



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
30 October 2020

Original: English

---

## Commission for Social Development

Fifty-ninth session

8–17 February 2021

**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority Theme: Socially just transition towards sustainable development: the role of digital technologies on social development and well-being of all**

### **Statement submitted by the International Federation for Home Economics, 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.

---

\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



The International Federation for Home Economics is the only global organization representing Home Economics and related fields. Home economists maintain that homes are environments where individuals reach their full potential, live a life of dignity, and develop and express their global and local interdependence. Inclusion in the innovation of digital technologies and expanded ownership and accessibility is essential to women and their families' well-being because giving and receiving communication is a fundamental human right and paramount to human flourishing.

Strong partnerships and policies promoting gender equality are essential to a socially just implementation of digital technologies that foster and protect well-being for women and their families. While massive strides in knowledge sharing programs have been made, many depend heavily on technology intensive hardware, platforms and infrastructure that are not accessible in an equal manner, creating a uniquely feminized aspect to the digital divide.

The continual innovation of digital technology has produced valuable gains for human welfare, however both the pace of the innovation and the failure to include women and their concerns at the forefront of this innovation means that access to digital technology will not be provided through the simple extension of high-speed internet or cellular infrastructure. Despite the best efforts of the global community, some women, families, and communities could spend the rest of their lives on the far side of the digital divide and policy and partnership efforts should be made to reach and support them. Ensuring that innovation does not lead to the premature abandonment of technologies that are most accessible to the majority of women and families will require a strengthening of partnerships between non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and policymakers. To this end, the International Federation for Home Economics is calling on Member States and those in civil society who share a focus on communication in everyday living for health and well-being of women and families to strengthen partnerships and sharpen the focus on access to digital technology. We propose the following efforts which apply to all Sustainable Development Goals but highlights Goal 5, Gender Equality, and Goal 17, Partnerships to Achieve the Goal.

Women are significantly underrepresented in the production and consumption of digital technologies, therefore significant opportunities and highly functional products are inaccessible to them. Few women, if any at all in some areas, participate in the innovation, manufacturing or leadership of communication infrastructure or devices. As such, women are denied both full and effective participation in political and economic aspects of technology changes and expansion. Limited involvement in opportunities created by digital technology is not the only barrier to access women face. Systems and devices are made without consideration for the needs and desires of female end-users seeking enhancements to daily living. Unlike industrial technologies, digital technologies can be considered household technology and in a sharp turn from previous eras of household technology development and implementation, which included input from professional home economists and the people they serve, the development of digital technology has failed to put the needs of women, families and communities at the heart of the effort. Knowledge sharing devices and access to timely, reliable information are important tools in everyday life and in domestic work. Digital devices need to be equally distributed without reference to gender or family status. Empowering women through access to their own digital devices, they and their families will be offered all the opportunity that comes with this ownership, for example, access to education, communication, reporting, health care, and more. Ownership of digital technologies would allow women to explore and create their worlds from their own homes, meaning women's identity development, self-concept, and dignity would not be limited by geographic location and other

characteristics relevant in national contexts. Data protection and the necessity of data commodity should be legally managed in a fair and just system that specifically includes and protects women. Both infrastructure and content should be developed according to the aspirations of women who, through geographic location, economic or educational status or discrimination are currently not able to adopt the latest technologies or join in an equal manner in technology mediated communication.

Many women lose access to digital technology through the premature abandonment of infrastructure and systems conducted without consideration of those being pushed across the divide by upgrades that make previous formats obsolete. Pushing essential public services, such as healthcare and education, into new systems without adequate planning for those who will be unable to access them due to discrimination, economic inequality or lack of education creates injustice. The COVID-19 pandemic brought this concern into stark focus. Across the world, large numbers of women have struggled to support and protect their families without access to the digital devices and services that have been the refuge of the more fortunate. What was once a luxury became, overnight, a necessity. Market forces understandably drive the development of digital technology used in households, however strong partnerships are needed to assert the rights of women and their families to technologies that benefit themselves beyond facilitating consumption.

Global and local organizations from Member States must develop and look for partnerships to address all feminized aspects of the digital divide in global, national, and local settings. At all levels, policymakers, financial institutions, investors, and governments should expand existing visions, strategic plans and accountability programs to include women. These efforts should include an accessibility evaluation, much like that conducted for sustainability impact, that calculates how the proposals to upgrade digital technology will support continued access by those members of society, especially women, who will not be in a position to benefit from the upgrade immediately. Besides a focus on accountability in programs that seek to upgrade digital technology, strong partnerships must be formed to identify and mobilize targeted financial resources for initiatives that promote and report successes and opportunities for improvement and for the inclusion of women in all levels of infrastructure design, development, implementation, and evaluation. Global and local agencies must establish and seek out innovation and research partnerships that include women in science and technology programs. Many innovations that help meet the needs of women and their families have yet to be identified because they do not have equal access to the centers of innovation. For example, Femtech start-ups and its early stage of funding should be encouraged to motivate the creativity of technology. Inclusion of content such as menstrual cycle tracking and breast milk monitoring on smartphones is an example of the type of innovation that has a clear benefit for women but is not widely available or accessible. Investments in capacity-building education for women should be established along with accountability reports and celebrations of successes. Efforts in this capacity-building education should be made outside of the formal education system, in recognition that many women leave formal education early and require personal or household access to education for daily living throughout their lives. As the United Nations continues to reform knowledge sharing by improving the coordination of existing infrastructure and systems, women should be viewed as essential in global technology discussions and decision-making. All social, political, and economic barriers should be removed in order to allow for women to develop, manage, and otherwise benefit from products and markets of digital technologies. Education and economic incentives should be promoted to mitigate all feminized aspects of the digital divide. With unique knowledge and experience, women from varied backgrounds, ages, economic classes, race, and spiritual beliefs should be embraced in all levels of governance for the enrichment, efficiency, and effectiveness of public, private-public, and civil society partnerships

that aim to discover, produce, and manage renewable energy resources for digital technologies.

The International Federation for Home Economics offers this statement in the context of and with the hope for the attainment of the all of the Sustainable Development Goals and their related targets, with particular emphasis on: Goal 5, Gender Equality and Goal 17, Partnerships to Achieve the Goal. We sincerely thank the Commission for Social Development for the opportunity to work toward the realization of our mutual aims of universal peace, human rights as all Member States have agreed to, and larger freedom for our entire human family by resolving widespread, feminized inaccessibility in the development and usage of digital technologies that are required for individual , household, and universal well-being.

---