorses the positive usage of the internet (ITU, 2017). Siberkreasi received an award from the United Nations and International Telecommunication Union at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Prizes in Geneva, Switzerland, in the Capacity Building category.

Who: Multiple government agencies, including the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Children Protection, as well as private sector and civil society partners (more than 60 national level institutions and communities have collaborated in this national movement)

Why is this a promising practice? This is an illustrative example of mobilizing over 60 partners from different stakeholder groups around the important idea of improving digital literacy.

Costa Rica

Gender-targeted digital literacy programs in Costa Rica

Stage/ Timescale: Ongoing

What: Costa Rica is pioneering gender in digital policy efforts in promoting women's access to technology through initiatives like the National Telecommunications Development Plan (Plan Nacional de Desarrollo de Telecomunicaciones), which includes digital programs that target female-headed households and elderly women. These programs provide training, digital literacy, and resources to empower women to use technology effectively. For example, the plan commits to training 6,000 people over the age of 40 (at least 50% women) in the use of ICT by 2027.

Who: Central government

Why is this a promising practice? This case shows how the inclusion of gender-responsive indicators in initiatives targeting specific groups of women (e.g. women-headed households, elderly women) in national development programs has helped close the gender digital divide based on an intersectional approach—that is, targeting specific demographics of women based on socio-economic status. To increase digital use, it is important to understand women's diverse needs, circumstances and challenges. Setting indicators for targeted outreach ensures policymakers are fully committed to reaching a diverse demographic of women and their communities, including the hardest to reach.

Enhancing Safety and Security

Mexico

"Olimpia Law" to combat gender-based digital violence including non-consensual dissemination of intimate images and materials

Stage/ Timescale: Introduced in 2020

What: The "Olimpia Law" (named after Mexican activist Olimpia Coral Melo) has set legal precedents in Mexico and across countries in Latin America for recognizing and penalizing gender-based digital violence. As of 2022, this national legislation resulted in 35 legal reforms across 28 local state legislatures in Mexico to provide legal recourse for different forms of online violence and abuse in their principal laws on ending violence against women. This includes criminalization of sextortion, threats, cyber harassment, sexual harassment, and non-consensual image sharing (UN Women, 2022). There are, however, high levels of impunity reported as associated with gender-based violence in Mexico (RESURJ, 2020), which affects how victims access justice (OHCHR, 2023).

Who: Mexican government and state legislatures, informed by activist groups (Latin Dispatch, 2020)

Why is this a promising practice? This example highlights the importance of national legal reform and frameworks to combat technology-facilitated gender-based violence, informed by women's activist movements and accelerated by high level leadership; there have been cases where individuals have been prosecuted and convicted under this law in efforts to address digital violence and protect victims, particularly women, from online abuse and harassment.

India

Scheme for Cyber Crimes Prevention against Women and Children in India

Stage/ Timescale: Initiated in 2017 - Ongoing (Government of India, 2023)

What: The Ministry of Home Affairs in partnership with the Ministry of Women and Child Development developed the Scheme for Cyber Crimes Prevention against Women and Children. Over $13 million USD was issued to the country's states for implementation (OpenGov Asia, 2019).

This initiative includes an online reporting program for addressing and resolving cybercrimes; resources for a cyber forensic training laboratory, capacity building, and training in each state to assist and improve law enforcement response, a research and development unit to improve technology readiness for response, and an awareness creation unit to disseminate education and awareness campaigns in the prevention of technology-facilitated gender-based violence. As a result, awareness about cybercrime was introduced as a component of the school curriculum (OpenGov Asia, 2019). The National Commission of Women also launched a WhatsApp number to provide easily accessible support and assistance to women experiencing all forms of violence, including online violence (NORC, 2022).

Who: Indian Ministry of Home Affairs in partnership with the Ministry of Women and Child Development and the National Commission of Women

Why is this a promising practice? This example demonstrates India's coordinated multi-sector response across institutions; and complementarity of both direct assistance to victims and preventative work such as awareness campaigns, capacity strengthening of government institutional response at the state and national levels.

