



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-seventh session

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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”

### Statement submitted by UNANIMA International, a 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

UNANIMA International, together with our endorsers, welcomes the theme “Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls” as the Priority Theme for the 67th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women. UNANIMA International is a nongovernmental organization (NGO) with consultative status at the United Nations (UN) and a coalition of 23 Communities of Women Religious and Friends in 85 countries with 25,000 Members. As part of our mandate, we raise issues affecting women and children/girls to the UN in New York and Geneva.

We are in the midst of rapid technological change and an increasing reliance on digital innovation for social progress, education, and economic processes. However, the distribution of and access to these innovations and technologies varies dramatically when examining disaggregated data and statistics. According to the International Communications Union (2020), on average across the developing world, nearly 25 percent fewer women than men have access to the internet. And, in regions like sub-Saharan Africa, this gender gap becomes as high as 45 percent. Given this reality, it is a responsibility of the international community to ensure that the transitions our society undertakes are just ones. It is imperative to acknowledge that technological advancement can only be as beneficial as the policies and practices that bolster their accessibility and responsible use. Digital rights are human rights, and women’s rights are human rights.

Certainly, there are invaluable benefits associated with widespread use of technology, especially for women and girls. When women and girls have access to the digital space, they can experience greater agency, connectedness to the rest of the world and their family members, financial independence, and can participate in education systems in ways that were previously not possible. Technology access can also provide a platform for women and girls to share their experiences, advance their knowledge, and contribute to global conversations on the very issues that disproportionately affect them, such as gender inequality, violence, and other inequities.

However, we have seen that advancements in technology can be a double-edged sword for those most left behind and can result in both unintended and intended consequences. Some of these consequences include marginalized groups being made more invisible to agencies, governments, and decision-makers. For example, the transition of social services and safety nets to exclusively online platforms does not account for the individuals and families that lack reliable access to the internet, mobile devices, and computers. As such, those without these technologies face a significant disadvantage and additional hurdles in receiving the support they need. Furthermore, without an online presence, many vulnerable people are unable to apply for housing, employment, financial assistance, healthcare, education programs, and citizenship/residency.

It is also important to remember that women and girls often face the brunt of sexual, domestic, and relationship violence. Technology can play a helpful role in women/girls escaping these harmful situations, but at the same time it can also exacerbate and promote these types of violence. In our research on Family Homelessness and human trafficking, UNANIMA International found that traffickers will often utilize technology and social media to buy and sell women and girls into sexual slavery; it is evident that technology can replicate some of the same power dynamics and forms of oppression that women have faced for thousands of years.

In recent years, UNANIMA International has engaged on issues related to the priority theme through our research, education, and advocacy on Family

Homelessness and its intersections with overarching global trends – including aspects of technology and digital access. We aim to establish Family Homelessness as a multilateral issue, with women, children, and girls as our focus. It is necessary and critical for Member States to address and prevent homelessness, particularly for women and girls, in order to fully actualize international laws, agendas, and plans of action. Some of these international frameworks include but are not limited to the 2030 Agenda, the New Urban Agenda, the Universal Declaration for Human Rights, and others. Simply put, we cannot expect to meet the ambitious targets of these frameworks without significant work to eradicate homelessness. Digital technologies and innovations have great potential to advance progress on important human rights and socioeconomic issues that disproportionately affect women and girls like homelessness, climate change, social exclusion, and gender equality among others.

UNANIMA International supports UN Women’s focus on these interconnected topics for the “Year of Action on Gender and Technology,” and recognizes the importance of technology in supporting solutions to our planet’s most difficult circumstances. We call for targeted policies and interventions that ensure women and girls who fall into vulnerable categories receive and have access to digital technologies, social protections, and services that will empower them to achieve their human rights and fully participate in just transitions into the future. Some of our recommendations include:

- Action to accelerate progress towards the full and equal economic participation of women, in particular advocating for closing the gender pay, pension and social protection, and digital divide gaps; this must be accompanied by recognition of women’s unpaid work and services for their families and communities.
- Clear guidelines and accountability mechanisms specified by governments for technology and social media companies to assist in preventing trafficking through online means.
- More national governmental efforts to collect disaggregated data on homelessness and housing insecurity, combined with regional efforts to network existing services, coordinating the response and better identifying gaps in services and people in need.
- Fulfilling of requirements of international agreements such as those laid out in The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), including the implementation of laws against domestic violence.
- Access to quality education (both formal and informal) and safe, supportive, respectful and inclusive in-person and online educational environments for all, and particularly women/girls, youth, the displaced, and people with disabilities.

This statement is endorsed by the following nongovernmental organizations at the United Nations with ECOSOC Status: Congregation of Our Lady of the Good Shepherd, Sisters of Charity Federation, Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Casa Generalizia della Societa’ del Sacro Cuore, Edmund Rice International Limited, Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary - Loreto Generalate, Sisters of Norte Dame de Namur, International Presentation Association, Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, Worldwide Network Nigeria: Women in Development and Environment, Passionists International, School Sisters of Notre Dame, Salesian Missions, Inc., Loretto Community (Sisters of Loretto)