Unlocking digital opportunities for Ukrainian women and girls for the gender responsive recovery and sustainable development – regional consultation for Ukraine, 22 February 2022

Main conclusions and recommendations

The consultation was conducted on 22 February with an aim to support preparations of Ukraine’s official delegation for 67th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW67). The specific objectives were to provide an update on the main directions, achievements and priorities for the national gender equality policy; discuss how digitalization and the development of new technologies can provide effective solutions to address the priorities and needs of women and girls in Ukraine and in hosting countries; share best practices and examples of empowering women for a meaningful engagement in the digital platforms and efficient application of them in the digital services and products; and agree on the joint recommendations on gender responsive digitalization governance, suggested pledges and commitments of development partners to overcome gender digital gaps in all spheres of social life and with the help of digitalization for recovery and post-war development.

The consultation was attended by 24 partners representing state institutions, civil society and private companies in Ukraine and key international development partners representing EU countries, in offline format and around 90 online participants from Georgia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Moldova, Slovakia, Sweden, the regional organizations (OSCE, Council of Europe, OECD, etc.), EU Delegation in Ukraine and UN system, as well as state institutions and civil society.

As a result of the participatory discussions, the following main conclusions and recommendations were made to be presented at the CSW67 around following four areas:

Strengthening legislation and policy framework on economic recovery, SME development, e-governance and addressing online and ICT-facilitated gender-based violence and discrimination and protecting the rights of women and girls online

After receiving EU candidacy in June 2022, the Government of Ukraine adopted a comprehensive State Strategy on Equal Rights and Opportunities of Women and Men by 2030 and its implementation plan for 2022-2024, which are in line with the key areas of CEDAW and the nationalized SDGs. On December 20, 2022, the Government approved the Strategy of Gender Equality in Education until 2030 and its implementation plan for 2022-2024. The Strategy defines key principles, target audiences, strategic goals.
and tasks for implementing policy on ensuring equal rights for men and women in education, including through representation of women in non-traditional areas of employment, those relating to STEM.

A comprehensive approach to the gender equality policy implementation should be ensured by developing a National Action Plan on implementation of the Concluding Observations of the CEDAW Committee. Also, the National Action Plan 1325 updated by the Government in 2022 allows to expand a support to those who are directly affected by the war.

Inclusive, accessible and safe digital tools play a key role in economic empowerment of women and girls affected by the full-scale war in Ukraine. The digital era offers unprecedented opportunities to close the gender digital divide and ensure that no one is left behind in the digital economy and society.

Digital solutions and technological innovations are important and efficient in humanitarian responses to crises and armed conflicts and into post-conflict reconstruction activities as they provide cost-efficient tools for early and long-term recovery. Women and girls, especially those in vulnerable and marginalized situations and those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination on the basis of race, colour, sex, age, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, disability or other status, face barriers to access digital services and tools and thus cannot benefit from innovative life-saving, psychological and socio-economic recovery solutions proposed by the state and other stakeholders.

The systemic measures on ensuring access to digital literacy, digital public services and tools should be integrated for women and girls in vulnerable and marginalized situations and those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination in crisis response and psychological and socio-economic recovery at the national, regional and local levels. Training for women and girls from vulnerable groups on digital literacy and skills should be included and equipping them with an access to digital tools and free Internet in the planning and implementation of national and local crisis response and recovery plans should be ensured. Partnership with women’s civil society organizations in planning and monitoring and evaluation of these measures based on AAAQ methodology (availability, accessibility, affordability, and quality of services) should be established.

Usage of digital technologies can be the reason for gender-based violence and cyber-violence. Addressing cyberviolence by development and implementation of a comprehensive set of actions responding to risks and all forms of violence (bulling, online harassment, hate speech, etc.) needs to be prioritized in the recovery and development policies. The solutions to help victims of the violence to begin their life from the new page and be sure that their relatives are safe as the posted in Internet is hard to remove and victims could live negative experience repeatedly should be implemented.

Early warning systems should be supported by application of digital tools and resources to address risks of conflicts and violations of universal human rights with a particular focus on crisis and post-crisis settings. Women human rights defenders and gender activists should be supported to collect alternative data and evidence on gender dimensions of inequality and discrimination and share the suggested solutions.
Key recommendations:

Guarantee access to online spaces

→ **Internet access needs to be guaranteed** for Ukrainian women in all their diversity by accounting for the needs of rural women, women refugees, of Roma women and women with IDP status and undocumented women.