Generating Data and Insights

Mozambique

Sex-disaggregated ICT data in national census in Mozambique

Stage/ Timescale: Initiated in 2015 through national multi-stakeholder consultations

What: Mozambique's National Institute of Statistics adopted sex-disaggregated ICT indicators in the national census to provide more accurate data and insights into women's ICT access and use. Mozambique now publishes census survey data on ICT access, adoption and use by women and men at both the individual and household level. Sex-disaggregated ICT data has been used to inform policies to close the gender digital divide (GDIP, 2024).

Who: National Institute of Statistics

Why is this a promising practice? This example demonstrates political commitment for the long-term and sustainable collection of sex-disaggregated ICT data through the national census to inform evidence-based policymaking. Such information allows the governments to implement informed gender-targeted policy interventions.

Philippines

Women and ICT Development Index (WIDI) Survey to strengthen sex-disaggregated ICT data collection

Stage/ Timescale: Initiated in 2022

What: The Women and ICT Development Index (WIDI) Survey data are intended to inform gender-responsive ICT policy development. In addition to commissioning gender and ICT surveys to inform policy-making on women's digital inclusion, the government's Gender and Development (GAD) budget policy directs all government departments and agencies to allocate a minimum of 5% of total annual budgets to finance gender programs, projects, and initiatives. Gender mainstreaming is led by gender focal points, whose role is to drive gender-responsive policies and programs (GDIP, 2024).

Who: Philippine Statistics Authority

Why is this a promising practice? This case highlights the critical importance of political commitment to gender budgeting, which requires sex-disaggregated data for relevant and meaningful implementation, including resource mobilization.

South Africa

Consumer Advisory Panel including representatives of persons with disabilities, women, youth, senior citizens and people living in ICT under-served areas

Stage/ Timescale: Updated regulations in 2022 and 2023

What: The ICT-sector regulator in South Africa, the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA), hosts an active Consumer Advisory Panel, composed of members nominated through a public process, including representatives of persons with disabilities, women, youth, senior citizens and people living in ICT under-served areas. The Consumer Advisory Panel conducts stakeholder engagement and advocacy programs throughout South Africa to identify critical consumer insights and concerns, and to promote consumer interests throughout the country (GDIP, 2024).

Who: Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA)

Why is this a promising practice? This example highlights the importance of effective multi-stakeholder consultation, including representation from across socio-economic demographics to ensure data and insights are nationally representative and analyzed to inform holistic digital strategies.

This evidence of promising practices is continuously evolving. What is clear is that there is no quick fix solution to closing the gender digital divide. The success of interventions depends on adopting a holistic approach that is tailored to the local context. Promising practices are a guideline to understand the ingredients to successful interventions. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, it is critically important to document and communicate the experiences and learnings accumulated from gender-inclusive interventions. Not only does it allow the continuous monitoring of the state of the global digital divide, but it also enables countries to create a community of practice, to learn from one another, understand how to adapt locally and replicate, and scale up successful solutions. This is the moment for policymakers to come forward and take action driving solutions that are tailored to local contexts.

The **G20/OECD High-Level Principles on Financial Consumer Protection**, updated in 2022, includes Principle 10 calling for policy makers and oversight authorities to *"work collaboratively with relevant stakeholders, including other government and regulatory agencies, digital security agencies, law enforcement agencies, financial services industry and utility companies, to raise public awareness of digital security risks and promote safe online and digital transactions"* (OECD, 2012).

