



**The Internet Governance Forum**  
**Gender and Access Best Practice Forum 2019**  
**Summary of responses to the open call for input**  
**1 October 2019**

In 2019, the Gender and Access Best Practice Forum (BPF) is focusing on gender and participation in the digital economy. To assist in scoping the issue, the Forum disseminated a survey to help scope the topic. This report analyses the responses.

**Response rate and characteristics of participants**

There were 25 responses. However, two of the responses were from people who were clearly antagonistic to the initiative. Their responses are reproduced in an appendix to this report and not included in the main analysis in the body of the report.

Affiliations (only 19 respondents provided their affiliation) include a range of different civil society organisations, a national and regional internet governance forum (an NRI) an organisations that are part of the technical community.

24 respondents identified their country. Geographically, Africa had the most respondents (7), followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (5). Asia Pacific was next (4) followed by Europe (3) and the Middle East (2) and North America (2).

In terms of individual countries, there were three participants from India and two each from Brazil, Germany and the United States. Argentina, Barbados, Cameroon, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gambia, Lebanon, Lesotho, Mali, Netherlands, Palestine, Uganda, Vanuatu and Zimbabwe each had one participant.

**Responses to the questions**

**1. Digital economy is a broad concept. What should be the operational scope of this concept for the purpose of the Gender and Access BPF's work in 2019?**

Two responses explicitly re-emphasised the broad scope of the concept of "digital economy" while some others did so implicitly. Five examples are listed below. The fact that each describes the broadness in a different way is in itself an indication of the broadness of the concept. The second example suggests avoiding duplication of the work of others within the BPF's work.

- As broad as possible, to encompass the fact that everything in the internet – as well as the medium itself – is a monetized commodity, corporate-owned and regulated by governments. In this sense, the internet is the same as the digital economy.

- The concept is very broad, and disadvantaged groups have different needs to fully utilize ICT for economic purposes. The digital divide differs from country to country, and the BPF should focus on strengthening community groups and networks that have a focus on gender issues so we do not duplicate work that other groups are already doing in this area.
- All the ways in which digital technology has impacted how we work and forms of labour. It should extend beyond the information technology sector as ICTs are now used as platform and delivery in relation to various other products and services to differing degrees.
- The gender struggles and vulnerabilities when doing digital economies and how policy recommendations can influence from different layers (the bottom users of internet, the ISPs, the platforms such as facebook and whatsapp which foster online commerce, how the taxes and government can help reduce the barriers and stigmas).
- The impact of the digital economy on the quality of life of women, gender-diverse people and LGBTQ folks taking into consideration environmental impacts, internet surveillance, shrinking spaces online.

Some responses were clearly linked to labour and work. Some of these focused on opportunities for (women) entrepreneurs and innovators as well as the barriers facing them. Of these, one suggested showcasing best practices among women utilising the digital economy for their livelihoods. One questioned whether the digital economy would be good or bad for producers of arts and crafts. Others seemed to relate to the workplace for employees (rather than entrepreneurs or self-employed), including lower-paid employees in tech companies.

Several responses referred to financial transactions. One noted the need for different financial infrastructure given the limited availability and cost of Paypal "for grassroots gender projects". One person simply wrote "blockchain" and did not elaborate further.

Two responses suggested the need for those benefiting from new technology to be taxed on the revenue generated.

Several responses focused on inclusion, and the need to focus on those least likely to be part of the digital economy. One person noted that non-digital transactions should not be disabled. Another noted that inclusion should not be simply from a "passive consumer perspective" but that those historically excluded "must be at the centre of models for governance of platforms that are influencing our communications."

