

# UNDERSTANDING THE RISKS OF ICT TO WOMEN AND GIRLS



## WHAT IS THE GENDER DIGITAL DIVIDE?

The digital divide is the distinction between those who have mobile and Internet access and are able to make use of ICT and those who are excluded. The gender digital divide reflects the inequalities between men and women in terms of ICT access and use.

ICT enables access to critical health services as well as to opportunities for education, civic participation, employment, entrepreneurship, and access to finance that were once out of reach for many people. It acts as a vital gateway for women to access information that can improve their livelihoods, significantly enhancing their ability to contribute to their families and the global community. Access to, and use of, mobile devices and the Internet also has an impact on women's empowerment, as well as on social cohesion and subverting gender norms. Yet, just as ICT is accelerating opportunities and impact all across the world, women are being left behind.

More than half of the world's women are offline: in developing countries, the Internet penetration rate for women on all devices is 40.7 percent, compared to 52.8 percent for men.<sup>1</sup> Three hundred million fewer women than men use mobile Internet (a gender gap of 20 percent).<sup>2</sup>

Around 393 million adult women (aged 18 and over) in low- and middle-income countries do not own mobile phones; women are 8 percent less likely to own a mobile phone than men. This gap is larger in certain regions: in South Asia, the gender gap is 23 percent (207 million women); in sub-Saharan Africa, it is 13 percent (74 million women). Women are 20 percent less likely than men to own a smartphone, and again, this gap is larger in certain regions.

<sup>1</sup> Facts and Figures 2019. ITU, 2019. Available at <https://itu.foleon.com/itu/measuring-digital-development/gender-gap/>  
<sup>2</sup> The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2020. GSMA Connected Women, 2020. Available at <https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/GSMA-The-Mobile-Gender-Gap-Report-2020.pdf>

## BOX I. A NOTE ON INTERSECTIONALITY

Both the Internet and the mobile gender digital divide are intersectional: a rural, low-income woman is much less likely to be connected than an urban woman. For example, while urban women in Brazil are 2 percent less likely than men to use the mobile Internet, women in rural areas are 32 percent less likely.<sup>3</sup>

However, research has tended to focus on divides based on singular identities, such as gender or class.<sup>4</sup> There is a strong need to generate more research on cross-cutting divides.

## WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF ICT FOR WOMEN?

Closing the gender digital divide is a crucial part of realizing USAID's core objective of increasing women's economic empowerment and gender equality. ICT can give women and underrepresented populations access to information, finance, markets, and other life-enhancing services.

At the same time, ICT can be a double-edged sword for women and girls, as there are often unintended consequences of ICT that can threaten a woman's safety and well-being. Indeed, the inventor of the Internet, Tim Berners-Lee, recently declared that the Internet was not working for women and girls,<sup>5</sup> and was not a safe space for them. This is backed up by worrying statistics: as Figure I shows, over half of young women globally report having experienced violence online, and 87 percent of them believe the problem is getting worse.<sup>6</sup>

FIGURE I. RISKS OF ICT



WEB FOUNDATION, 2020

<sup>3</sup> The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2019. GSMA Connected Women, 2019. Available at [www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/resources/mobile-gender-gap-report-2019/](http://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/resources/mobile-gender-gap-report-2019/)

<sup>4</sup> Leaving no one behind in a digital world. Institute of Development Studies, 2018. Available at [opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/20.500.12413/14147/Emerging%20Issues\\_LNOBDW\\_final.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](http://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/20.500.12413/14147/Emerging%20Issues_LNOBDW_final.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

<sup>5</sup> Internet 'is not working for women and girls', says Berners-Lee. The Guardian, 2020. Available at [www.theguardian.com/global/2020/mar/12/internet-not-working-women-girls-tim-berners-lee](http://www.theguardian.com/global/2020/mar/12/internet-not-working-women-girls-tim-berners-lee)

<sup>6</sup> The online crisis facing women and girls threatens global progress on gender equality. The Web Foundation, 2020. Available at [webfoundation.org/2020/03/the-online-crisis-facing-women-and-girls-threatens-global-progress-on-gender-equality/](http://webfoundation.org/2020/03/the-online-crisis-facing-women-and-girls-threatens-global-progress-on-gender-equality/)