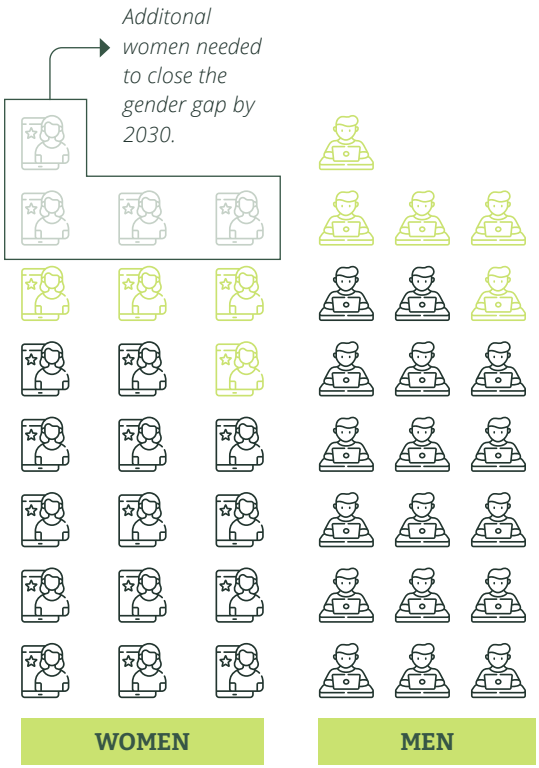
From Commitment to Action: The Time is Now

The international community has set ambitious targets to reduce the gender digital divide in recent years. The SDGs call for women's increased access to information and technologies under Goals 5 and 9.[6] In 2023, Member States made commitments to addressing the barriers to women's digital inclusion at the 67th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (United Nations, 2023) and under India's presidency, leaders of the G20 committed to halving the digital gender gap by 2030 (G20, 2023).

Despite global commitment to address the gender digital divide, progress is slow, and the world is off-track in delivering on their promises.

The rate at which complex digital technologies are rapidly evolving far exceeds the current rate of progress to close the digital divide. Without fully addressing the gender digital divide through a comprehensive approach based on proven solutions, women will remain excluded from the digital ecosystem. As the world becomes more reliant on digital technologies, we risk exposing them to more vulnerable positions in terms of economic opportunities, financial inclusion, and lack of resilience to shocks including economic and climate-related ones. By not taking rapid, concerted action now, we risk leaving more and more women behind; excluding them from experiencing the full benefits of the digital world. Now is the time to take rapid, concerted action, ensuring we move from commitment to concrete action.

[6] SDG 5.1 "End all forms of discrimination against women and girls everywhere"; 5.c "Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women; and 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".



In 2023, it was estimated that 810M women need to adopt the internet to close the gender divide by 2030.

However, it was **forecasted that only 360M are estimated to do so in that timeframe.**

The rate at which the internet usage gender divide is closing is too slow given 2030 targets.

As countries continue to rapidly digitize, they must intentionally include women or risk creating and exacerbating economic and social inequality.

Committed Leadership

Now is the time for policymakers to provide strong political leadership and champion the women's digital inclusion policy agenda. Leaders must deliver on new and existing commitments which includes accelerating financing and implementation of effective and measurable evidence-based solutions, to advance towards women's digital inclusion. This includes expanding governments' focus when it comes to digital inclusion. In order to have long-term, sustainable impact, there is a need for ICT and digital inclusion policies to address the wide range of barriers that hinder women's digital adoption.

Dedicated Resources

Moving from commitment to action also requires dedicated resources. When resources are specifically dedicated to gender equality initiatives, the result can be transformational—encouraging greater participation of women in the digital economy and stimulating broader societal benefits, including increased access to employment, enhanced educational outcomes, and greater innovation, ultimately contributing to sustainable economic development and social equity. Governments, the private sector, and digital development partners all play a crucial role in financing women's digital inclusion.

Governments

To unlock the impact and effectiveness of government digital inclusion policies (such as USFs), policy makers must adopt time-bound gender targets supported by gender budgeting and facilitate ongoing multi-stakeholder collaboration across telecommunications operators, private sector, regulatory agencies, ministries, and local communities to ensure programs and investments are targeted effectively, efficiently, fairly, and transparently. Countries can leverage existing Universal Service and Access Funds (USFs)[7] - financing mechanisms used to extend ICT services to underserved areas - as well as public-private partnerships and national budget allocations to bridge the gender digital divide. Public funds are pivotal in facilitating the deployment of digital infrastructure in areas commercially unfeasible to reach, subsidizing access for the most marginalized populations, and supporting educational programs aimed at enhancing digital literacy among women. Governments can enact policies and regulations that incentivize the expansion of meaningful connectivity and affordable access to the internet through effective competition policy, community-centered connectivity solutions, such as community networks or community based ISPs, spectrum auctions and licenses for different types of providers, private-sector investments in urban and rural areas, and encourage involvement of the donor community and civil society in gender supportive initiatives.

