



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
29 November 2022

Original: English

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## Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-seventh session

6–17 March 2023

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and  
to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly  
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and  
peace for the twenty-first century”

### Statement submitted by Asia Pacific Women’s Watch (APWW), a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

Asia Pacific Women's Watch is a regional network representing voices from across the five sub-regions of Asia and the Pacific. We welcome the priority theme for the sixty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

We recognise the work of the Generation Equality Coalition, the Government of Finland and the International Telecommunication Union (Development Sector) in their work in addressing cyber-bullying and providing tools for Child Online Protection. Gender justice for all women and girls is a core human right, and indispensable for gender equality, development, poverty reduction and is crucial to achieving human progress. Information Communication Technologies are a systemic, pervasive set of technologies that are associated with fundamental institutional, social and economic restructuring with uneven growth in accessibility across countries. Large Technology companies run platforms of a scale that is a significant threat to safety and security of information and democracy.

We have seen during COVID-19 across the entire Asia and Pacific Regions education threatened by closure of schools and education moving from face-to-face classrooms to online teaching, women and girls are being severely hampered by this modality. Education has a key role to prepare societies for global changes let alone the 4th Revolution and digital age. We must recall the role of equitable and inclusive quality education and promote access of girls and women to scientific and technical training for professional equality between women and men.

Access to on-line Education and the future of work are clearly linked. Equitable and inclusive quality education plays a critical role in gender transformative actions in entrepreneurship, science, technology and innovation and can increase the roles of women and girls in the digital world.

Over the last decade we have witnessed a sharp and immediate rise and reliance on the use of information technology. Digital spaces can be empowering places of opinion-formation, debate and mobilisation and can play a key role in gender justice. However, given the inherent gender-bias of on-line media, many women are put off from taking part in political discussions or on-line forums due to on-line harassment, cyberbullying, identify theft, stalking and fear.

In conflict and disaster affected areas, it is often social media and on-line news reporting that reaches those most affected first. And yet it is social media and other forms of information technology that are quickly closed down, monitored and censored as a threat to already stressed states and communities.

Access to internet and internet-based tools become a major barrier for families and schools to engage with and to continue online education. In the Pacific Island States tertiary education in particular was impacted by this shift. Economic demands for services, computers and tools for education have increased across all countries. With 'stay at home' orders in place in many countries, levels of care work have increased, often falling on the young women in the household, preventing them from continuing their educations. Continuing gender discrimination in education and training do not augur well for education outcomes for women and girls in all their diversity.

Challenges to accessing the internet remain, while urban centres are well connected and relatively cost-effective, rural and remote areas remain reliant on mobile phone connectivity which at best is sporadic and costly. Many women and girls rely on mobile data to access the internet because they either don't have internet access at home, they can't access affordable internet at home their living situation does not allow them access to the internet.

Digital learning initiatives as well as implementation strategies are not designed to reach the most disadvantaged. Those that need it most. Scaling up on-line education, as we have witnessed during COVID 19 exacerbated existing divides, perpetuated and scaled up the challenges and left many women and girls without access to the means of education, safety and security. As we move towards the completion of the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda, it is essential we take stronger steps to make digital technology an equaliser, instead of a tool that reinforces inequality.

We are witnessing a rise in online bullying, cyber-abuse, stalking, ‘revenge-porn’ and grooming of women. This increase of physical and psychological violence is increasing and puts at risk women’s privacy and physical security. Intersecting forms of discrimination fuelled by race, gender, class, caste, ability stereotypes remain a key issue within the Asia and Pacific Region. Online abuse is a major force in all women’s lives. Women and girls who must navigate multiple oppressions because of their race, sexuality, class, disability or because they are transgender are even more at risk of online abuse and their experiences of gender-based harassment are intensified by these aspects of identity. Online harassment targets women and girls from all political, cultural and religious backgrounds and women and girls of different sexualities and abilities, and women who are viewed as being non-normative. Women carry a greater burden of on-line harassment. This abuse often begins in education and continues into the workplace. The impact of media, ‘influencers’ and targeted on-line content can lead to unrealistic expectations for young women. Lack of self-esteem and low self-confidence, combined with content (words and images) specific targeting make young women vulnerable at an early age to appearance based results on-line.

Being pressured to perform in an on-line often hostile environment leads to major stress in students and those in the workforce. Bringing the on-line environment into the home, which is often perceived as a ‘safe’ place can cause intense stress and anxiety for young women and girls. The on-line presence track and gathers information across a person’s lifecycle. Many countries in Asia and the Pacific utilise this information for ‘national purposes’ which raises the issue of accountability and ethics in data gathering.

## **Recommendations**

Provide easily accessible information to inform women and girls about technological threats and risks, platform surveillance and how to confidently and securely access and utilise the internet and its services.

Increase technological connectivity and educational resources to rural and remote areas for access to education through internet capability infrastructure and support connectivity and digital learning opportunities for all.

Governments, private sector, and civil society to hold social media platforms more accountable, through moderation and regulation, for content, information sharing and impact of this on women and girls in all their diversity.

Ensure connectivity efforts include implementation plans to reduce digital gender divides and reach the most marginalised, including older women, learners with disabilities, indigenous women and girls, people on the move and others living in fragile and emergency contexts.