## BOX 2. A NOTE ON DEFINITIONS

The literature lacks standardized terms to refer to technology-facilitated violence and abuse towards women, or gender-based violence. This variation in terminology often reflects, and results in, a lack of clarity about what technology-facilitated violence and abuse is. For clarity, this document uses the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) term, “Technology-Facilitated Gender-based Violence (GBV),” which is defined as:

“Action by one or more people that harms others based on their sexual or gender identity or by enforcing harmful gender norms. This action is carried out using the Internet and/or mobile technology and includes stalking, bullying, sexual harassment, defamation, hate speech and exploitation.”<sup>7</sup>

While the Internet in particular can be a source of information, entertainment, and empowerment, there is also a fear, on the part of female users (and their families), of the negative side: being exposed to inappropriate content, risks to personal safety, online bullying and harassment, increased risk of cyberstalking, compromising of personal information or data, and perceptions that online relationships can damage reputations. This negative component of ICT can be a barrier to access and use for women and girls, whether through self-policing or through gatekeepers who restrict access, often due to social norms.<sup>8</sup>

### TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED GBV

» *ADS 205 Domains: Access and Control; Cultural Norms and Beliefs; Power and Decision Making; Gender Roles, Responsibilities, and Time Use*

Like GBV more broadly, technology-facilitated GBV is overwhelmingly skewed towards women and girls: 95 percent of aggressive behavior, harassment, abusive language, and denigrating images in online spaces are aimed at women and girls. The consequences of technology-facilitated GBV are not limited to digital spaces, moreover: its risks and consequences straddle both the physical world and the digital world.

### RISKS IN THE PHYSICAL WORLD

Mobile phones possess real value; in public spaces, carrying a phone can put a woman at risk of theft and bodily harm. Women and girls often report leaving their mobile phone at home or avoiding using it in public to prevent theft; similarly, they may not choose (or be permitted by gatekeepers) to own a higher-end handset or smartphone for fear of theft. Accordingly, theft concerns can in turn curtail Internet use, as women and girls using lower-end phones (or basic or feature phones) are less likely to be online.



Photo: KC Nwakalor for USAID / Digital Development Communications

<sup>7</sup> Technology-facilitated Gender-based Violence: What is it, and how do we measure it? ICRW, 2018. Available at [n2r4h9b5.stackpathcdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICRW\\_TFGBVMarketing\\_Brief\\_v8-Web.pdf](https://n2r4h9b5.stackpathcdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICRW_TFGBVMarketing_Brief_v8-Web.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> A framework to understand women's mobile-related safety concerns in low-and middle-income countries. GSMA Connected Women, 2018. Available at [www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/resources/a-framework-to-understand-womens-mobile-related-safety-concerns-in-low-and-middle-income-countries/](http://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/resources/a-framework-to-understand-womens-mobile-related-safety-concerns-in-low-and-middle-income-countries/)

There is also a link between physical violence and access to/use of ICT by women. Many women report that they avoid using mobile phones or the Internet at home, or that they hide their phone to avoid domestic violence caused by jealousy.<sup>9</sup> Women's online activity and digital connection are often blamed for an increase in sexual relationships outside of marriage and consequent conflict and physical violence between partners and families.<sup>10</sup> Physical violence often arises when men perceive women's (real or imagined) use of mobile phones and the Internet as allowing them to break free from men's control; their use of ICT is seen as disruptive and destructive to the social order—and, therefore, as a punishable act.