→ **Digital tools and devices need to be accessible** to Ukrainian women and Ukrainian refugees to guarantee their access to the digital services necessary for their livelihoods.

Digital literacy and adaptability

→ **Digital trainings need to be made available to all women**, considering their specific needs according to their age and social situation. Many women of retirement age do not have the skills to use digital tools or do not know about them which hinders their access to basic services.

→ Digital tools and digital trainings must consider the needs of women with disabilities in their design and outreach.

Coordination between stakeholders

→ To promote the expansion of women's economic opportunities, it is necessary to **establish vertical** (between all levels of executive and local self-government authorities) and **horizontal communication** (between executive authorities, local self-government authorities and civil society). Vertical communication provides opportunities for advocacy and promotion of digital solutions. Horizontal communication creates opportunities for gathering information about the needs of beneficiaries and their analysis.

→ CSOs need to be provided with **financial and non-financial resources** to continue to bridge the literacy gap at the local level. Governments and international donors can provide additional resources to CSOs that have firsthand experience and knowledge of communities.

To expand the economic opportunities of women, the following steps must be taken:

→ **Create platforms** where information about utility service providers and public sector service providers will be accumulated.

→ **Conduct capacity building** for newly created NGOs on non-conflict advocacy of the interests of their members and/or target audience.

→ Train representatives of executive authorities and local self-government bodies to **facilitate consultations** with public organizations, volunteers and initiative groups.

---

**Strengthening institutional capacity of key stakeholders (state institutions, private sector, CSOs)**

ICT ecosystem could provide women and girls affected by the full-scale war with consultations on how to start business activities and develop business model, implement digital solutions for the business growth, use financial instruments and attract investments, start exporting products to the foreign markets, relocate business and find new partners and clients, etc. There are useful practices being replicated to diversify and provide a targeted support to different groups of women to develop and upgrade their skills and develop business in IT sector.

**Key recommendations:**
Develop digital products and services that are user-friendly for both individuals and entrepreneurs and CSOs, which will encourage users to learn and improve their skills. In all parts of Ukraine, there needs to be governmental agents who can aid on how to use digital services.

Provide education and training in digital literacy. Trainings should be targeted separately for businesses, social service users, and for civil servants.

Institutionalize digital literacy training programs through accredited educational institutions to guarantee the quality of the information provided.

Develop platforms for communication on the provision of digital services, such as a web resource that will collect all regulations, projects, new initiatives, as well as information on training, grants and microgrants.

For services to be accessible, the group recommends initiating a mapping exercise in three steps:

- **Access** – Mapping stakeholders as well as diverse groups of women and girls and their needs.
- **Skills** – Mapping the different competencies needed to cover these needs. What are the skills needed to guarantee meaningful access to online spaces?
- **Resources** – Mapping capacity building and programs that can address these needs. Based on the analysis, the government should hold consultations with all stakeholders and develop a comprehensive "Program for Women's Economic Empowerment through Digitalization", which will serve as a roadmap to increase women's participation in digitalization and use of digital services.

Expanding access of women to digital skills and affordable digital technologies and tools for their economic empowerment, equal access to decent work in Ukraine and refugee hosting countries as well as financial resources to sustain and scale up their businesses

The full-scale Russian Federation’s invasion to Ukraine exacerbated gender inequalities and put additional burdens of the paid and unpaid work to women who very often became the breadwinner in the family. Digital approaches provide sometimes the only opportunities for education and employment during the war, therefore the ad hoc solutions by using adaptive digital tools to increase level of employment among women need to be implemented.

It is important to train and retrain women to have employment in all sectors, including IT and digital one; and to support women’s entrepreneurship to have income generation opportunities online and distantly. All partners should join their efforts to create workplaces in Ukraine for economic empowerment of women and economic recovery of the country; and to prevent large-scaled brain-drain abroad by providing employment opportunities and opportunities to participate in recovery.

