

# Submission to the Office of the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology on the **Global Digital Compact** from UN Women on behalf of the Action Coalition on Gender Based Violence; Equality Now; and the Alliance for Universal Digital Rights (AUDRi)



## Background

Under The Common Agenda, the UN Secretary General called for a Global Digital Compact to be agreed at the Summit of the Future (September 2024) to “outline shared principles for an open, free and secure digital future for all.” Ensuring that women’s rights organizations in all their diversity feed into this process is critical to shape a vision of digital cooperation and governance based on human rights and feminist principles. In his report to UNGA77, on the Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, the Secretary General proposed a high level consultation on violence against women and girls in digital contexts to inform the Global Digital Compact.

On 6th March 2023 the Alliance for Universal Digital Rights (AUDRi), Equality Now, Women Leading In AI, UN Women representing the Generation Equality Action Coalition on Gender Based Violence and the Governments of Spain, Finland and Mexico co-hosted a consultation event, with the participation of the UN Tech Envoy, to provide opportunities for women’s rights organizations, civil society and grassroots women’s groups to share their perspectives to and feed into the consultation process to ensure that the Global Digital Compact prioritizes women and girls’ safety and human rights in digital spaces.

Eighty participants from around the world<sup>1</sup> attended the session and were divided into 8 groups to discuss the following questions:

1. What would the final version of the Global Digital Compact look like if it was rooted in a human- rights based, feminist and intersectional approach?
2. What do women in your region need to benefit from the digital revolution? And what needs to happen for all women and girls to experience safety, freedom and dignity when they are online?
3. What actions do Governments, Businesses, CSOs, UN bodies, Regional Bodies and International Actors need to take in order to realize this?

This submission summarizes the key points and recommendations that emerged during the session.

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<sup>1</sup> Civil society and women’s rights organizations from different countries included Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Cameroon, Canada, Finland, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, Poland, Romania, Rwanda, Spain, Sudan, Sweden, Tanzania, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States, and Zimbabwe.



# 1. Vision - A feminist and intersectional GDC that is grounded in human rights

A Global Digital Compact (GDC) rooted in a human rights based, feminist and intersectional approach would ensure that all digital spaces uphold safety, respect, dignity and tolerance for women and girls in all their diversity. Women would be visible and empowered in all digital spaces, so that future generations of women and girls see the digital sphere as a space rooted in human rights, equality and safety, where they can thrive.

A successful GDC will articulate how we ensure that digital space is open, free and secure for all women and girls, with special consideration of the needs of women and girls in the Global South, and culturally relevant in different contexts. A truly intersectional approach would ensure the diverse needs of women and girls are addressed and prioritize the protection and empowerment of marginalized groups of women, particularly those that experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination such as women with disabilities, young women, older women, women of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, LGBTQI+ people, women living in rural areas, migrant women, women living in poverty, amongst others. The rights to a life free of violence in all digital and online spaces must be upheld in line with key principles and already established human rights standards on violence against women.

Furthermore, the GDC would call for closing the gender digital divide by increasing women and girls' internet connectivity through ensuring that it is affordable, reliable, available and safe as well as increasing women and girls' participation in shaping the digital revolution. Increased accessibility would in turn contribute to reducing social, economic and cultural inequalities and promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

The GDC must ensure that women and girls can participate in inclusive, safe and free digital civic spaces, enabling women's movements to connect, organize and exchange across borders.

In line with the Alliance for Universal Digital Rights (AUDRI) principles, the GDC would create a future where all citizens of the global digital ecosystem, no matter who they are or where they live, can enjoy equal rights to safety, freedom, and dignity. (See the principles in Annex 1.)

## **2. Principles for a feminist and intersectional GDC that is grounded in human rights requires ensuring that all women and girls experience safety, freedom and dignity when they are online**

In order to achieve the vision outlined above, there are a number of key pathways that can be taken. These pathways intend to overcome the current barriers to safety, freedom and dignity that women and girls face when accessing, informing, or benefiting from the global digital revolution.