Finally, there were four responses that are not easily classifiable:

- The complementarity between men and women with regard to access to the internet but also the chance to learn more for all.
- Tracking and consent. Is tracking the online equivalent of stalking? How can we make consent part of what it means to be digital?
- The technological tools (software and hardware) and how ownership and design affects the communities impacted by digital economy (this could include algorithm bias as well)
- Policies and best practices that will make women and the LGBTIQ community more comfortable within the digital economy

## **2. What gender issues are you aware of that relate to the digital economy? What elements we should look into in order to measure gender equality in the digital economy for the purpose of the BPF's work?**

Two people noted the digital divide or digital gender gap, but without further elaboration. A third simply gave an online reference: <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/women-ict>.

**Access** – including safety and other aspects of wifi and other access points, “inclusion”, bank accounts, and affordability – was the most common gender issue raised, with at least ten people highlighting this. **Access to finance** - one person noted, in particular, that decision-making algorithms that determine access to loans and other forms of support for digital business “are often made up by white men's logic.” One person suggested that those who expanded outreach should be rewarded so as to increase access.

The next most common issue was **participation and/or representation**. This was raised by at least nine people, one of whom noted concern about LGBTQI in particular. Various aspects of participation and representation were cited, including ownership; use; design, creation and/or sale of goods and services online; IT positions; online/posting; and purchasing power.

**Deficiencies in respect of digital skills**, digital and general literacy and available training were highlighted by six people. One of these named LGBTQI users as those especially affected in this respect.

Four people named **security and/or privacy** as an issue. **Job security** - one used the term “work security”, and it is not clear if this referred to digital security or certainty that their job would continue. One of the others observed that **surveillance and censorship** of certain platforms affected the livelihoods and security of certain groups, such as sex workers, who utilised the web for their transactions.

Two people referred to **gender-based violence**, with one highlighting the need to create and enforce mechanisms to denounce this.

Three people referred broadly to **economic empowerment**.

Three raised the issue of **care work**. The issue was elaborated in different ways, as follows:

- Care labour and other kinds of labour go unnoticed in the digital economy even though it relies heavily on it.
- Care-work by women that is often mediated by apps and mobile phones, or domestic workers through platforms, beauticians, Uber drivers and so on.
- Economic activities that women (and potentially the LGBTQI community) perform in the digital economy tend to replicate the distribution of employment by industry in the “traditional economy”. e.g. these groups may end up participating in activities that allow them to continue taking care of children and adult people, and perform household chores, and with discrimination in the digital platforms.

Two people noted that there were **other factors, alongside gender**, that were important, whether social, ethnic, race, caste, geographic, or feudal. One of these people questioned whether ICT would reduce or exacerbate work-related inequalities and unfair practices associated with these factors.

On the measurement question, one person suggested that the HIV Stigma Index might be a good model to follow in measuring “gender incivility” and a hostile environment.

The remaining responses are difficult to group and are therefore listed separately. Some of the responses do not appear to relate to gender in particular:

- Those with access can become a commodity in their digital experiences, without understanding how the process of datafication impacts their experience
- Platform challenges, in particular ownership and control
- Local content including in smaller economies (such as small island developing states) as currently most content is from bigger economies with different settings
- Messaging around clothing brands and house rental types

- Gender narrows the focus in countries where the digital economy “didn’t pick up yet.” Nevertheless, lack of understanding of different “deceiving tricks” results in loss
- Examine complaints which not addressed by platforms, companies, etc, especially in social media and online information.
- Your social media presence, whether private or public, limits access to the economy just as your physical appearance can. So what does it mean to be your whole self in this new world with all the social controls that have become nearly invisible?
- Need to frame the different forms of digital economy (selling small crafts, food and related items to increase domestic economy, telemarketing, on-line sexual labour, factory electronics device makers are usually women, tourism in traditional communities, etc) and how they relate to gender specificities e.g. lesser access. The internet in my opinion works as a catalyst for society’s prejudices so most of the off-line inequalities are present online as well.
- Socio-cultural reasons play an important role in explaining the digital gender divide.
- Lack of awareness of the potential benefits that the internet may bring.
- Ability of women to use digital technologies is directly and indirectly affected by market-related factors including investment dynamics, regulations, and competition, especially in rural areas, which are often sparsely populated, and the investment and installation of infrastructures, such as broadband infrastructures and cell phone towers, is less economically profitable.

### **3. What are the social barriers affecting participation in the digital economy in the ‘after access’ context from a gendered perspective (specifically women and LGBTQI community)?**

At least seven people named **hate speech and other forms of violence online**, at least six referred to **connectivity and/or access** (e.g. no smartphone, sharing a smartphone with male family members, **privacy** in using the internet, holding back on the use of data shared within a family, **lack of own money** to buy mobile data, **affordability**), at least six referred to **lack of education and/or skills**, and at least six to **stereotypes and social norms**. In respect of the latter, one person noted that trans people whose documentation might differ from how they experienced and presented themselves might be viewed as less acceptable and thus many ended up in service jobs despite having higher qualifications. At least four people referred to privacy and/or security issues, and two to **self-confidence**.

Three people referred to issues of **control**. Two said that control was in the hands of men, with one adding that it was the hands of white cis-het men. Another referred to the lack of accountability and transparency but did not say to whom or what this referred. There was one response each referring to **freedom of speech** and **time**.

The remaining responses were as follows:

- Inability to support internet uses
- Lack of relevant and language-appropriate content and services result in limited use of acquired skills
- Understand the needs and how those general rights should be treated specifically for women and LGBTQI people in a way that can be intersectional and a reflection of the reality these people are living
- Cultural differences and language might lead to misunderstanding.
- There is only one way to information science: school mathematics. But in the real world you can access IT from any part of your life. That is how it should be taught.
- Digital as individual activity and not group or family activity

One person's responses to this question reflected action to be taken rather than the issues. The person highlighted building a solid organisation, awareness-raising on funding in the digital area, and legislation relating to LGBTQI.

### **3.1 What are the capacity, skill, resource or economic barriers affecting participation in the digital economy in the 'after access' context from a gendered perspective (specifically women and LGBTQI community)?**

This is a single question, but a complicated one in that it asks about a range of different kinds of barriers, and then qualifies this by specifying that it is the "after access" context and the focus should be on women and LGBTQI community in particular. Some of the responses do not appear to take these qualifications into account.

In the area of capacity and skill set, responses were as follows:

- The capacity to face and respond to online means of violence, misogyny and LGBT-phobia online
- Lack of (general) education, digital skills and illiteracy, programming skills, language
- Limited educational opportunities, high cost of education and training
- Lack of technical knowledge (and resulting reliance on younger people),
- Girls' and women's lesser confidence in ICT, maths and science areas
- Skills for both suppliers and consumers of services
- Lack of knowledge of internet rights, policies that address sexual harassment and discrimination, decision-making process
- Lack of skills in respect of advocacy and governance boards
- Lack of capacity building in "economy domain" and personalisation of content to one's own community

One person noted that many different skill sets and resources were needed, but that access can help fight against institutional barriers and inequalities.

In terms of resource or economic barriers, responses referred to:

- Women's limited available time, including because of unpaid care work
- Affordability of devices, internet and services more generally
- Lesser earning power of women exacerbating the challenge of affordability
- Limited access to bank credit
- Socio-cultural perceptions and biases that may prevent women from obtaining senior roles in digital companies.

One person observed that "discrimination may affect the possibility of participating in certain activities and the wage/income received. Even when participants have a nickname, the gender is sometimes inferred." The person gave the example of women receiving lower payments than men in eBay for the same products.

There were several responses ("lack of support"; "economic issues"; and "specific legislation/law landed property") that seemed to fall in the resource and economic category but were not clearly specified.

Finally, there were responses that did not seem to fit neatly into skill, capacity, resource and economic barriers:

- Privacy, security, data protection, online abuse (about 4 responses)
- Lack of representation of LGBTQI issues on ISOC and IG
- HIV "because half don't get treatment"
- Gender division of labour
- Intentional leadership rather than token positions.

