

# THE FEMINIST PRINCIPLES FOR INCLUDING GENDER IN THE GDC

## BACKGROUND

The Global Digital Compact (GDC) is expected to “outline shared principles for an open, free and secure digital future for all”. Just as international cooperation is critical to protecting the health of the planet we all share, international collaboration and cooperation are needed to pursue benefits of digital technologies while mitigating their risks.

The GDC must be based on universal standards that adopt a human rights-based approach and must also recognise the differentiated impact that information and communications technologies (ICTs) have on women, girls and people of diverse genders and sexualities.

The core principles of the GDC of openness, freedom and security must be infused with an intersectional feminist perspective to ensure that the ongoing digital transformation of our economies and societies can usher in a gender-just world that is affirming to all individuals and their path to self-actualisation.

The development of the feminist principles listed below has been a dynamic and multifaceted process, drawing inspiration and guidance from a range of sources, such as the Agreed Conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) 67; the [conclusions](#) of a UN Women & Equality Now consultation event at CSW; and a [submission](#) to the Global Digital Compact consultation by APC, following an event with gender rights and digital organisations in March 2023. The principles also draw on United Nations Human Rights Council (A/HRC) resolutions, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).



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# THE FEMINIST GLOBAL DIGITAL COMPACT WOULD:

## 1. Ensure concrete commitments to protect the digital rights of women and girls and marginalised groups

Advance concrete commitments to assure a digital future grounded on existing **human rights law and standards** for gender-just societies and economies in which States and private sector protect, respect and promote the human rights of women and girls in all their diversity and people facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. This includes recourse for violations of human rights in the digital sphere, and the adoption of an intersectional approach when interpreting human rights that considers gender alongside race, class, caste, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, (dis)ability and any other relevant factor, so as to address any gendered discrimination and inequality.

## 2. Guarantee freedom from technology-facilitated gender-based violence

Include provisions for States to pass legislation that protects the right to **freedom from technology facilitated gender-based violence**. This would include measures for prevention and survivor-centred responses including swift and meaningful redress for survivors, safe and ethical technology and transparent and responsive processes for improving technology in response to technical and social changes. Crucially, States must insist that technology companies practise transparency by disclosing their actions, methods, and motivations, and enforce accountability for their conduct.


## 3. Promote universal rights to freedom of expression, privacy, peaceful assembly, and participation of women and girls in all their diversity in all aspects of life

Promote the full realisation of universal rights to **freedom of expression** and information, to freedom of peaceful assembly and association including the freedom to protest and organise, as well as to full participation in and enjoyment of economic, social, cultural, civil and political life. This includes protection of the right to encryption and online anonymity, and the prohibition of Internet disruptions that do not comply with international human rights standards.

## 4. Ensure universal, affordable, accessible, and safe internet access for all

Promote universal, affordable, unconditional, open, meaningful<sup>1</sup> and equal **access to the Internet for women and girls in all their diversity and people of diverse genders, including those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination**. This includes the right of people with disabilities to receive and impart information and ideas through safe, accessible and affordable formats and technologies, as well as the right to create, share and engage with information in their own language.

<sup>1</sup> On the concept of meaningful connectivity, see for example: ITU's Global Connectivity Report 2022, available at: <https://www.itu.int/hub/publication/d-ind-global-01-2022/>.



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## 5. Demand strict action against harmful surveillance applications and high-risk AI systems and set safeguards to prevent discriminatory biases

Safeguards and standards developed in consultation across global civil society, women's rights and feminist organisations, government and the private sector, with those at the risk of most harm leading the design, should be adopted to ensure that gender stereotyping and discriminatory biases are not translated into AI systems. This should include, at a minimum, transparency in relation to data sets, their sources and uses, and applied algorithms.



Expressly ban surveillance applications that cannot be operated in compliance with international human rights law and impose moratoriums on the sale and use of AI systems that carry a high risk for the enjoyment of human rights unless and until adequate safeguards to protect human rights are in place. Labour cannot be subject to surveillance, particularly any that invades privacy and security, and protections and accountability are needed to ensure women are not subject to technology-driven monitoring.

## 6. Expand women's participation and leadership in the technology sector and digital policymaking

Include measures to **increase the participation and representation of women in all their diversity across all levels of the technology sector including in the design, leadership and decision-making processes** at national and international levels on digital technology governance, infrastructure planning and regulation, and technology development. These measures should include the promotion and support of women and girls studying and working in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), facilitating women's involvement in democratic processes, and strengthening women's rights movements and young women-led organisations to participate in decision making and policy making processes.

## 7. Prioritise strategies that reduce the environmental impact of new technologies

Climate change is a global phenomenon that impacts all people. However, the consequences of climate change are not experienced evenly, and women in developing countries are likely to be disproportionately affected. In light of the pressing contemporary environmental challenges that endanger global populations, particularly women and girls, States must take action to **reduce the energy consumption of the Internet** and digital technologies and minimise harm from the extraction of natural resources to fuel new technologies.



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## THE FEMINIST GLOBAL DIGITAL COMPACT WOULD:

### 8. Implement measures for states and transnational corporations to ensure data privacy, governance, and consent

Include measures for states and transnational corporations to protect the **right to privacy and protection and data governance systems** to ensure that women and girls in all their diversity are able to exercise full control and provide ongoing and informed consent over their personal data and information online at all levels.

### 9. Adopt Equality-by-Design principles and a human-rights based approach throughout all phases of digital technology development.

Make sure that a human-rights based approach and **Equality-by-design principles**<sup>2</sup>, including transparency and human rights and gender rights impact assessments, are incorporated into the development of any algorithmic decision-making systems or digital technologies prior to deployment. And are not tested without these principles, to prevent discrimination and harmful biases being amplified and/or perpetuated.

### 10. Re-shape the participation and role of women in accessing and using digital technology. And address its potential impacts on labour and entrepreneurship.

Ensure that intersectional assessments are undertaken to understand how the processes of digitalisation are impacting different segments of the population, particularly considering the negative impacts on women in all their diversity and people facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. On the basis of this research, develop policies and programmes to close gender gaps and build economic resilience to changes due to technology, including displacement in the job ecosystem, which is disproportionately affecting women-dominated sectors. Furthermore, ensure that measures are in place to encourage and support women and girls studying and working in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and make sure that they have access to safe working conditions, are supported by stronger labour movements, and are provided with access to working environments that encourage feminist economic approaches such as collectives and cooperatives as alternative models of digital innovation and entrepreneurship.

<sup>2</sup> Equality by Design is an approach to system design which requires and enables the potential equality impacts of an algorithmic system to be identified, assessed and addressed as an integral part of the development process. See: *Principles on Equality by Design in Algorithmic Decision-Making*, Equal Rights Trust, 2023.

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## THESE PRINCIPLES HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED BY:

