

# Unleashing Digital Transformation for Women and Girls in the Western Balkans

Closing the gender digital divide in jobs, services and civic engagement

Summary of Consultation Monday 13th September 2021



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## Meeting Aims

- The programme is anchored in UN Women's partnership with the European Union to support the Western Balkans, candidates and potential candidates to the EU membership to align their normative frameworks with the acquis Communautaire, and more specifically to achieve the results stated in the EU Gender Action Plan III.
- The programme builds in and contributes to the results and ongoing programming of UN Women in the region in support of national governments and civil society organizations to advance the gender equality and women's rights agenda emanating from national commitments and international and regional conventions such as CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention.
- In this context, UN Women ECARO is holding a series of regional/sub-regional consultations to understand better the needs and existing similar interventions in the region, as well as to determine where and how the programme should focus its interventions and opportunities for strategic partnerships within it.
- This meeting is one of a series of regional/sub-regional consultations held by UN Women to gather critical stakeholders' views on the most pressing barriers for women, girls, and entire societies to benefit equally and participate in the gains that digitalization could potentially bring to the region.
- This meeting was informed by an online survey that was disseminated prior by UN Women which would also inform the programme being developed.

## Attendees

- Esmeralda Hoxha, Gender Alliance for Development Center
- Eridjona Vallja, Observatory for Children and Youth Rights
- Flutra Bektashi, EcoKosWomen - EKW
- Dina Spahiu, ipko foundation
- Dorina Grezda, Innovation Centre Kosovo (ICK)
- Jasmina Trajcheva, Organization of women of municipality of Sveti Nikole
- Nina Đukanović, NVO Dobar život
- Velida Hodzic, NVO IKRE Rozaje
- Katerina Shojikj, NRC
- Valentina Disoska, Association of business women
- Marina Tucović, Women's Center Uzice
- Iris Luarasi, Counselling Line for Women and Girls
- Mariana Meshi, Different & Equal
- Selma Badzic, Center of Women's Rights
- Edona Shala, Foundation for Information, Media, Dialogue and Education-Kosovalive (KIMDE)
- Delvina, Haxhijaha Open Data Kosovo
- Teuta Sahatqija, RWL
- Ardita Thaqi, Safe House Gjakove
- Marina Toseska, Local Action Group AGRO LIDER
- Liljana Jonoski, Rural Coalition
- Tamara Mirkovic, Roma center for woman and children Daje
- Svjetlana Timotic, IZ KRUGA - VOJVODINA

## **Introduction, Blerta Cela UN Women**

There are many successes in the region regarding the digitalisation of key processes and reducing the gender divide. UN Women and WCSOs in the Western Balkans will use the outcomes of both the survey and this consultation to harness these best practices and to create a programme that will benefit women and girls in the region. This is an opportunity for those involved intimately with the region's women and girls to help shape this programme, as WCSOs are UN Women's key partners in the region. Digital opportunities are becoming increasingly important and must be leveraged to reduce inequality.

This new initiative is in line with the Generation Equality Action Coalition on Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality. You can learn more about this Action Coalition [here](#), and you can learn more about leaders of this Action Coalition [here](#).

## **Survey Results, Yolanda Iriarte and Ela Ionescu, UN Women**

The slides used in this section of the consultation can be found in Annex 1.

Covid-19 has moved working spaces online, and the digital divide is leaving behind individuals without computer and internet access as well as organisations that are unable to digitalise their services. Closing the digital gender gap presents an opportunity to address social and economic disparities. Developing women and girls in ICT would help close this gap and also ICT can be used itself to address gender inequality in other sectors. We need to enable women and girls to participate safely in the digital economy, ensure their access to social services and to empower women's organisations voice and agency.

There are some organisations with expertise on this subject in the region, but what is most encouraging is that nearly everyone who responded to the survey no matter what their knowledge or expertise on the matter were on board with tackling the gender digital divide. In the region there is a sense of urgency about the need to develop digital capacities, as well as the need to increase accessibility in rural areas. Key areas of action include raising awareness and tackling gender stereotypes so there is safer access to digital tools; addressing gender bias and cultural norms around technology; emphasising women and girls capacity for entrepreneurship to ensure their access to the digital economy; essential digital services for victims and survivors of violence, in particular strengthening women and girls capacity to respond to online violence.