- Prioritization of men in tech and economic spaces
- Exclusion of those who are not online, who are mainly women
- Social media ad biases

### **3.2 Which of these barriers are also faced by men? And which do you feel are faced specifically by women?**

Again, this question in fact consisted of two questions. Analysis of the responses has been divided into three parts to reflect this. The following barriers were said to affect both women and men, with no gender distinction noted

- Commodification of digital data and algorithmic selection of online content
- Lack of digital skills (3 responses)
- Lack of access
- High unemployment
- High study costs

The next set of barriers were said to affect both, but with a stronger, more negative, impact for women:

- Use of the internet tool
- Financial barriers
- Digital economy barriers (worse for women due to lack of access to the right information and the right network)
- Constraints related to ethnicity, race, age, location, education, income (2 mentions).

One person said that while women and men faced the same barriers, men were “more able to publicly air the challenges.”

The following factors were said to be specific to women

- Hate speech (with LGBTQI, people of colour and other minorities also often targeted)
- Gender-based harassment
- Women are not taught how to use the smartphone and feel shy to learn from men.
- Women share the smartphone with the male members of the household, do not have privacy, and men check the websites visited by women.
- Women are not allowed to move out of their house after dark, but men can move around freely and can access the wifi access point.
- Women use mobile data mostly for the welfare of the house, and their device is used by the children as well. Men use it mostly for entertainment and children do not often touch the mobile phone of their father.
- Fewer women own a laptop while men prioritise a laptop over other household expenses.
- Gender stereotypes, limited training hours, fewer opportunities to be accepted in an IT position, lower salaries, auto exclusions.
- Discrimination and unequal allocation of non-remunerated activities.
- Legislation/law [on?] landed property, bank credit, weakness of purchasing power, self-confidence, respect by spouse and/or partner

### **4. How does the quality and type of their internet connection impact on the type of economic activity that women and LGBTQI engage in? For example, if they do not have access to affordable high-speed broadband connectivity, or if their access is primarily through social networking platforms?**

Several responses highlighted the benefits of having access to high-speed internet. The benefits included being able to complete tasks quicker and thus having more time to do other activities, being more able to study online, and being able to get in bids quickly on the stock exchange or similar platforms.

Others referred to other aspects of quality. For example, lack of 24/7 access to connectivity could be seen as reflecting lesser reliability. Similarly, internet disruptions were seen to “hamper productivity, frustrate business confidence, and sour investment” as well as limiting access to up-to-date information.

Some responses referred to the psychological impact of not having a good quality connection. One of these suggested that a poor connection could be worse than no access at all, “because frustration and the perception that one does not have the knowledge to deal with technical difficulties can lead to a rejection of future access through other means.” Another noted that if a woman was prevented from earning through not having access to quality internet, this would result in her “giving up”. A third noted that poor quality would result in disinterest in using the internet to improve productivity.

Some people wrote about the impact of poor quality access without specifying the nature of the quality defects. The impacts included restrictions in the type of economic activity done; limited ability to make the business visible, communicate with customers, and expand the customer network; restricted access to jobs where the hiring process uses digital platforms; lack of access to quality scientific information; an increased need to travel to sell or buy goods, do bank transactions, and access education (with associated increased safety risks).

In terms of social platforms, one person saw the limitation of digital access to social networks as “limiting, politically and economically dangerous, and harming to an empowered internet use.” Another equated social media and “social control”. A third noted that the apps that women employed through phone apps used were designed to diminish their control and resulted in their commuting long distances. [Why?] A fourth noted that many women depended on their phones for internet access and might find social media platforms more accessible than browsers and search engines, but did not elaborate on the implications of this.

Finally, there were several responses that provided reasons why women might not have access to quality internet rather than focusing on the impact of the lack of access. Reasons included lack of profitability of providing internet to remote areas, inadequate energy supplies, and women’s limited buying power (for both equipment and high-speed broadband). There was one response, which gave Brazil as an example, highlighting the lack of net neutrality as a reason for women having access only through social works such as whatsapp and facebook.

