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Commission on the Status of Women
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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": emerging issues, trends, focus areas and new approaches to questions affecting the situation of women, including equality between women and men

Interactive dialogue on the emerging issue/focus area "Artificial intelligence to advance gender equality: challenges and opportunities"

Chair's summary

1. On 21 March 2024, the Commission on the Status of Women held an interactive dialogue on the emerging issue and focus area "Artificial intelligence to advance gender equality: challenges and opportunities". Participants exchanged experiences, knowledge, lessons learned and good practices, with an emphasis on addressing the structural and systemic barriers that exacerbate the gender digital gap in new and emerging technologies, focusing on artificial intelligence. The Vice-Chair of the Commission, Māris Burbergs (Latvia), made an introductory statement and chaired the dialogue.

2. The following speakers made opening remarks: the Global Chief Privacy and AI Governance Officer at Wipro, an international information technology, consulting and business process services company, Ivana Bartoletti (Italy); a member of the High-level Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence and researcher at the Center for the Study of Law, Internet and Society, Estela Aranha (Brazil); the Executive Director of the first gender data observatory in Latin America, DataGénero, Ivana Feldfeber (Argentina); an associate professor at the Department of Media and Digital Culture at the Tecnológico de Monterrey of Mexico, Paola Ricaurte Quijano; and a researcher at the Institute of Legal Science, Faculty of Law, University of Latvia, Irena Barkane. Representatives from 13 Member States, 1 observer and 8 civil society organizations engaged in the discussion with the panel members.

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Context

3. The unequal pace of digital transformation within and between countries, and how it is being layered over existing structural and systemic barriers, translates into unequal opportunities for women and girls. Emerging technologies, and artificial intelligence in particular, are considered to be one of the seismic shifts that will shape the twenty-first century, having the potential to deeply affect all economic, social and political spheres of society as well as the environment. In the current artificial intelligence architecture, benefits and risks are not equitably distributed and power is concentrated in the hands of a few corporations, States and individuals who control talent, data and compute resources. This calls for an in-depth reflection on how to harness the benefits of artificial intelligence so that women and girls may enjoy equal opportunities and rights, gain the skills needed to participate in its design and deployment, have access to artificial intelligence-enabled services that respond to their needs and priorities, and shape the values and principles that should underpin its safe and equitable use.

Current challenges and opportunities of artificial intelligence and how this technology can be harnessed to benefit women and girls

4. Speakers recognized that, despite its potential productive benefits in critical sectors such as health, agriculture and renewable energy, artificial intelligence systems have exacerbated gender inequality by reinforcing socioeconomic disparities, widening the gender digital divide and perpetuating gender stereotypes and biases. Of particular concern is the discrimination faced by women and girls, especially those from marginalized backgrounds, due to factors such as technology-enabled controls, biased algorithmic decision-making, and precarious working conditions in the technological industry. Effective strategies for ensuring the socioeconomic benefits of artificial intelligence must therefore include as a priority the participation and leadership of all women and girls in the development of artificial intelligence systems, from the design and deployment of these technologies to their utilization and monitoring.

5. Participants expressed concern over the gender gap in digital literacy, artificial intelligence education and employment, emphasizing the urgent need to eliminate barriers hindering women and girls from accessing digital technologies, Internet connectivity and education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Speakers also drew attention to the profound impact of artificial intelligence on job markets, noting the disproportionately higher number of women facing employment loss due to the automation of jobs and the negative impacts of the gig economy on women's rights and protections in the workplace. In response, reskilling and upskilling initiatives were identified as essential to empowering women with the requisite digital skills to secure viable employment options and address the shortage of digital and data science professionals. Early exposure of girls to technology education is paramount in fostering digital literacy and narrowing the artificial intelligence divide.

6. Speakers underscored the critical need for transparency in generative artificial intelligence systems, particularly the algorithms and data sets used in their development. The impact of artificial intelligence on the privacy of women and girls underscores the imperative to rethink meaningful consent in the digital realm. Furthermore, speakers noted the concerning proliferation of online violence against women and girls enabled by artificial intelligence tools such as deepfakes, coupled with limited mechanisms to prevent and respond to artificial intelligence-facilitated gender-based violence. Women in the public eye, including politicians, journalists and women human rights defenders, were identified as being particularly vulnerable

to the threats posed by artificial intelligence. In addition, the increase in misinformation and disinformation through artificial intelligence was highlighted as a troubling trend.

The way forward

7. Member States highlighted a range of strategies aimed at harnessing the transformative potential of artificial intelligence to maximize societal benefits while ensuring socioeconomic prosperity and gender equality. Central to these strategies is the establishment of robust regulatory and policy frameworks imbued with a gender perspective, utilizing intersectional, multi-stakeholder approaches to effectively tackle the challenges posed by artificial intelligence. They highlighted existing frameworks on artificial intelligence governance, both national and international, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, the recently adopted European Union Artificial Intelligence Act, the Council of Europe Convention on Artificial Intelligence, Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law and the Hiroshima AI Process. Furthermore, there was recognition of the pivotal role of investing in women-led artificial intelligence initiatives and fostering partnerships with women-led civil society organizations to drive gender-responsive artificial intelligence development and governance. A comprehensive whole-of-society approach involving Governments, technology companies, international organizations, academia and civil society was viewed as crucial for coordinated and impactful interventions.

8. Participants emphasized the importance of incorporating gender considerations at every stage of artificial intelligence development, deployment and utilization, through mechanisms such as gender impact assessments and public consultations with adequate representation of women and girls and their lived experiences. This approach is aimed at identifying and mitigating artificial intelligence-related risks, ensuring a human-rights based and people-centred approach and preventing the encoding of inequalities in artificial intelligence systems.

9. Speakers stressed the significance of placing gender at the core of artificial intelligence regulatory frameworks and policies and increased investment in key areas such as digital literacy and skills training, entrepreneurship, science, technology, engineering and mathematics education for girls, and research in responsible artificial intelligence and the impacts of artificial intelligence on women. Speakers also highlighted the significance of the upcoming Summit of the Future, particularly the ongoing intergovernmental negotiations on the Global Digital Compact, as an important opportunity to integrate gender perspectives and a stand-alone goal on gender equality to address common global challenges.