

THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENTS AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN IMPROVING WOMEN ACCESS TO NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Opening remarks: Her Excellency Ambassador Anda Filip (Romania)

UNECE

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Women and men around the world are increasingly taking advantage of new technologies - in particular information and communication technology (ICT) - to start and develop their business, acquire new knowledge, seek advice and participate in social and political life.

New technologies can be thus a tool to promote gender equality and enhance the economic, political and social empowerment of women as recognized by the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action as well as other documents. At the same time, however, ICT may perpetuate existing gender-based inequalities in opportunities and resources and create new forms of inequality between women and men.

1. **The ongoing process of the World Summit on the Information Society** offers a unique opportunity to address the gender issues, searching for ways and means to **raise the awareness** on trends and issues related to gender and ICT development, **to identify the obstacles and barriers** hampering an equal access of women and men to ICT, **to establish a platform for dialogue** among major stakeholders and recommend **concrete follow up activities** for improving women's access to new technologies.

2. **The Pan European Ministerial Conference in preparation of WSIS – the Bucharest Declaration**

The Bucharest Declaration is a consistent step ahead in stating the most significant **principles** to be followed in building the Information Society, as well as in identifying the main areas where **priority action** is required.

- The Information Society offers great potential in **promoting sustainable development, democracy, transparency, accountability and good governance.**
- Full exploitation of the **new opportunities provided by information and communication technologies (ICTs)** and of their combination with traditional media, as well as an adequate response to the challenge of the digital divide, should be important parts in any strategy, national and international, aimed at achieving the development goals set by the Millennium Declaration.

- The Information Society is based on **broad dissemination and sharing of information and genuine participation** of all stakeholders - Governments, private sector and civil society.
- Their contribution is vital in the efforts to bring full benefits of the Information Society to all. Governments and other stakeholders *should also provide the necessary conditions to ensure women's equal access to information and knowledge, as well as equal opportunities as participants and decision-makers in all aspects*, related to the shaping of ICT policies and frameworks.

3. Elements to be underlined in relation with the “gender sensitive Information Society” issue:

Gender equality refers to all ICT areas (users, producers and decision makers):

- It reflects not only core UN values embodied in international standards of human rights, and conventions (CEDAW) but is also critical for economic growth.
- Women represent 50% of potential consumers for ICT products and services and labour force in ICT sector bringing ideas for new products, services and management styles.
- Economic arguments are especially relevant to the ECE region, where women are well educated, including in math and science (as seen in Romania and other countries).

Attention to gender equality is critical for building IS based on human rights and economic arguments

Gender digital divide:

- The situation in transition countries needs attention due to the deterioration of women’s position in the economy during the 1990s.
- Disproportional cuts in employment and shifts of women’s jobs to the lower end of the labour, cuts in family benefits and social protection, and persistence of traditional views of women’s role resulted in lower income /wages, less time for learning ICT related skills and unfavourable social climate for using ICT-related opportunities.

Gender specific barriers in access to ITC:

- high access costs and technology choice;
- limited access to learn new skills (lack of information and encouragement to apply for ICT training);
- insufficient networks and perception of ICT as a “male” sector.
- differences among women in access to ICT are determined by geographical factor (urban-rural areas), family status (single mothers) and age (difficult access for women over 40-45 years old).

Opportunities for using ITC as a tool for advancing gender equality:

- advancing **gender justice** (awareness raising, discrimination, violence);
- increasing **women’s employability** (best practices in using ICTs for developing women’s businesses, improving access to jobs and markets);
- using ICT for **networking** at national, regional and global levels;
- E-learning and increasing **women’s political participation** through e-governance.

Recommendations for action:

(to all stakeholders: governments, private sector, civil society and international community)

- Including a **gender perspective** into a debate and preparation of national ICT strategies and fully involving women in the development of e-governance systems;
- Building and developing **women's capacity to use ICT** for entrepreneurship and business development;
- Encourage **gender mainstreaming** in telecommunication institutions, especially for infrastructure development and related projects ensuring the affordable access especially for disadvantaged women, such as those living in rural areas, single mothers and older women;
- Launching the process of preparation of **national reports** to assess the situation of women and men as users, producers and decisions makers in the ICT.