## RISKS IN THE DIGITAL WORLD

Using the Internet leads to an increased risk of online sexual harassment and abuse for women and girls. Nearly 25 percent of women across Europe and the United States have experienced online abuse or harassment at least once, and 41 percent report that these experiences made them feel that their physical safety was threatened.<sup>11</sup> Social media in particular present an unsafe space: 68 percent of reported online abuse of women and girls takes place on social media platforms.<sup>12</sup> Reported harassment through ICT is not only online, but also on mobile phones: 36 percent of women in India reported that they have received calls or messages of a sexual or inappropriate nature, and 82 percent also said that they have received unwanted pictures or videos of a sexual or inappropriate nature.<sup>13</sup>

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There is also an increasing number of websites that are dedicated to sharing revenge pornography, with users submitting images of victims (without their consent) accompanied by their personal information. Ninety percent of victims are female, and there have been many cases of suicide among women because of this “revenge porn.”<sup>14</sup> This acts as a major deterrent to using the Internet for younger women in particular: in the 2020 Web Foundation survey, 35 percent of young women reported that the online sharing of private, intimate images and videos without their consent was their top concern about using the Internet.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>9</sup> A framework to understand women's mobile-related safety concerns in low-and middle-income countries. GSMA Connected Women, 2018. Available at [www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/resources/a-framework-to-understand-womens-mobile-related-safety-concerns-in-low-and-middle-income-countries/](http://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/resources/a-framework-to-understand-womens-mobile-related-safety-concerns-in-low-and-middle-income-countries/)

<sup>10</sup> Mobile phones, Gender-based Violence, and distrust in state services: Case studies from Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. Hobbs, 2018. Available at [onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/apv.12178](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/apv.12178)

<sup>11</sup> Amnesty reveals alarming impact of online abuse against women. Amnesty International, 2017. Available at [www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/11/amnesty-reveals-alarming-impact-of-online-abuse-against-women/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/11/amnesty-reveals-alarming-impact-of-online-abuse-against-women/)

<sup>12</sup> The online crisis facing women and girls threatens global progress on gender equality. The Web Foundation, 2020. Available at [webfoundation.org/2020/03/the-online-crisis-facing-women-and-girls-threatens-global-progress-on-gender-equality/](http://webfoundation.org/2020/03/the-online-crisis-facing-women-and-girls-threatens-global-progress-on-gender-equality/)

<sup>13</sup> Bridging the gender gap: Mobile access and usage in low- and middle-income countries. GSMA Connected Women, 2015. Available at [www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Connected-Women-Gender-Gap.pdf](http://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Connected-Women-Gender-Gap.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Cyber violence against women and girls. EIGE, 2017. Available at <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/cyber-violence-against-women-and-girls>

<sup>15</sup> The online crisis facing women and girls threatens global progress on gender equality. The Web Foundation, 2020. Available at [webfoundation.org/2020/03/the-online-crisis-facing-women-and-girls-threatens-global-progress-on-gender-equality/](http://webfoundation.org/2020/03/the-online-crisis-facing-women-and-girls-threatens-global-progress-on-gender-equality/)

Cyberbullying is also much more acute for women and girls. In Uganda, 45 percent of women surveyed reported that they experienced direct bullying or threatening behavior when using the Internet.<sup>16</sup> Victims of cyberbullying represent a wide range of populations and contexts: female politicians and elected officials regularly experience far more cyberbullying attacks than their male counterparts, receiving hate speech and threatening comments about their sexuality and appearance.<sup>17</sup>

## CYBERSECURITY AND DATA PRIVACY

» *ADS 205 Domains: Access and Control; Cultural Norms and Beliefs; Power and Decision Making; Gender Roles, Responsibilities, and Time Use*

Another consideration in bringing more women and girls online is the attendant security and privacy risks, related to cybersecurity as well as data privacy and data security. When a woman loses her identity, she may lose her monthly income or suffer reputational risks. While cyberattacks, data risks, and privacy breaches—such as sharing of personally identifiable or sensitive information—impact everyone, women and girls tend to be more vulnerable. This is because they tend to have lower levels of digital literacy skills, and so are less aware of risks and risk mitigation strategies.<sup>18</sup> In some African countries, women were found to be far less aware than men of potential cybersecurity or privacy threats, and how to safeguard themselves.<sup>19</sup>