Private Sector

Innovations in financing models, including implementing new mechanisms or reforms, can also enable a diverse pool of contributions towards investments from non-network operators, either directly or indirectly (UN Broadband Commission, 2021). These may include in-kind contributions from the government, non-network operators such as equipment vendors, impact investors, or community and philanthropic grants. For example, during COVID-19, several countries waived spectrum fees or

[7] Universal Service and Access Funds (USFs) are financing mechanisms used to extend ICT services to underserved areas. They are funded through levies on telecommunications sector revenues, collected from service providers operating within a country. The primary goal of USAFs is to ensure that all citizens have access to essential communication services and must be considered alongside policy and regulatory measures and market-driven mechanisms to maximize coverage and connectivity.

allotted free spectrum to improve coverage in hard-to-reach areas. Private sector investment leads to the increase of economic opportunities for women and to demand-creation and expansion of markets for companies and entrepreneurs. Policy-makers can incentivize and crowd-in private and foreign direct investments by establishing an enabling investment climate.

Donors

Philanthropic organizations through grants can often mobilize resources significantly faster and with fewer conditions than public funding. It can also play a key role in crowding in more support or matched funding from other public or private institutions raising the profile and attention on digital gender inclusion and helping achieve social and economic development goals locally and globally. Addressing the digital gender divide requires commitment and institutional leadership to invest in women and community-centered connectivity in targeted underserved areas; providing affordable access, digital literacy, and relevant content to reach the unconnected. The governments can channel the donors' funds into gender-supportive activities by setting relevant priorities in country development strategies.

Civil Society

Partnership with civil society and non-profit organizations, including women's rights groups and movements, is critical to inform government and donor agenda-setting to close the gender digital divide. Civil society ensures women's digital inclusion agendas enhance and are responsive to local knowledge and experiences working directly with women and girls in communities. Civil society is a critical voice to ensure dedicated resources reach those who are left behind, and to monitor resource allocation based on ethical, human-rights-based standards and frameworks. Non-profit organizations can often fill the investment gap and operate in areas where there is a deficit of public funding and lack of private investment due to absence of return on investment. Decision-makers can encourage and support the activities of the civil society by simplifying regulations, allocating dedicated funds, and simply recognizing the importance of the work of the non-profit sector.

Utilizing Global Frameworks

Where existing normative frameworks have failed to adequately address the gender digital divide, the UN Global Digital Compact (GDC) has the potential to mobilize political will and new public resources and partnerships—supporting countries to advocate for the allocation of specific funds to tackle digital disparities, emphasizing the critical need to close the gender gap.

The currently negotiated Global Digital Compact has provided a critical opportunity to re-energize the international community behind closing the digital divide and addressing specific gendered aspects of digital transformation. In its current form, the compact offers a starting point to apply the necessary pressure to close the gender digital divide, though it must go further and deeper if we are to meet the 2030 global agenda. Governments can leverage the Global Digital Compact and the strong international attention on this agenda at this time, to mobilize the necessary resources and support at a national level and turn commitment into action. Addressing the gender digital divide is only possible through a comprehensive approach backed by intentional action and scalable solutions.

Global Digital Compact: Urging Government Action to Close the Gender Digital Divide (United Nations, 2024)

In September 2024, under the Auspices of the UN General Assembly, Member States will gather at the Summit of the Future to agree on key actions that will ensure the global community is ready to respond to present and future challenges. Amongst proceedings, it's expected that Member States will adopt the Global Digital Compact - an inclusive global framework to overcome digital, data, and innovation divides as it sets to "outline shared principles for an open, free and secure digital future for all". The 2024 UN Summit of the Future and Global Digital Compact present a pivotal moment for governments to accelerate action on closing the gender digital divide by adopting gender-inclusive policies.