## **Discussion Questions and input from participants**

The participants have discussed the below three questions via two breakout groups, and with notes on a Miroboard. The miroboard outputs from this discussion can be seen in Annex 2.

### **1. What would be the key interventions to address these obstacles?**

- Mapping of the need and providing funding for equipment and capacity assistance in the dissemination and use of digital equipment, especially in rural communities.
- Awareness-raising on the digitalisation process, its necessity and benefits and tackling of traditional stereotypes that still sometimes exist around the ownership of digital devices. These awareness raising work needs to include a gender equality component, and should include women's organizations in their preparatory and implementation phases.
- Governments should have a gender responsive digital strategy and policies. The interventions of this digital strategy should be inclusive and diversified for the needs of different groups, include the women parliamentarians as policy makers.
- Digital gender based violence should also be addressed and prevented, the survivors should be given support and women's organizations working on these issues should be funded
- Education - digital and computer literacy - needs to work as an intervention at elementary, secondary and university levels to inspire women and girls to enter STEM fields. Through life-long learning opportunities women can be inspired to take up e-commerce.
- Media should include more women in STEM fields, as role models.
- Women's organizations, especially those who are in direct contact with women and girls on the ground and those that undertake advocacy, should be supported by funding and capacity building on digitalisation, and a network of women's organizations working on these issues should be established.

### **2. What would be the key stakeholders to be involved when addressing those obstacles?**

- Media as a key stakeholder in order to both tackle stereotypes and communicate with women and girls in the region.
- Role of municipalities in which WCSOs are based as well as working with the governments in the region.
- Governments, legislators and parliamentarians, especially women parliamentarians across party lines Relevant government institutions, e.g. Ministry of Information and Society, Agency for Employment...

- Private sector organisations and ICT companies with social responsibility programs, with expertise in technology could help address some capacity gaps.
- Donors
- Regional cooperation institutions
- Public and private education institutions, including life-long learning institutions, should be encouraged to work with WCSOs, as well as parents also play a key role in influencing the decisions of women and young girls (in relation to their joining the STEM field).
- Civil society organizations are one of the crucial stakeholders
- Local communities and the women and girls that are targeted for digitalisation projects should be included in the development of these programs
- Role of UN Women can be to bring stakeholders together

### **3. What are the key capacity gaps for civil society organisations?**

- Need more recognition of smaller NGOs and networking between all organisations in the region, for example with joint education programmes relating to technology.
- Physical lack of digital equipment and infrastructure has become an even bigger capacity gap with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Funding is needed to bridge this gap. Lack of awareness on the importance of the issue and lack of knowledge on the issue to be able to work on digitalisation on the ground
- Lack of knowledge on how to use digitalised services such as e-commerce, e-governance services, etc. , as well as on how to use the digital platforms safely
- Skill-building on advocacy is needed by CSOs to be able to advocate for these issues in front of decision makers and relevant institutions
- A needs analysis on these issues are necessary before developing programs to access the lack of digitalisation
- Survivors of digital violence need to know their rights e.g., around protecting their personal data. Additionally, need to raise awareness on accessing virtual legal assistance or virtual psychological support.

## Annex One: Survey Results


### Digital gender divide

Refers to the measurable gap between women and men in their access to, use of and ability to influence, contribute to and benefit from ICT.


### Background and Rationale

The digital revolution brings immense potential **to improve social and economic outcomes** globally. However, a significant **digital gender gap** still exists, risking:


- The **perpetuation of existing patterns** of gender inequality;
- **Limiting the equitable realization of the benefits** of digital transformation for women worldwide



**COVID-19 has accelerated digital transformation and more clearly exposed the gap between those with digital skills and access and those without.** Digital transformation has left behind both individuals without computer/internet access and organizations unable to digitalize their services.



**Women and girls' low presence in STEM/ICT sectors:** one of the persistent gender gaps and limited progress identified in the Beijing +25 review process in the Western Balkans.