This disparity is related to individual perceptions of what privacy is. In some contexts, women who are less digitally literate often regard privacy as a “social” thing, rather than a “tech” or “data” thing. When women in South Asia talked about maintaining online privacy on their mobile, they focused on keeping their online (or mobile) activities private or secret from other people within their household or community (i.e., through content hiding or deletion, or using phone locks), rather than on data privacy, cybersecurity, or privacy risks from other online actors.<sup>20</sup>

Personal data breaches and data privacy risks can also be more acute for women and girls. As companies increasingly collect personal and financial data from consumers, many of these companies violate privacy rights and data security. Evidence shows that women and girls are more likely to be on the receiving end of these violations, as female consumers tend to be less aware of the risks and of their rights.<sup>21</sup> There is also an increased

<sup>16</sup> Tech-related violence against women in peri-urban areas of Uganda. WOUNGNET, 2019. Available at [www.apc.org/en/pubs/tech-related-violence-against-women-peri-urban-areas-uganda](http://www.apc.org/en/pubs/tech-related-violence-against-women-peri-urban-areas-uganda)

<sup>17</sup> Breaking the silence: Ending online violence and abuse against women’s rights activists. Womankind, 2018. Available at [www.womankind.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/resources/?topic=29544c1e-0c86-63e3-9143-ff00009d7e70](http://www.womankind.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/resources/?topic=29544c1e-0c86-63e3-9143-ff00009d7e70)

<sup>18</sup> Engendering ICT: Toolkit for task team leaders. The World Bank, 2018. Available at [www.athenainfonomics.com/?portfolio=gendering-ict-toolkit](http://www.athenainfonomics.com/?portfolio=gendering-ict-toolkit)

<sup>19</sup> Understanding the gender gap in the Global South. After Access, 2018. Available at [afteraccess.net/reports](http://afteraccess.net/reports)

<sup>20</sup> “Privacy is not for me, it’s for those rich women”: Performative privacy practices on mobile phones by women in South Asia. Sambasivan, Checkley, Batool, Ahmed, Nemer, Gaytán-Lugo, Matthews, Consolvo, and Churchill, 2018. Available at [www.usenix.org/conference/soups2018/presentation/sambasivan](http://www.usenix.org/conference/soups2018/presentation/sambasivan)

<sup>21</sup> Visibility and secrecy: Data protection, privacy and gender in Pakistan. GenderIT, 2019. Available at [www.genderit.org/articles/visibility-and-secrecy-data-protection-privacy-and-gender-pakistan](http://www.genderit.org/articles/visibility-and-secrecy-data-protection-privacy-and-gender-pakistan)

risk of data breaches for women, as more identification systems shift to digital. While digital identification is often presented as a way of facilitating access to government services and a way to confirm and protect identities, it can also be used as a tool for control and surveillance by the state or by other actors. And in countries with strong gender norms and patriarchal structures, it can be used to control women and limit their agency.<sup>22</sup>

## REINFORCING GENDER STEREOTYPES AND INEQUALITIES

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Increasing mobile and Internet access and use among women and girls can also lead to the unintended consequence of reinforcing gender stereotypes or exacerbating existing gender inequalities. In some patriarchal societies—where women’s mobile phone or Internet access and use may be associated with assumptions about a woman’s freedom to make her own choices or form relationships—this may upend traditional household control, power dynamics, and expectations. While in some cases this can result in giving women more choice and control, it can also have negative effects, such as revealing tensions within a household or community and resulting in reinforced gender-based restrictions or male dominance.

For example, in some households or communities, particularly those with strong gender-based norms, it is common for women’s mobile and Internet usage to be controlled by men or mothers-in-law or older women. Often, men in these societies believe that ICT has a corrupting influence on women. In many countries, it is an expected cultural norm that women share their devices with their husbands and families, and it is also considered acceptable behavior for husbands to monitor their wives’ online activity.<sup>23</sup> This is often more acute for young women and girls, especially those who are unmarried: parents or intimate partners use mobile phones to control or track a daughter’s movements much more than they would a son’s, reinforcing gender norms about what is safe and acceptable for girls compared to boys.<sup>24</sup>