### **Bridging the gender digital divide**

It is well documented that there are significant gender gaps in terms of access to and control of digital technology and the Internet. These gaps increase when one considers additional intersecting factors, for example for women living in poverty or women living in rural spaces. The GDC should provide a roadmap for equitable access to digital tools and the Internet in both cities and rural areas, ensuring that service provision is affordable, speedy and reliable.

Digital inclusion requires equitable access to digital tools and the Internet, and meaningful connectivity for all women and girls. Plans to achieve this must be informed by the needs and voices of different women to identify appropriate and locally relevant solutions to bridging the digital divide. For example, different financial models, such as community networks, may be considered to ensure affordable access, and local infrastructure needs, for example electricity connectivity, would be planned for. Finally, access, digital inclusion and meaningful connectivity must be adapted and provided to women living with disabilities, including those with sight loss, hearing loss and those with learning disabilities, and ensuring that rural spaces are provided with the same access to the Internet as urban spaces.

The above would empower women and girls to make choices about the digital tools that they use and how and where they use them.

### **Strengthening women's and girls' digital literacy and skills**

Education, training and access to safety are necessary for women and girls to benefit from and be agents of change in creating an inclusive and feminist digital future. The GDC would ensure that all women and girls access and benefit from inclusive digital learning and skills development so that they can safely access the Internet and benefit from the opportunities that it offers. A particular focus on

prioritizing strengthening the capacities of women in marginalized communities and those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination by enhancing their digital literacy and skills must be invested in, to ensure that women and girls benefit equally from the digital revolution.

We recommend digital education from a young age that embeds teaching of gender equality and respect in digital spaces as core curriculum components. In addition, the promotion, protection and prevention of harm to women and girls' rights including the right to live a life free of violence both online and offline would be supported through such an approach. Globally, enhancing women and girls' digital literacy and skills while ensuring access to and control over digital tools and meaningful connectivity can be catalytic in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment by increasing access to better education, opportunities for public participation and while ensuring data protection.

## **Increasing women's participation in the tech sector and STEM**

We need more women – and more diverse women – entering STEM fields and shaping our digital future. To achieve this, we also need more online role models to inspire young women and girls to be in the digital space and to shape the digital space. Young women and girls must have opportunities to access quality STEM education in all countries around the world, and harmful social and cultural norms that discourage girls from doing so must be reversed.

Educational establishments and workplaces for women in STEM must be free of sexual harassment for them to benefit in and participate fully in shaping the digital future. Scholarships for girls may be used to encourage their participation, and temporary special measures, such as quotas may be used to incentivize closing the gender gaps in STEM education and employment.

For women working in the tech sector, funding must be provided for them to design and develop their own technology and digital solutions that work for women and girls.

## **Shaping a safe and inclusive digital future**

We need a feminist approach to the architecture of the Internet and feminist design of digital tools to transform this space into one that is safe and inclusive for all women and girls. This would mean integrating safety by design and safeguards into existing and new technologies to prevent technology facilitated gender-based violence against women and girls (TF GBV). The global democratizing of the production of such spaces also involves decolonizing the language of the Internet, making it available in local languages and adapted to different contexts. A feminist digital future must be developed through a participatory process that centers women's voices, and where deliberate efforts are made to include the

how  
actors  
order to re

C.S.O's

MAKE  
ECONOMIC  
CASE FOR  
GENDER EQUAL TECH

Governments

Tech  
Businesses

GOVERNMENT  
CONSTITUTIONAL  
OBLIGATION

What do women need in the digital transition?  
- what needs to happen to ensure they are not left behind?