On 6 October 2020, the EC adopted a comprehensive **Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans** which aims to spur the long-term recovery of the region and a green digital transition, foster economic regional cooperation, boost economic growth, echoing to the **EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III 2021-2025**

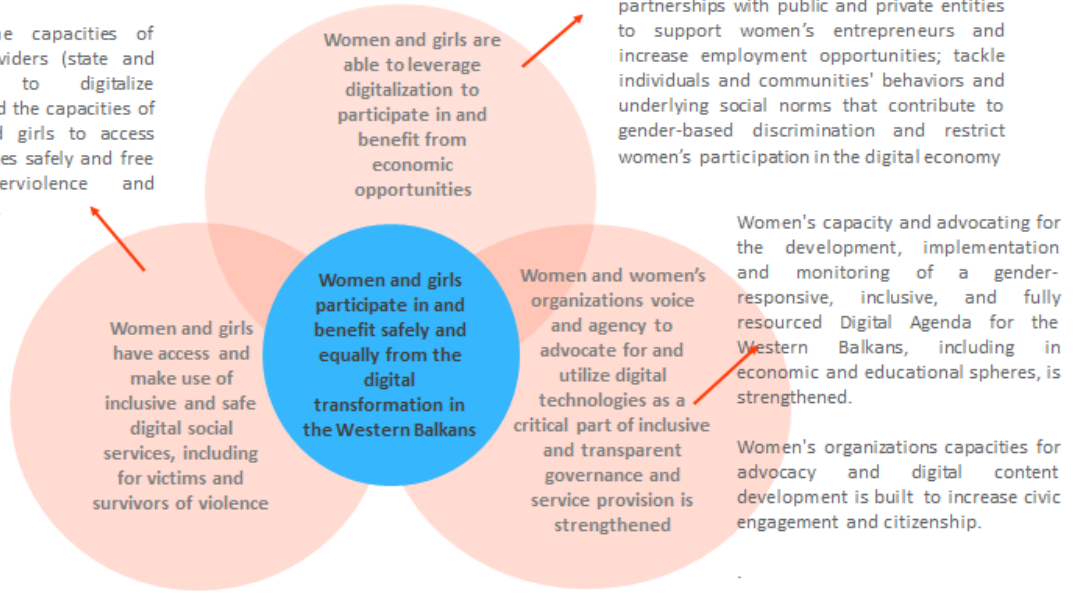
### Programme description in brief

Programme description	The programme aims at harnessing the potential gains from access to fast evolving information and communication technology (ICT)/or digital technologies by 1) enabling women and girls to <b>participate safely and equally in the digital economy</b> ; 2) enhancing <b>access to and availability of inclusive digital social services</b> for women and girls, with a focus on women from marginalized groups; and 3) empowering women and women's organizations to <b>advocate for and utilize digital technologies</b> for more inclusive and transparent governance.
Duration	TBD –tentatively 36 months
Geographic coverage	Regional and Western Balkans: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro (*) and Serbia
Suggested collaborative agencies and partners	CSOs; <b>women's rights organizations</b> ; national machineries for the advancement of women and key in line ministries; International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and Council of Europe (CoE)

\* For the European Union, this designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence. For UN Women, references to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

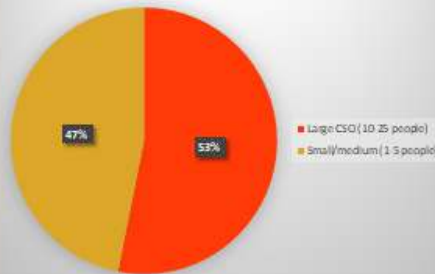
## Strategic framework

Enhance the capacities of service providers (state and non-state) to digitalize services, and the capacities of women and girls to access those services safely and free from cyberviolence and harassment.

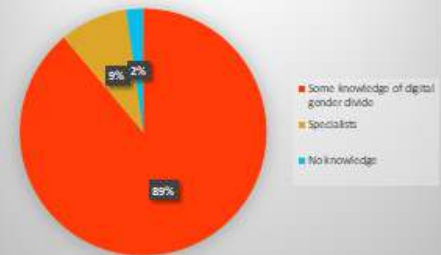


## Knowledge and Expertise of CSOs

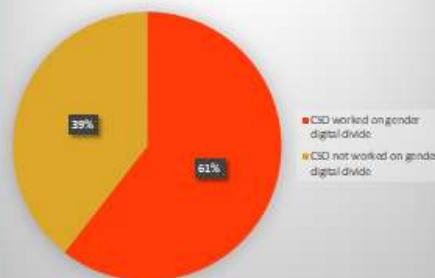
Size of the Organization



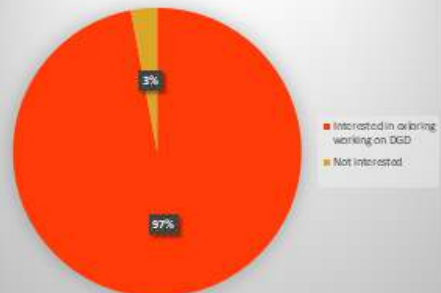
Knowledge of digital gender divide (DGD)



Expertise on DGD



Interested in exploring on DGD





## Survey Results

### To enable women & girls to lead and participate safely and equally in the digital economy

Women and girls, especially from marginalized groups, have **increased skills in digital literacy**, advanced ICT and digital entrepreneurship.

**Traditional gender norms and stereotypes** that contribute to gender-based discrimination and restrict women's participation in the digital economy are reduced.

#### Key challenges and priorities:

- ✓ Equip women and girls with skills and technologies so they can contribute to better employment policies
- ✓ There is a lack of understanding/knowledge of the digital economy so there is a need to provide trainings for marginalized women to become economically active in the labor market.
- ✓ Conduct entrepreneurship training with special emphasis on the digital economy
- ✓ Capacity building provided on digital marketing –
- ✓ Establish a mentorship program for women entrepreneurs
- ✓ Develop a platform to promote women's educational practices and stories

#### Key challenges and priorities:

- ✓ Reducing traditional gender norms and deconstructing stereotypes being at the root of the issue- therefore needs to be addressed raising self-confidence ; (mentorship programs)
- ✓ Create entry points for women to enter STEM professions – that can help reduce stereotypes
- ✓ Media awareness raising campaigns to help reduce patriarchal culture and traditional norm
- ✓ Capacity building for women on how to developing business-related tools and services

## Survey Results

### To enhance access to and availability of inclusive digital social services for women and girls, with a focus on women from marginalized groups.

**Capacities of state and non-state services providers to run digital essential services** for victims and survivors of violence in a safe environment is strengthened.

Women and girls, men and boys are knowledgeable and have the tools to **protect themselves from online and cyber violence** and have access to safe and secure digital services.

#### Key challenges and priorities:

- ✓ Provide access to safe and secure digital services
- ✓ Capacity building and financial support for women's NGOs offering specialist support services to victims of violence
- ✓ Raise awareness about legal aid services available through media campaigns-monitoring hate speech and cyber violence that is targeting the LGBT community
- ✓ Strengthen capacities of service providers including in and rural areas so women are empowered to use existing digital services
- ✓ Governments have the capacities (technical and financial)to invest in sustainable services with easy access

#### Key challenges and priorities:

- ✓ Strengthen capacities of women so they have the tools to protect themselves from online and cyberviolence
- ✓ Increase digital opportunities for rural inhabitants (media, trainings)–to be well informed about diverse forms of digital threats and tools for prevention of cyberviolence
- ✓ Develop educational programmes (IT) that can be embedded in formal education with a special focus on girls
- ✓ Promote women champions that can mentor other women about online and cyber violence

## Survey Results

To empower women and women's organizations to advocate for and utilize digital technologies as a critical part of inclusive and transparent governance

Women's voice and agency advocating for the development, implementation and monitoring of a gender-responsive, inclusive, and fully resourced Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans, including in economic and educational spheres, is strengthened

Women's organizations are better able to leverage digital technologies to increase civic engagement and citizenship

### Key challenges and priorities:

- ✓ Conduct ToT to strengthen capacities of CSOs to deliver workshops and trainings
- ✓ Creating an enabling environment for the non-governmental sector to use digitalization tools
- ✓ Provide long term sustainable staff training on how to access to information and online services
- ✓ Strengthening gender inclusive peacebuilding and democratic governance policies while speeding up EU reforms
- ✓ Provide technical equipment for CSOs and its members living in rural areas and with different types of disabilities

### Key challenges and priorities:

- ✓ Support to CSOs in the implementation of gender sensitive policies
- ✓ Enable women's organizations to provide members with equal access to all available digital services regardless of the location, equipment, and technical skills of their associates
- ✓ Women's organizations need to advocate for completely free and accessible services
- ✓ Create a platform of engagement – connecting all CSOs to explore ideas and initiatives around services provision through digital and social innovation
- ✓ Provide financial and expert support for women's organizations to build capacities on digital technologies tools
- ✓ Empowering women and women's organizations to advocate for and utilize digital technologies as critical part of inclusive and transparent governance

## Key set of activities by programme objectives, informed by survey

To enable women & girls to lead and participate safely and equally in the digital economy

### Key activities

- ✓ Deliver training programmes in enhanced ICT and soft digital skills;
- ✓ Promote networking, mentoring, other forms of learning to deepen women & girls' knowledge and access to partnerships and digital platforms;
- ✓ Conduct research on the barriers and opportunities for women entrepreneurs and in the ICT sector to inform policy making and programme implementations to inform interventions on positive social norms, including behavioral change initiatives;
- ✓ Conduct job fairs and virtual expos to connect women with drivers of demand for digital jobs (private, public sector, online outsourcing and digital platforms)
- ✓ Engage male champions on STEM from governments and companies to ensure that hiring practices also attempt to break down gender stereotypes in the labour market;
- ✓ Engage social media companies operating in the region to prevent and take action on any form of online violence that prevent women from participating in the digital economy (pillar 2)

## Key set of activities by programme objectives, informed by survey

To enhance access and use of inclusive digital social services, including services for women victims and survivors of violence

### Key activities

- ✓ Train state and non-state service providers on digital transformation/adaptation of existing social services;
- ✓ To provide sustainable support and guidance for the digital transformation of CSOs providing services;
- ✓ To build trust between online services providers and potential users;
- ✓ Conduct research on cyber-violence, including against minoritized groups of women, to inform law development, policy making and service provision;
- ✓ Develop and implement a mapping tool to crowd-source reporting of sexual violence, harassment and stalking, and to document and monitor it;
- ✓ Provide offline and online legal counseling and psychosocial support to victims of cyberviolence and hate speech;
- ✓ Invest in large-scale initiatives to eradicate online gender violence and educate users on their rights, privacy, and security to prevent and reduce the incidents of online violence against women and girls;
- ✓ Advocate among governments and tech leaders to regulate online violence towards a well-defined legal framework that guarantees protection for all,
- ✓ Enhance collaboration with the largest social media platforms in the region.

## Key set of activities by programme objectives, informed by survey

To strengthen women and women's organizations voice and agency to advocate for and utilize digital technologies as a critical part of inclusive and transparent governance and civic engagement

### Key activities

- ✓ Provide technical assistance and capacities development to policy makers and CSOs to reform/develop gender-sensitive frameworks and strategies;
- ✓ Establish permanent regional working groups based on a multi-stakeholder approach to provide regional advice on issues of digital transformation and expertise that will facilitate and enhance the process;
- ✓ Increase CSOs' and medias' capacities to raise-awareness and tackle challenges related to the Digital Agenda and empower them to become active participants in the process;
- ✓ To hold a biennial regional forum on advancing gender equality in the digital world.
- ✓ Conduct regional research, integrating an intersectional approach, on how to enhance digital civic engagement for and by women and girls;
- ✓ Set-up capacities-building programmes for CSOs and activists/informal network to increase their capacities to produce content and leverage digital technologies to increase civic engagement and citizenship;
- ✓ Increase women's organizations' capacities to online fundraising method to fund their activities (expertise).
- ✓ Establish community/city/national/regional women's organizations-led platforms for citizens to inform and drive action in their local constituencies.

## Programme modality of implementation & Key strategies



Direct beneficiaries: Women's organizations working on gender equality and women's empowerment, including organizations representing women from minority and disadvantaged groups, primarily as responsible partners but also as beneficiaries of capacity development, technical assistance, and knowledge-building.

40%

Around 40 percent will be allocated for implementation by CSOs. Furthermore, 30 percent of these funded interventions will benefit the most disadvantaged groups of women and minoritized women



The programme will build on existing partnerships of UN Women in the Western Balkans & at regional level, including with CSOs, in line ministries, national machineries for the advancement of women, the International Telecommunication Union and the Council of Europe.

## Annex Two: Miroboard from Discussion