The Best Time to Act is Now

Collective efforts amongst policymakers and commitments from the global community will be essential in closing the gender digital divide.

The time is now, and without concerted efforts, we will continue to fall short on creating inclusive, safe, and sustainable digital economies where women and girls can thrive. The current fast-moving landscape in which emerging technologies continuously push the boundaries of creativity and innovation provides ample justification for the need to take action. WiDEF is a key initiative that can leverage and build on ongoing global initiatives as a starting point for meaningful change, bolstering efforts to advocate and ensure that women are equipped, engaged, and empowered to play a role in the digital economy.

Policymakers must rise to the challenge and remain steadfast and committed to being champions of change. To dismantle the barriers to women's digital inclusion, policymakers must remain astute to global technological trends and innovation. The risk of leaving women out of the digital economy means that the very solutions, initiatives, innovations, and policies intended to close the digital divide could detrimentally perpetuate gender biases and enable technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

This report seeks to support policymakers in better understanding the key considerations required to develop gender-transformative policies and engage with promising practices to contribute to enabling policy environments rooted in closing the gender digital divide. WiDEF's mission is entrenched in bringing policy makers together to commit to accelerating women's digital inclusion through the adoption of gender-transformative policies.

WiDEF's goal is for this inaugural Policy Impact Report is to inspire policymakers to remain bold in their visions and steadfast in their actions towards a digitally inclusive future. Progress can only be made once policymakers take the lead in championing women's rights in the digital sphere, and remain informed on the key considerations to implementing impactful gender-transformative policy solutions. The time is now to drive and amplify equal opportunities for women and girls' meaningful connectivity and participation in the digital economy. Only then, will global majority communities and countries operate and thrive in a digitally evolving world.

References

1. United Nations. “UN Trust Fund Report to the Commission on the Status of Women 2021.” UN Women, January 2021. https://untf.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/01/un-trust-fund-report-to-the-commission-on-the-status-of-women-2021

2. G20 Leaders. “G20 New Delhi Leaders’ Declaration.” G20 Summit, New Delhi, September 9-10, 2023. Accessed September 5, 2024. https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/66739/g20-new-delhi-leaders-declaration.pdf

3. International Telecommunication Union. "Facts and Figures 2023." ITU, October 10, 2023. Accessed September 5, 2024. https://www.itu.int/itu-d/reports/statistics/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2023/11/Measuring-digital-development-Facts-and-figures-2023-E.pdf

4. International Telecommunication Union. "Handbook on mainstreaming gender in digital policies." ITU, March, 2023. Accessed September 5, 2024. https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-d/opb/hdb/D-HDB-GENDER-2023-01-PDF-E.pdf

5. Global Digital Inclusion Partnership. "Connected Resilience: Gendered Experiences of Meaningful Connectivity." GDIP, March 14, 2024. Accessed September 5, 2024. https://globaldigitalinclusion.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/GDIP-Connected-Resilience-Online.pdf

6. GSMA. "The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2024." GSMA, May 29, 2024. Accessed September 5, 2024. https://www.gsma.com/r/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/The-Mobile-Gender-Gap-Report-2024.pdf?utm_source=website&utm_medium=button&utm_campaign=gender-gap-2024

7. Tyers, A. "Gender Digital Divide Desk Review Report." Banyan Global, USAID. Women’s Economic Empowerment and Equality Technical Assistance task order under the Advancing the Agenda of Gender Equality indefinite delivery, indefinite quantity contract, 2020.