## **5. What type of economic activity do you think the BPF should focus its work on for us to come up with useful policy recommendations?**

Many of the responses to this question did not directly answer it. Those that did were so diverse that they are difficult to group. The only clear group related to **work mediated by or taking place through digital social networks and platforms**. This was named by three people. One of the three saw this as providing an opportunity for women to work at home, but noted that training on digital marketing would be necessary. The other two seemed less positive about the possibilities for economic empowerment through these platforms.

Responses from two people, one of whom referred to care work done by algorithms and robots and the other to the challenges of estimating the “value” of unpaid work, were perhaps linked if both were referring to unpaid care work. However, this was not clear from the responses.

The list below illustrates the range of further foci suggested:

- Rural livelihoods
- Home-based activities
- Women's artisanal work
- Fair trade
- Care work done by algorithms and robots
- Start-up economy entrepreneurial activities
- Agro-pastoral activities
- Urban agriculture activities
- Technology capacity building
- E-commerce
- Marketing strategies of gig companies that create competition among the workforce

Among the responses that did not strictly relate to the question, two referred to the role of the digital economy – and algorithms in particular – in determining access to social welfare. Other issues, in no particular order were:

- Social media networks violate the privacy of individuals to target them with ads
- Free access for women to the use of the internet
- Actions to encourage women to get involved in the evolution of technology and the internet.
- Acknowledgement that many women make volunteer contributions to online sites, small and large
- The realities of ordinary women in middle- and low-income countries and how their working capacity and income is impacted by digital technology.
- Discrimination when performing economic activities online
- Connection between decision to participate in the digital economy and type of participation (which industry/activity), and allocation of time in non-remunerated activities within the household.
- Vulnerability to risk and abuses (due to poverty, domestic violence, sexual labour, low literacy, domestic workers, indigenous, black, lgbtqi+ communities).
- Storification of data and content
- Policy-wise, the right to read, make audio video and annotate content for their communities

## **6. What are the specific policies and regulation that impacts on women's participation in the digital economy?**

Six people suggested that the focus should be on **policy related to educational and training opportunities**. Four referred to **policy related to employment conditions** and benefits and labour rights. Of the four, one noted the difficulty of organising workers employed online to negotiate for their own rights, while a second urged that policies – such as maternity and parental leave – be provided so as to equalise the burden of unpaid care work. Three people raised **policies related to gender-based violence** and harassment and a further two raised the issue of **pay equity**.

Two responses could be read as relating to **privacy**. The concern of the first seemed to be that there should be adequate protection in place. In contrast, the second was concerned that the vulnerability of women and the LGBTIQ community was often used to justify regulation of the internet as well as participation in the digital economy. Two other responses related to other **forms of restriction**. One noted that businesses sometimes did not allow particular employees access to the internet. Another referred simply to **men's role as "gatekeepers"** without explaining further. Perhaps related, another response called for **"balance on governance"**.

Two responses related to **tax**. One person bemoaned the high taxes on laptops and customs duties on imported technology. The other highlighted over-the-top or social media tax.

Several responses related in some way to **access**, namely:

- Policies that cover multi-disadvantaged groups, like rural regions, minority languages, internet access at public libraries
- Women-only wifi hotspots in market centres, shopping malls, and public facilities
- National broadband plans and emerging fourth industrial revolution strategies, access and affordability policies
- The remaining diverse responses were as follows:
  - Internet shutdowns with our prior warning
  - Promotion of digital enterprises led by women
  - Consolidation of networks of women entrepreneurs
  - Cheap gendered labour (like call centres)
  - Shrinking online spaces for freedoms (like the recent tumblr terms of reference).
  - Presentation of content in an accessible, safe and gender-sensitive manner
  - Weakness of landed property.