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22 Reclaiming the right to privacy: An opportunity to challenge gender inequality. Privacy International, 2019. Available at [privacyinternational.org/news-analysis/2762/reclaiming-right-privacy-opportunity-challenge-gender-inequality](https://privacyinternational.org/news-analysis/2762/reclaiming-right-privacy-opportunity-challenge-gender-inequality)

23 Being meaningfully mobile: Mobile phones and development. Tacchi, J., 2014. Available at [repository.lboro.ac.uk/articles/Being\\_meaningfully\\_mobile\\_mobile\\_phones\\_and\\_development/9462647](https://repository.lboro.ac.uk/articles/Being_meaningfully_mobile_mobile_phones_and_development/9462647)

24 Taking stock: Data and evidence on gender equality in digital access, skills and leadership. EQUALS, 2019. United Nations University Institute on Computing and Society/International Telecommunications Union. Available at [www.itu.int/en/action/gender-equality/Documents/EQUALS%20Research%20Report%202019.pdf](https://www.itu.int/en/action/gender-equality/Documents/EQUALS%20Research%20Report%202019.pdf)



Photo: Paula Bronstein/Getty Images/Images of Empowerment

Women’s use of social media is often seen as a threat to existing relationships and control, and it can lead to reinforcing unequal power relations between men and women. Women often report that their male partners did not allow them to be on Facebook, or felt uncomfortable with them being on social media sites, due to jealousy or fears that they would be unfaithful; some women in African countries report that they were afraid of being online because of their husbands’ reaction, describing increased tension within the household as a result of their being online.<sup>25</sup> Many women in South Asia report that they depend on their husband, father, or brothers for access to the Internet and ICT, both because of social norms around control and because of their own lack of digital literacy skills.<sup>26</sup>

Social media is often used as a tool to support social norms of male dominance. In many countries it perpetuates gender inequalities and reinforces social norms by marginalizing women. In some contexts, young male Facebook users report having two Facebook accounts: one for their male friends and one for their family. This is done to avoid their male friends seeing their female relatives in photos, which would compromise their female relatives’ honor and their family’s reputation.

This approach reinforces the social norm that women need to be protected and hidden from society and males, as a form of “digital purdah”<sup>27</sup> — keeping women and girls confined to the private space, thus reducing their agency. Young women and girls are much more aware of, and exposed to, criticism for what they do online (e.g., having an open profile, too many friends, too many male friends, or revealing photos); this in turn leads to self-monitoring and self-surveillance.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Understanding the gender gap in the Global South. After Access, 2018. Available at [afteraccess.net/reports](https://afteraccess.net/reports)

<sup>26</sup> “Privacy is not for me, it’s for those rich women”: Performative privacy practices on mobile phones by women in South Asia. Sambasivan, Checkley, Batool, Ahmed, Nemer, Gaytán-Lugo, Matthews, Consolvo, and Churchill, 2018. Available at [www.usenix.org/conference/soups2018/presentation/sambasivan](https://www.usenix.org/conference/soups2018/presentation/sambasivan)

<sup>27</sup> Digital purdah, or how Facebook maintains gender segregation in Pakistan. Schoemaker, E., 2015. Available at [blogs.lse.ac.uk/internationaldevelopment/2015/08/01/digital-purdah-or-how-facebook-maintains-gender-segregation-in-pakistan/](https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/internationaldevelopment/2015/08/01/digital-purdah-or-how-facebook-maintains-gender-segregation-in-pakistan/)

<sup>28</sup> Gender equality and youth: Opportunities and risks of digitalisation. EIGE, 2019. Available at [eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-and-youth-opportunities-and-risks-digitalisation](https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-and-youth-opportunities-and-risks-digitalisation)

Interestingly, many of these gender norms and unequal power relations that ICT can reinforce are internalized by women and girls themselves, in a form of digital “double consciousness.” Some women view it as completely acceptable for their male relatives to monitor their devices and their Internet usage. Some even report that they appreciated it when male members checked their phones, to ward off unwanted calls and attention on social media, as these women view their own digital literacy skills and capabilities as lower than their male relatives’.<sup>29</sup> Adolescent girls often report they believe that phones and the Internet can be unsafe spaces for them; they think that since they cannot be trusted with access, they shouldn’t have it.<sup>30</sup>

## WHY DO THESE RISKS MATTER?

These negative impacts of ICT on women and girls can reduce or restrict the way they use mobile phones or the Internet, which can negate the positive benefits that ICT can bring. Women and girls increasingly report that the risks associated with mobile and the Internet are both a major barrier to access and a deterrent to further usage. This is not only because of their own concerns, but also in response to those of their parents, spouses, or male gatekeepers; many women and girls report that they don’t own a phone or are not online because their (male) relatives are worried about their safety.