8. International Monetary Fund. "Nigeria: 2024 Article IV Consultation-Press Release; Staff Report; Staff Statement; and Statement by the Executive Director for Nigeria." IMF, May 9, 2024. Accessed July 22, 2024. https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/NGA

9. GSMA. "The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2022." GSMA, June 22, 2022. Accessed September 5, 2024. https://www.gsma.com/r/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/The-Mobile-Gender-Gap-Report-2022.pdf

10. GSMA. "Policy Considerations to Accelerate Digital Inclusion for Women in Low and Middle-Income Countries." GSMA, September 20, 2022. Accessed September 5, 2024. https://www.gsma.com/solutions-and-impact/connectivity-for-good/mobile-for-development/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Policy-considerations-to-accelerate-digital-inclusion-for-women-in-low-and-middle-income-countries-report.pdf

11. Women in the Digital Economy Fund. "About Us." WiDEF, March 2023. Accessed September 5, 2024. https://widef.global/about/

12. International Telecommunication Union. "UN Framework for Meaningful Connectivity Background Paper." ITU, April 2022. Accessed September 5, 2024. https://www.itu.int/itu-d/meetings/statistics/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2022/04/UniversalMeaningfulDigitalConnectivityTargets2030_BackgroundPaper.pdf

13. UN Women. "Forecasting Time Spent on Unpaid Care and Domestic Work." UN Women, 2023. Accessed September 5, 2024. https://data.unwomen.org/publications/forecasting-time-spent-unpaid-care-and-domestic-work

14. USAID, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Microsoft, UPS, KOICA. For more information on the WiDEF consortium, please see https://widef.global/about/

15. UN Women Generation Equality, Action Coalition Technology & Innovation for Gender Equality. "Gender x Innovation Guide." UN Women, 2023. Accessed September 5, 2024. https://techforgenerationequality.org/innovation

16. Women At the Table. "We Shape our Tools, Thereafter Our Tools Shape Us: Artificial Intelligence, Automated Decision-Making & Gender" https://www.womenatthetable.net/research-advocacy/we-shape-our-tools/

17. World Bank. "Promoting Women's Digital Financial Inclusion: Overcoming Barriers and Fostering Gender Equality. A Toolkit for Practitioners." https://digitalfinance.worldbank.org/topics/gender

18. BNamericas. "Indotel and the Supérate Program Will Launch a Project to Benefit 2,000 Homes with Internet Access." Accessed September 5, 2024. https://www.bnamericas.com/en/news/indotel-and-the-superate-program-will-launch-a-project-to-benefit-2000-homes-with-internet-access

19. El Caribe. "Presidente del INDOTEL presentó logros y avances institucionales en informe de gestión 2020-2024." Accessed September 5, 2024. https://www.elcaribe.com.do/panorama/pais/presidente-del-indotel-presento-logros-y-avances-institucionales-en-informe-de-gestion-2020-2024/

20. Global Digital Inclusion Partnership. "GDIP-UCC Uganda Impact Assessment: Rural Household Devices Project." Accessed September 5, 2024 https://globaldigitalinclusion.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/GDIP-UCC-Uganda-Impact-Assessment-Rural-Household-Devices-Project-FINAL.pdf

21. Global Digital Inclusion Partnership. "Connecting the Underserved and Unserved: What Can We Learn from Uganda." Accessed September 5, 2024. https://globaldigitalinclusion.org/2024/01/24/connecting-the-underserved-and-unserved-what-can-we-learn-from-uganda/

22. World Economic Forum. "Realizing the Potential of Global Digital Jobs." Accessed September 5, 2024. https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Realizing_the_Potential_of_Global_Digital_Jobs_2024.pdf

23. Digital Watch Observatory. "Brazil Launches BRL 28 Billion to Boost Digital Inclusion and Connectivity." Accessed September 5, 2024. https://dig.watch/updates/brazil-launches-brl-28-billion-to-boost-digital-inclusion-and-connectivity

24. Laaha. "Country Selector." Accessed September 5, 2024. https://laaha.org/country-selector

25. UNICEF. “From Human-Centered Technology Design to Women and Girls-Centered Digital Products: Addressing Gender-Based Violence.” Accessed September 5, 2024. https://www.unicef.org/media/148851/file/From%20Human%20Centered%20Technology%20Design%20to%20Women%20and%20Girls-Centered%20Digital%20Products%20Addressing%20Gender-Based%20Violence.pdf

