

Women and technology: Is global digital equality within reach?

Global digital equality is key to ensuring societies and economies become [thrivable](#). This means that all genders must contribute to and participate in an ever-growing digital world so that no one gets left behind.

A 2015 report by McKinsey Global Institute reported that advancing women's equality [could add \\$12 trillion to global growth by 2025](#), where the report mapped 15 gender-equality indicators for 95 countries and found that almost half had very high levels of inequality. Hence, the effect of gender inequality in all areas needs to be addressed if a sustainable future for all humankind is to be achieved.



Source: Canva

Why is global digital equality important?

Digital platforms, mobile phones, and internet access offer increased connection and opportunities for users. For women, and in particular, those who are caregivers, this can increase their employment opportunities, education, flexibility, and financial independence.

Financial tools, such as banking applications, are often used to manage money, start a business, and fund educational expenses. In many countries, where women's finances are often managed by male family members or partners, access would inevitably encourage monetary freedom.

Globally, around 327 million women have less access to mobile internet than men. Women are on average [26% less likely](#) than men to have a smartphone. In South Asia and Africa, the figures stand at 70% and 34%, respectively.

Although technology has the potential to provide a more optimistic outlook for global digital equality, there's still a long way to go. A 2018 report by The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), suggested that [the gender divide in internet use is actually widening](#).

In countries, such as India, Egypt, and South Korea – where women can face structural barriers that limit their ability to participate in society on the same level as their male counterparts – technology can help them overcome societal restrictions.

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What is being done?

Government programmes and non-government organization (NGO) initiatives aimed at breaking down technology barriers have had promising results.



Source: Canva

Google and [Tata Trusts](#) developed an initiative called [Internet Saathi](#) ('Internet Friend') in 2015 that promoted digital literacy for women in rural communities in India. The programme trains women on how to use the internet and equips them with mobile devices. Trainers, known as Internet Saathis, have educated over 28 million women across 289,000 villages so far.

[EQUALS Global Partnership](#) (EQUALS) is also a group of corporate leaders, governments, not-for-profit organizations, non-governmental organizations, and academic institutions that are dedicated to promoting gender balance in the technology sector. This research group champions access, skills development, and career opportunities for all genders by promoting awareness, and political engagement.



Source: EQUALS

In addition, [#eSkills4Girls](#) is an initiative aimed at tackling the gender digital divide, particularly in low income and developing countries. The platform aims to

collect and distribute information and knowledge about gender digital inequality in order to boost education and employment opportunities for women.

Barriers to the digital inclusion of women are generally connected to a set of interrelated factors: Availability of infrastructure, financial constraints, and institutional contexts.

#eSkills4Girls

Social media has also given a voice to women in countries where opportunities to speak out can be limited. [Media Matters for Women](#) (MMW) operates in Africa and aims to connect women and girls with information that enables them to access knowledge regarding their rights. By delivering podcasts on topics, such as teen pregnancy, gender-based violence, and income generation, the initiative inspires discussion and empowerment.

Towards an inclusive digital world

Innovative approaches are needed to ensure that women are empowered to engage in their economies. Technology is a powerful tool for advancing the empowerment of women and girls, but ultimately, addressing the structural inequalities that drive the gender divide is required.

Raising awareness, challenging gender stereotypes, and addressing the cause of gender inequality can also provide a solid foundation for progress. Changes in policy must also aim to resolve the digital gender divide in order to provide new sources of strong, inclusive, and [sustainable economic growth](#). Check the **Thrive Project** for more information!

References

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