Interactive dialogue on emerging issue/focus area

Artificial Intelligence to advance gender equality

Thursday, 21 March 2024, 10.00 – 1.00 p.m.

Background and rationale

In his report to prepare the sixty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women (E/CN.6/2023/3), the Secretary-General reflected on how digital technologies are rapidly transforming society, simultaneously allowing for unprecedented advances to improve social and economic outcomes for women and girls but also giving rise to profound new challenges that may perpetuate and deepen existing patterns of gender inequalities.

The unequal pace of digital transformation within and across countries, and how this is being layered over structural and systemic barriers, translates into unequal opportunities for women and girls. Emerging technologies, and artificial intelligence (AI) in particular, are considered to be one of the seismic shifts that will be shaping the twenty-first century with the potential to deeply impact all economic, social and political areas as well as the environment. In the current AI architecture, benefits and risks are not equitably distributed, with power concentrated in 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 AI so that women and girls may enjoy equal opportunities and rights, have the skills to participate in its design and deployment, have access to AI-enabled services that responds to the needs and priorities and shape the values and principles that should underpin its safe and equitable use.

At present, only 22 per cent of artificial intelligence workers globally are women, while girls do as well as boys in science in most countries. This limits women's access to fast-growing and well-paid careers and their direct participation in shaping AI systems and leading investments, research, public policy and businesses in this sector. Automation and artificial intelligence also bring major disruptions to industries and the labour force, leading simultaneously to job creation, elimination and transformation. While job losses will differ among countries, women will predominantly bear the impact of those changes, owing to the varied nature of persistent occupational and vertical segregation.

A recent global analysis of 133 systems across industries from 1988 to the present day found that 44.2 per cent of them demonstrated gender bias, with 25.7 per cent exhibiting both gender and racial bias, resulting primarily in lower quality of service, unfair allocation of resources and reinforcement of existing, harmful stereotypes. A comprehensive report into deepfakes in 2023 found that deepfake pornography makes up 98 per cent of all deepfake videos found online, while 99 per cent of the victims targeted by deepfake pornography are women. The spread of gendered disinformation and online abuse fueled by algorithms used in social media is pushing push back against decades of progress made on women's and minority rights, limiting their participation in public life and undermining democracy and human rights.

The serious harm and discrimination against women and girls triggered by AI have highlighted the need for ethical reflection. In recent years, there has been a proliferation of ethical and responsible frameworks developed by Governments, civil society organizations, companies, and multi-stakeholder partnerships to articulate principles to help to mitigate risks and spread technological benefits. Many cover prevention of bias, safety and protection of privacy, but few adopt a gender-responsive approach or call for artificial intelligence systems to "help to eliminate relationships of domination between groups and people based on differences of power, wealth, or knowledge".

Those frameworks are founded on best practices and values, making it difficult to hold Governments or corporations accountable for any violations. Instead, they should be grounded in international human rights standards and norms and adopt a human rights-based design approach that would commit to designing digital technologies that respect human rights by default, rather than permit abuse or exploitation as part of their business model, the consequences of which are only addressed after they have occurred.

Objective
Following the 67th session of the Commission and its analysis of the impact that technological change is having on the achievement of gender equality, the interactive dialogue will provide an opportunity to delve deeper on AI and how it can be harnessed to fulfil the needs and human rights of women and girls in all their diversity.

The dialogue will bring together stakeholders including government officials and representatives of non-governmental organizations, youth and the United Nations system. The interactive dialogue will start with presentations by a small number of invited participants, followed by good practice examples and other contributions from Member States and non-governmental organizations.

Format and participation
Consideration of the emerging issue will be through an interactive dialogue. A CSW Vice-Chair will chair and moderate the meeting. The topics will be introduced by invited speakers. Member States will participate in the dialogue on a voluntary basis. No speakers' list will be kept. UN-Women will facilitate an online application process for representatives of NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC. The list of NGOs proposed for participation in the event will be distributed to Member States through respective Bureau members.

Guiding questions:
- What are the main impacts of AI on gender equality and the lives and rights of women and girls?
- What measures need to be taken to adequately mainstream gender perspectives in discussions on AI governance mechanisms?
- How do stakeholders build capacity to effectively harness the power of AI to narrow gender equality gaps and prevent forms of GBV, discrimination and misinformation against women and girls which can occur through AI systems? What measures can be taken to better protect women in the public eye who are targeted to a much greater extent, especially politicians, journalists and women human rights defenders?
- What steps governments can take to transform the current AI ecosystem and its power asymmetries and unequal distribution of benefits and risks?
- What are the key gender perspectives that need to be included in the current discussions on new digital governance frameworks, including the Global Digital Compact and the work of the HLAB on AI?

Outcome
The outcome of the meeting will be in the form of a summary of the Chair of the Commission, prepared in consultation with the regional groups, through the members of the Bureau.