The Digital empowerment of women in conflict settings: Why it matters

Date: 8 March 2023
Time: 8:15-9:30 EST
Venue: Conference Room 8, Conference Building (to be livestreamed)
Please register to attend here

CONCEPT NOTE FOR SIDE EVENT AT CSW67 (2023)

War and armed conflicts have devastating effects on people's lives, and women and girls often bear the brunt of the conflict. Russia's attack on Ukraine alone created a massive refugee crisis in Europe and beyond, with more than 7,9 million seeking refuge across Europe, with an estimated 96% being women and children . More than 4,9 million refugees from Ukraine have registered for temporary protection or similar national protection schemes in Europe[1] and more than 6.5 million have been internally displaced[i]. In Afghanistan over 2.5 million people left the country as a result of the Taliban's takeover with an estimated 3.1 million people now internally displaced[ii]. Conflict and displacement has had a negative impact on the economy and women's economic empowerment resulting in loss of jobs and income generation options.

Digitalization can offer new opportunities for the economic participation of women from conflict countries. Digital tools are also important for income generation, as well as access to services, information, education and receiving identification documents. But there is no one size fits all: women who fled their homes as a result of conflicts within and between countries of origin range from highly skilled in ICT to digital illiterates. Different types of empowerment are needed.

Digital empowerment of vulnerable women in the context of war can contribute to increased socioeconomic resilience, reduced inequalities and a diminished gender digital divide.

In 2021 the Action Coalition on Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality (AC on TIGE) was set-up as one of the six Generation Equality Action Coalitions introduced as the world's roadmap for gender equality. The Action Coalitions represent innovative, multi-stakeholder partnerships focused on the most critical areas in gender equality to achieve concrete change for women and girls worldwide. The AC on TIGE explores how technology and innovation can help advance gender equality and create new solutions responding to women and girls by reducing gender digital gap, making digital ecosystem gender transformative and overcoming online and ICT-facilitated violence. A total of 241 partners - governments, civil society, private companies, academia and international development organizations, including OSCE,

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[1] Situation Ukraine Refugee Situation (unhcr.org)

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Government of Finland and Ukraine, - are a part of the AC on TIGE and have committed to make **technology and innovation gender equal** and mobilize other partners to **join this commitment**.

> *By 2026, women and girls in all their diversity have equal opportunities to safely and meaningfully access, use, lead, and design technology and innovation with freedom of expression, joy, and boundless potential. We call for collective responsibility, especially from governments and corporations, to develop bold gender transformative actions to widen innovation ecosystems, embed transparency and accountability in digital technology, and expand inclusive digital economies.*
>
> GEF Action Coalition on Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality

Based on evidence from women with experiences from war and conflict, this side event will bring together high level speakers from international organizations, governments, the private sector and civil society to discuss how digital tools can serve as tool to empower women economically and provide essential income generation opportunities in volatile conflict settings.   It will provide an opportunity to showcase results and successes from the AC on TIGE commitment makers and inspire others to take action to replicate good practices and make new commitments to address gender digital gap in the current crisis context.

The event is hosted by the OSCE Gender Issues Programme and UN Women, and is part of the OSCE multiyear project *WIN for Women and Men - Strengthening comprehensive security through innovating and networking for gender equality.*

Objectives
The side event will focus on good practices and opportunities for including women refugees in the digital economy by:
1. Showcasing good examples of digital services that women from conflict countries benefit
2. Providing policy recommendations for the design of effective programmatic actions to support women in volatile setting
3. Supporting the AC on TIGE's partners to jointly advocate for equal digital rights and bring a common voice to be heard to the surface of the world wide web

Agenda

Opening remarks:
➢ **Helga Maria Schmid**, OSCE Secretary General

Keynote by Paivi Kaarina Kannisto, Chief, the Peace, Security and Resilience Unit, UN Women

Panel discussion:
- **Fawzia Kofi**, Afghan Politician and Women's Rights Advocate, Former Deputy Prime Minister and Nobel Peace Prize Nominee
- **Yulia Sporosh**, Head of the Ukrainian NGO "Girls", NGO supporting digital empowerment of women inside Ukraine

- **Rama Chakaki**, Impact Tech Investor and co-funder of the VIP.fund, a venture philanthropy fund investing in programs for youth and women refugees
- **Asetila Kostinger,** Founder of the GoodStartUp School promoting female entrepreneurship
- **Representative of Microsoft**
- **Sofia Scarlat,** Generation Equality Youth Activist (Romania)

Closing remarks - Representative from Government of Finland (in a capacity of a leader for the Action Coalition on Technology & Innovation for Gender Equality)

Moderator: *Dr. Lara Scarpitta, OSCE Senior Adviser on Gender Issues*

Guiding questions for discussion:

- How can women and girl refugees benefit from digital opportunities (education, childcare, tools, language skills)?
- Not all women and girl refugees are digitally literate. How can we make sure that digitalization does not constitute yet another barrier to their participation and inclusion in their communities?
- What are innovative solutions to support women's entrepreneurship by improving access to ICT and digital platforms as well as financial resources to sustain and scale up their businesses in the time of crises?
- How can women-led IT business support women and girls affected by crises? How can the AC on TIGE support achieving gender-transformative changes by dismantling patriarchal structures, addressing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, reducing inequalities and redistributing power in the ICT sector?
- How to effectively address online and ICT-facilitated gender-based violence and discrimination in the context of crises?

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[i] UNHCR – Ukraine Emergency https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/91524
[ii] https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/91524