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Commission on the Status of Women
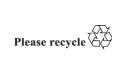**Sixty-seventh session**
6–17 March 2023
Agenda item 3
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and
to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly,
entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century"

Ministerial round tables on "Fostering inclusive innovation and technological change to empower women and girls and create safer digital spaces"

Chair's summary

1.   On 7 March 2023, the Commission on the Status of Women held ministerial round tables on "Fostering inclusive innovation and technological change to empower women and girls and create safer digital spaces", in the context of the priority theme "Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls". Participants exchanged experiences, lessons learned and good practices in relation to the topic, with an emphasis on measures taken to create an enabling environment to promote inclusive innovation processes, to ensure that products and services empower women and girls rather than perpetuate inequalities, and to create safe digital spaces.

2.   The Parliamentary State Secretary of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth of Germany, Ekin Deligöz, chaired the first round table and made introductory remarks. The Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), Asa Regner, summarized key messages. Ministers and high-level officials from 17 Member States participated in the first round table. The Secretary of State for Policies on Equality and Diversity of the Ministry of Women, Genders and Diversity of Argentina, Paulina Calderón, chaired the second round table, and the Deputy Secretary-General, Amina J. Mohammed provided opening remarks via video message. Ministers and high-level officials from 20 Member States participated.

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Measures to promote inclusive innovation ecosystems and gender-responsive technological change

3. Ministers underscored that digitalization must be an inclusive, human-centred and human rights-based process and that new technologies must promote and accelerate the achievement of gender equality, rather than amplify existing inequalities. Ministers recognized that women and girls held the key to innovative solutions to emerging issues, such as climate change. They stressed that the full participation and representation of women at all levels of technology design and development was therefore critical.

4. Speakers provided positive examples of policies and programmes to promote the participation and leadership of women in innovation and technology design. Examples cited included campaigns, scholarships, loans and internships to promote and support women and girls pursuing higher education in fields related to science, technology, engineering and mathematics, as well as mentorship schemes and the enforcement of targets and quotas for hiring women in the technology sector. A number of speakers stressed the importance of addressing gender stereotypes and negative social norms that prevented women and girls from effectively contributing to innovation and technology development.

5. Several speakers highlighted the importance of applying gender lens criteria in the allocation of financial support to research projects, and prioritizing investment in projects from women-led or diverse teams. Several representatives also stressed the importance of supporting women-led enterprises and women entrepreneurs in the technology and innovation sphere. The importance of industry-led initiatives, as well as public-private partnerships, was emphasized in that respect.

6. Participants shared how digital tools and services had been developed specifically to meet the needs of and support the empowerment of women, women entrepreneurs and micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises. They included e-government tools providing services in areas such as health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, maternal care, social services and employment, as well as tools offering economic opportunities and digital financial products and services. Such tools had often proved critical to providing vital services for women in rural settings and to ensuring the continued and safe provision of services during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

Best practice approaches in preventing and eliminating online gender-based violence

7. Ministers expressed concern about the significant growth in instances of violence against women and girls in online and digital environments, such as hate speech, disinformation, misinformation, malinformation, incitement to hatred, invasion of privacy, defamation and sex crimes and trafficking. Speakers acknowledged that women who experienced intersecting forms of discrimination were more vulnerable to those forms of abuse, including women and girls with disabilities, young women and girls, women of colour and indigenous women. Participants emphasized that online gender-based violence particularly affected women in the public eye, such as politicians and journalists, in view of the fact that online platforms were important spaces for feminist movements and advocacy, and that instances of violence discouraged women and girls from assuming leadership positions and curbed their freedom of expression.

8. Speakers expressed their commitment to eradicating violence in digital spaces and to ensuring that the Internet was a space in which human rights were upheld and women and girls were empowered to establish safe and secure online environments.

Ministers underscored the importance of developing national action plans and legislation to eliminate online gender-based violence. Speakers highlighted the value of mainstreaming a gender perspective across public policies and programmes, as well as ensuring effective cooperation across government ministries. They also highlighted the need for a comprehensive definition of online gender-based violence and greater levels of research and data collection to track and better understand instances of online gender-based violence.

9. Several speakers emphasized the need to develop and implement sound legislative frameworks that addressed the intersectional nature of online gender-based violence. Ministers highlighted how national legislation on gender-based violence had been adapted to include the online or digital sphere, while others provided examples of specific laws, policies and programmes. Examples of specific provisions included the swift removal of harmful or intimate content, the establishment of punishments for perpetrators, and initiatives that made lists of perpetrators available to the public.

10. Ministers emphasized that it was critical for national governments to partner with social media platforms to improve online safety and ensure that online spaces were a source of opportunities for women and girls. Speakers also provided examples of how digital tools could be used to address cases of violence online, including innovative programmes and algorithms capable of identifying instances of online gender-based violence, as well as digital platforms and applications for survivors to report such instances, access information on services and present testimonies in court virtually.

11. Governments emphasized that awareness-raising and education were critical to eliminating online gender-based violence and that schools and learning environments were a key setting for efforts to tackle the gendered stereotypes that perpetuated violence. Several speakers provided examples of relevant initiatives, including focus group discussions and digital awareness courses to improve young people's comprehension of online gender-based violence, and the creation of guidance for schools to support victims of online bullying. Ministers underscored the critical role of civil society in raising awareness to combat online gender-based violence and promote the safety and well-being of women and girls online.

12. Participants stressed the urgent need to foster better digital governance, with standards to ensure data protection and privacy and the transparency and accountability of digital spaces. The need to ensure that the Internet reinforced democratic principles was recognized, while the need to promote global digital public goods was also stressed.

International cooperation and multi-stakeholder partnerships

13. Ministers underlined that international cooperation and multi-stakeholder responses were key to bridging the gender divide in digital access and skills, promoting inclusive innovation and technological change, eliminating online gender-based violence and creating safe online and digital spaces. Several speakers noted the important partnerships with United Nations agencies, private sector partners and civil society organizations in that respect. Speakers stressed the need to ensure the integration of a gender perspective within relevant international processes, including the future development of a global digital compact and the Summit of the Future in 2024.

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