**7. Is there any work (research, writings, capacity building, video, audio, financing initiatives etc.) done by yourself or others in this field that you feel will be valuable for the work of the BPF this year? Please share relevant links.**

AND

**8. Are there any individuals or organisations focusing on women's participation in the digital economy that you think the BPF should reach out to?**

The following work and organisations were noted by respondents:

**Research:**

- Research and advocacy of APC Women's Rights Programme: The EROTICS Project - <https://erotics.apc.org/>); <https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/executive-summary-mapping-research-gender-and-digital-technology>;
- Feminist Internet Research Network (FIRN). Producing relevant papers including (1) Women and access: how women utilise the connectivity for income generation (2) Women technology and beyond in community networks that the person was currently working on. These can be included in the BPF this year. - <https://www.apc.org/en/project/firn-feminist-internet-research-network>
- Indian Institute of Technology Bombay. Work on the digital economy - <http://www.iitb.ac.in/>
- International Development Research Centre (IDRC) programmes including: Inclusive Economies <https://www.idrc.ca/en/what-we-do/inclusive-economies>; Employment and Growth <https://www.idrc.ca/en/program/employment-and-growth>. The latter is intended to find solutions that remove barriers to women's economic empowerment
- Kohl: A journal for gender and body research - <https://kohljournal.press/> The summer 2019 edition is focused on alternative economies and gendered labour <https://kohljournal.press/issue-5-2>

- Noopur Raval working on Uber drivers, not specifically gender, but very active in relation to tech workers in India. She has also done work on beauticians through platforms.

### Campaigns:

- Colnodo's Dominate Technology in Colombia campaign - <https://www.dominemoslatecnologia.org/>

### Organisations/institutions/projects:

- Association for Progressive Communications (APC) - <https://www.apc.org>
- Caribbean girls hack - <https://www.facebook.com/cgirlzhack/>
- Center for Family Life in New York, UP & GO platform - <https://www.upandgo.coop/>
- Centro Latam Digital - <https://centrolatam.digital/>
- Centre for ICT Policy for Eastern and Southern Africa (CIPESA) - <https://cipesa.org>
- CLAM Latin American Center on Sexuality and Human Rights. Based at the Rio de Janeiro State University, Brazil. <http://www.clam.org.br/EN/>
- Coding Rights - <https://www.codingrights.org> - in particular their work on work on shrinking economic spaces
- Colnodo Digital Security School - <https://escueladeseguridaddigital.co/>
- Fair Work Foundation - <https://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/research/projects/a-fairwork-foundation-towards-fair-work-in-the-platform-economy/>
- FRIDA the young feminist fund - <https://youngfeministfund.org>
- GenderIT: Feminist Reflection on Internet Policies - <https://genderit.org/> including <https://www.genderit.org/gender-labour-technology>
- GMSA - <https://www.gsma.com/> and EU Commissioner Gabriel speaking to the GMSA on women in the digital economy - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E\\_3DGnZbYoc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E_3DGnZbYoc)
- Gram Marg - <http://grammarg.in>
- Internet Rights and Principles Coalition - <http://internetrightsandprinciples.org>
- Iruway - <https://iruway.janastu.org/> (mesh radio activity in particular)
- Janastu - <https://janastu.org/>
- Life in Leggings, Barbados - <https://www.facebook.com/officiallifeinleggings/>
- LIRNEasia: a regional ICT policy and regulation think tank - <https://lirneasia.net/>
- NOAH, Barbados - <https://noahbarbados.wordpress.com/>
- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) <https://www.oecd.org/social/empowering-women-in-the-digital-age-brochure.pdf>
- Resurj - <http://resurj.org/>
- Research ICT Africa (RIA) - <https://researchictafrica.net/>
- Sula Batsu - <https://www.sulabatsu.com/>
- The Engine Room - <https://www.theengineroom.org/>
- The Knowledge Workshop - <https://alwarsha.org/>
- Unbox Janastu - <http://j.mp/unbox-janastu>
- Unwanted Witness - <https://www.unwantedwitness.org>
- World Wide Web Foundation - <https://webfoundation.org/>. Working on meaningful connectivity.