STRONG  
WOMEN  
INFORMED  
LEGISLATION  
REGULATION  
POLICY + PROCESS

FEMINIST  
BY DESIGN  
(TECH + LEGISLATION)

Drive results  
- 10% of women in leadership  
- 10% of women in safety  
- 10% of women in STEM

Implementing  
with  
- 10% of women in leadership  
- 10% of women in safety  
- 10% of women in STEM

Global  
collaboration  
- global  
- global  
- global

Compassion  
- don't just  
- don't just  
- don't just

Transparency  
- don't just  
- don't just  
- don't just

Money  
- don't just  
- don't just  
- don't just

Empowerment  
- don't just  
- don't just  
- don't just

Government  
- don't just  
- don't just  
- don't just

Tech  
Businesses  
- don't just  
- don't just  
- don't just

CSOs  
- don't just  
- don't just  
- don't just



voices of women who are the most excluded from these processes, notably those experiencing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. The process must be transparent and multi-stakeholder, and allow for meaningful participation, including co-design. This will serve to ensure that the design of technology is human-centered and accessible, resulting in women and girls having power over technology, and would embed safety by design and safeguards to prevent TF GBV.

Engaging in the feminist digital future would mean that people would be aware of and be able to rely on codes of ethics built into international law and agreements, particularly the GDC.

Finally, a safe and inclusive digital future requires content moderators for different languages and dialects, and knowledge of local contexts to ensure that women's and girls' rights are not violated. Feminist content moderation requires that training and education be provided to content moderators and the tech sector on human rights, gender responsive design, preventing and responding to TF GBV etc. adaptation to the specificity of the local context is needed, and it must be informed by human rights.

## **Ensuring safety online through laws and regulation**

The GDC should lay the foundation for regulatory frameworks that take a zero-tolerance approach to tech-facilitated GBV, gendered hate speech and discrimination, prioritizing equality and non-discrimination and safe access to digital spaces, whilst at the same time protecting freedom of expression. Legal and regulatory frameworks should be informed by the diverse voices of women and girls so that agreed and consistent standards and safeguards can be put in place to prevent TF GBV reflecting the context specific needs of women and girls, while at the same time setting standards on freedom of expression and privacy. Laws and policies are needed, that safeguard women's rights, with transborder cooperation for implementation and with clear sanctions for violations. Technology companies should put in place strong policies and codes of conduct to prevent TF GBV and discrimination as well as providing swift and effective reporting mechanisms, and response remedies for women and girls that experience violence.

The compact should also prioritize data privacy and protection and ensure that women and girls have control over their personal data and should ensure transparency over how algorithms work.

A successful GDC would make the digital realm safer for women and girls by providing guidance for transnational, legal and enforceable accountability for corporations and governments. This could include setting parameters for liability as well as identifying tangible and transparent mechanisms for implementation, including existing ones at the international level.



## **Enhancing access to survivor-centered services**

Women and girls who experience TF GBV or other human rights violations in online spaces or through the use of technology must have access to justice and support services that are survivor-centered, trauma-informed, and grounded in human rights. Services must be easy to access safely in all countries around the world.

## **Women's leadership and empowerment**

Women and girls in all their diversity must have a seat at the table and a role in decision-making across all facets of the global digital revolution, from design of tech to ethics for AI, financing and governance.

**ENDS**

# Annex 1

## Alliance for Universal Digital Rights (AUDRI) 9 Digital Principles

1. **Universal and Equal Rights.** Everyone has an equal right to protection, opportunity, and respect, including in the digital realm.
2. **Personal Safety and Data Privacy.** Everyone has a right to control information about themselves and to secure protection from digital harms.
3. **Digital self-determination.** Everyone has a right to exercise self-determination in the use of digital technologies.
4. **Digital Access for All.** Everyone has a right to access the digital realm and to be free to participate in digital life.
5. **Freedom of Expression and Association.** Everyone has a right to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association online.
6. **Secure, stable and resilient networks.** Everyone has a right to benefit from secure, stable, and resilient digital networks and technologies.
7. **Linguistic and Cultural Diversity.** Everyone has a right to use any language of their choice to create and share digital information.
8. **Universal Standards and Regulation.** Everyone has an equal right to benefit from the development and use of digital technology.
9. **Good Digital Governance.** Everyone has the right to multilateral, democratic oversight of the internet and digital technologies.

Explore the Digital Principles in full at [audri.org](https://audri.org).