These risks also limit and restrict women’s and girls’ usage and participation with mobiles and the Internet. Intimidation, harassment, and concerns about risks can lead to the (self) censorship of personal information that women and girls share online—or can force them to stop participating online altogether. Women may self-police their Internet use (or are monitored by male/female/family gatekeepers), which results in limited usage, or they may reduce their use of social media due to fear of harassment or other online safety concerns.<sup>31</sup> Other impacts include being less willing to engage in public discourse and to voice their opinions, withdrawing from specific conversations, self-censoring their responses, or withdrawing from the Internet or social media altogether.<sup>32</sup>



**FIGURE 2. THE EFFECT OF TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED GBV**

WEB FOUNDATION, 2020

29 “Privacy is not for me, it’s for those rich women”: Performative privacy practices on mobile phones by women in South Asia. Sambasivan, Checkley, Batool, Ahmed, Nemer, Gaytán-Lugo, Matthews, Consolvo, and Churchill, 2018. Available at [www.usenix.org/conference/soups2018/presentation/sambasivan](http://www.usenix.org/conference/soups2018/presentation/sambasivan)

30 Real girls, real lives, connected. Girl Effect and Vodafone Foundation, 2018. Available at [www.girlsandmobile.org/](http://www.girlsandmobile.org/)

31 A framework to understand women’s mobile-related safety concerns in low- and middle-income countries. GSMA Connected Women, 2018. Available at [www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/resources/a-framework-to-understand-womens-mobile-related-safety-concerns-in-low-and-middle-income-countries/](http://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/resources/a-framework-to-understand-womens-mobile-related-safety-concerns-in-low-and-middle-income-countries/)

32 Breaking the silence: Ending online violence and abuse against women’s rights activists. Womankind, 2018. Available at [www.womankind.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/resources/?topic=29544c1e-0c86-63e3-9143-ff00009d7e70](http://www.womankind.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/resources/?topic=29544c1e-0c86-63e3-9143-ff00009d7e70)

This resultant silencing of women is not only a violation of their right to freedom of expression; it also undoes the benefits of ICT access and use. Moreover, these negative digital experiences—which are disproportionately skewed towards women and girls—also have a negative impact on women’s and girls’ well-being. A reported 59 percent of young women who experienced online abuse say it has affected their emotional and/or physical well-being (Figure 2), and that it affects their relationships, reduces their confidence in using the Internet, and makes them feel that they are less capable than others and less likely to achieve their ambitions.<sup>33</sup>

Women and girls often do not know what to do when faced with these risks. Women and girls frequently have lower digital literacy skills as well as lower levels of confidence, which makes them more vulnerable to the risks than men and boys; they also often have little information about staying safe online or resources to turn to.

Girls often report that they do not know how to proceed or where to turn for help when faced with online harassment or non-consensual sharing of nude photos.<sup>34</sup> One study of eight countries in Africa and Asia found that 25 percent of women who are harassed online or via mobile phones do nothing about it, citing reasons such as “it’s not worth reporting,” “it happens all the time,” and “authorities don’t care.”<sup>35</sup> Similarly, 56 percent of Palestinian women and girls who had experienced technology-facilitated GBV do not consider the Palestinian police or legal system to be trustworthy, stating that such issues are dealt with in much the same way as other gender-based issues—through family support rather than through legal remedies.<sup>36</sup>