26. Internet Society Kyrgyz Chapter. “Sanarip Insan.” Accessed September 5, 2024 .https://isoc.kg/sanaripinsan/

27. GSMA. “How to Use the MISTT: Kyrgyz.” Accessed September 5, 2024. https://www.gsma.com/solutions-and-impact/connectivity-for-good/mobile-for-development//wp-content/uploads/2023/08/How-to-use-the-MISTT-Kyrgyz.pdf

28. Citi Newsroom. “GIFEC Honoured at ITU 2018 Telecom Awards.” Accessed September 5, 2024. https://citinewsroom.com/2018/10/gifec-honoured-at-itu-2018-telecom-awards/

29. Asaase Radio. “GIFEC Equips 14,000 Youth with ICT Skills.” Accessed September 5, 2024. https://www.asaaseradio.com/gifec-equips-14000-youth-with-ict-skills/

30. International Telecommunication Union. “National Movement on Digital Literacy #Siberkreasi.” Accessed September 5, 2024. https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/archive/stocktaking/Project/Details?projectId=1514925904

31. UN Women (2022). “Accelerating efforts to tackle online and technology-facilitated violence against women and girls.” https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/10/accelerating-efforts-to-tackle-online-and-technology-facilitated-violence-against-women-and-girls

32. RESURJ. “The Olimpia Law: A Feminist Win in the Fight to Address Digital Violence in Mexico.” Accessed September 5, 2024. https://resurj.org/reflection/the-olimpia-law-a-feminist-win-in-the-fight-to-address-digital-violence-in-mexico/

33. OHCHR. “We’re Here to Tell It: Mexican Women Break Silence Over Femicides.” Accessed September 5, 2024. https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2023/07/were-here-tell-it-mexican-women-break-silence-over-femicides

34. Latin Dispatch. “Mexican Feminists Win Legal Protections Against Revenge Porn.” Accessed September 5, 2024. https://latindispatch.com/2020/03/17/olimpia-law/

35. Ministry of Home Affairs. "Details about CCPWC (Cybercrime Prevention against Women and Children) Scheme." Government of India, 2023. Accessed September 5, 2024. https://www.mha.gov.in/en/division_of_mha/cyber-and-information-security-cis-division/Details-about-CCPWC-CybercrimePrevention-against-Women-and-Children-Scheme

36. OpenGov Asia. “India’s Initiative for Cyber Crimes Against Women and Children.” Accessed September 5, 2024. https://opengovasia.com/2019/01/09/indias-initiative-for-cyber-crimes-against-women-and-children/

37. NORC at the University of Chicago and the International Center for Research on Women. (2022). Case Study: International Center for Research on Women. “Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence in Asia: India.” Accessed September 5, 2024. https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/USAID-TFGBV-India.pdf

38. OECD. “Recommendation of the Council on High-Level Principles on Financial Consumer Protection.” Accessed September 5, 2024. https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0394

39. Commission on the Status of Women Sixty-seventh session 6–17 March 2023 E/CN.6/2023/L.3 Agreed. Conclusions available: United Nations. “Report of the Secretary-General on the Work of the Organization.” Accessed September 5, 2024. https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/ltd/n23/081/71/pdf/n2308171.pdf?token=iqLgsMtgJyL8orpk5Z&fe=true

40. UN Broadband Commission. “21st Century Financing Models for Bridging Broadband Connectivity Gaps.” October, 2021Accessed September 5, 2024. https://broadbandcommission.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2021/11/21st-Century-Financing-Models-Broadband-Commission.pdf

41. United Nations. "Global Digital Compact. Rev 3." United Nations, July 11, 2024. Accessed September 5, 2024. https://www.un.org/techenvoy/global-digital-compact

WiDEF's primary objective is to invest in evidence-based, proven solutions to accelerate women's digital inclusion that ultimately leads to increased economic security, improved livelihoods, and stronger resilience. WiDEF will continuously assess and gather promising practices, building an evidence base on what works at scale and leads to sustainable impact. WiDEF will use this evidence base, as well as the experiences of the recipients of its grants and technical assistance to work with policymakers, ensuring the creation and strengthening of a conducive policy and regulatory environment.


WIDEF