Innovations and digital technologies are crucial for the empowerment of women affected by the full-scale war. Digital tools can provide employment and social assistance for women in Ukraine and abroad, digitalization make possible the access of various groups of women and men to social protection, administrative, social, medical, educational, cultural services, and legal assistance. At the same time, it is crucial to make it easier for women and men of vulnerable groups to use electronic government services. Digital literacy helps to increase competitiveness of women and girls on the labour market and find a new job because almost every profession involves usage of digital tools.
The representation of women in non-traditional areas of employment, those relating to STEM and technology, should be boosted and gender-based labour market segregation needs to be reduced. The strategies to increase the presence of women in technology are often focused on mentoring or unconscious bias training, putting the onus on individuals to change, rather than shifting workplace cultures that exclude women (CSW64 agreed conclusions).

*Key recommendations:*

**Promoting the benefits of digitalization for women**

The movement of "digitalization ambassadors" should be reignited in the country according to the "equal to equal" approach. This movement will be able to promote the benefits of digitalization in rural areas, among women of older age groups and/or in local cohorts of hardest to reach groups such as remote settlements, specialized institutions, hospitals, etc.

**Broadening the access to capacity buildings**

Capacity building towards digital literacy or usage of digital services should be flexible and organized in hybrid form. Organizing learnings only online limits the target categories of women both in terms of coverage rates and in terms of the effectiveness and success of the training.

**Ensuring meaningful and gender-responsive digital access**

- Suppliers and women should always be integrated into the technology development process. Digital tools developed at the national level should be responsive to women's needs, gender sensitive, flexible and adaptive. It is necessary to focus on the development of multi-level digital services and accompany them with trainings to help women master them.
- Digital technologies that are developed specifically for women must be tested by women, this process must be monitored and regulated.
- The government should support employers who train female employees to use digital technologies. They should be supported to introduce the latest technologies, purchase modern equipment, and to provide certified training. This modernizes not only the economy, but also increases the career mobility of women.

**Ensuring digital reconstruction of Ukraine**

- Ukraine should use the potential of digitalization and IT care technologies primarily within the scope of services for vulnerable groups to carry out its reconstruction.
- The government should initiate a mapping exercise of digitization by sectors and activities.
- As a result, the sectors of the economy with the greatest women workforce (education, health care, social protection) should be equipped with digital auxiliary services, applications and platforms. This will lead to greater productivity, efficiency and quality of services targeting vulnerable groups (children, teenagers, sick, vulnerable, older age groups). It will also contribute to the growth of professional digital skills of women professionals.
- Investors who will contribute to the reconstruction of Ukraine after the war should ensure that women are well represented in all professional sectors. The government should regulate and monitor such inclusion.
Promoting women’s economic empowerment through digital solutions requires a multi-stakeholder approach, involving collaboration and action by governments, private sector organizations, civil society organizations, and women’s groups and youth organizations.

Consolidated efforts of the government and development partners on promotion of gender equality and women’s rights would help to achieve gender equality as it is an integral part of the state policy and a cross-cutting issue in all sectors. Creating and supporting the digital ecosystem is important to ensure the access to the Internet and accessibility of public services, provide training on digital literacy, develop IT sector and ensure transparency and accountability in the public sector.

Ukraine is open for the partnership to join efforts to create a common platform to promote new technologies and innovations for women and girls, including training, retraining, mentorship, internship, grants and support of startups for women’s economic empowerment.

Key recommendations:

→ The Governments should make women’s access to digital devices and connectivity its priority. This includes access to affordable smartphones, laptops, and other digital devices as well as affordable and reliable internet connectivity, electric generators and charging devices.

→ Private sector organizations should develop and provide affordable digital solutions, ensure online safety, and develop user-friendly applications that are tailored to women’s needs.

→ Civil society organizations should facilitate access to digital literacy by helping them navigate digital technologies and access digital platforms. Such training should include not only technical skills but also skills related to digital safety and privacy, providing mentorship and support for women entrepreneurs.

→ Donors and international organizations, financial institutions should provide access to financial or material assets to civil society organizations and local authorities.

Women’s economic empowerment through digital solutions involves conducting a needs assessment, developing a comprehensive strategy, and securing funding and partnerships to support:

→ Ensuring the access to digital skills and literacy by offering training programs and workshops which could be delivered by government agencies, non-profits, and local businesses can deliver these training programs.

→ Challenging gender-roles and cultural stereotypes by promoting STEM education.

→ Monitoring and evaluating the impact of digital solutions on women’s economic empowerment.