Photo: John O'Bryan/USAID

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Taking stock: Data and evidence on gender equality in digital access, skills and leadership. EQUALS, 2019. United Nations University Institute on Computing and Society/International Telecommunications Union. Available at [www.itu.int/en/action/gender-equality/Documents/EQUALS%20Research%20Report%202019.pdf](http://www.itu.int/en/action/gender-equality/Documents/EQUALS%20Research%20Report%202019.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> Women’s rights online. The Web Foundation, 2015. Available at [webfoundation.org/about/research/womens-rights-online-2015/](http://webfoundation.org/about/research/womens-rights-online-2015/)

<sup>36</sup> A violent network: Gender-based Violence against Palestinian women in virtual spaces. Kvinna till Kvinna, 2018. Available at [www.apc.org/sites/default/files/Report\\_GB - KtK.pdf](http://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/Report_GB - KtK.pdf)

This lack of confidence in legal systems is telling. There is a notable lack of formalized policies or regulations around technology-facilitated GBV. Despite its increasing prominence, technology-facilitated GBV still has few formalized regulations,<sup>37</sup> and in general, the response from many governments, law enforcement authorities, and social media companies has been insufficient. In some countries, like Kenya, there are legal frameworks for online safeguarding and security, but they are often generic and gender-blind. Indeed, in 74 percent of countries included in the Web Foundation's Web Index, law enforcement agencies and the courts are failing to take appropriate actions in situations of technology-facilitated GBV;<sup>38</sup> few perpetrators are held accountable for their actions, because of the limited ability to prosecute offenders due to the lack of clear regulations.<sup>39</sup>

Because these risks serve to discourage women and girls from using ICT, they also lead to differential economic and social growth for those women and girls. As the economy increasingly becomes digitized, economic and social growth in the future will depend upon the ability of individuals to use ICT. Women are key economic and social actors in their families and communities; when women are empowered, communities develop. If women and girls are deterred from using ICT because of the potential threats, or have convinced themselves that the risks are too high, this social norm has as much development-stifling impact as a law that would prohibit women using a phone, or a social norm that prevents girls going to school or learning a skill. As economies become more digital, persistent gender digital divides will lead to general economic, social, and opportunity divides. While ICT opens doors for men, unconnected women will face the risk of falling even further behind.

To understand the gender digital divide in more detail, and how it can be incorporated into gender analyses with a WEEGE lens, refer to the [Gender Digital Divide Gender Analysis Technical Resource](#) — the companion tool to this document.

37 Gender equality and youth: Opportunities and risks of digitalisation. EIGE, 2019. Available at [eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-and-youth-opportunities-and-risks-digitalisation](https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-and-youth-opportunities-and-risks-digitalisation)

38 Women's rights online. The Web Foundation, 2015. Available at [webfoundation.org/about/research/womens-rights-online-2015/](https://webfoundation.org/about/research/womens-rights-online-2015/)

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# DOCUMENTS IN THE GENDER DIGITAL DIVIDE RISK MITIGATION TECHNICAL NOTE



## HOW TO USE THIS GENDER DIGITAL DIVIDE RISK MITIGATION TECHNICAL NOTE



## UNDERSTANDING THE RISKS OF ICT TO WOMEN AND GIRLS



## TOOL 1: PRACTICAL RISK MITIGATION STRATEGIES

- » STRATEGY 1: UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT AND THE RISKS: “FIRST, DO NO HARM”
- » STRATEGY 2: INVEST IN, SUPPORT, AND SHARE INSIGHTS ON DIGITAL PRODUCTS AND SERVICES THAT MITIGATE RISKS
- » STRATEGY 3: SUPPORT AND STRENGTHEN ICT OUTREACH AND DIGITAL LITERACY INITIATIVES
- » STRATEGY 4: SUPPORT INITIATIVES THAT INVOLVE (MALE/FEMALE/FAMILY) GATEKEEPERS
- » STRATEGY 5: RAISE AWARENESS
- » STRATEGY 6: COLLABORATE AND WORK WITH OTHER NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS
- » STRATEGY 7: STRENGTHEN INTERNAL AND PARTNER CAPACITY FOR RISK MITIGATION AND SAFEGUARDING



## RESOURCES 1–3: KEY DOCUMENTS