



United Nations  
Economic Commission for Africa

## **Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment Section**

### **Virtual Expert Group Meeting on Digital upskilling for Women and Girls in Africa**

**UNCC, Addis Ababa**

**19 to 21 December 2022, 11:00 am to 17:00 pm (EAT)**

**October 2022**

## 1. Context

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased reliance on ICTs, digitalization and the use of online platforms to conduct business transactions, learning and development activities as well as everyday interactions. ECA and many countries across Africa have taken this opportunity to explore digitalization as a vehicle for transformational change to address sustainable development issues. This new emphasis on digital solutions has altered structural inequalities, causing a paradigm shift in favour of gender equality, created spaces for women and girls to participate in society and public life, and accelerated their integration into the digital revolution and addressing gender digital divides.

ECA has initiated several policies and programmes designed to support member States achieve this transformation. For example, its Digital Centre of Excellence has run various workshops for young girls to encourage programming skills, through coding boot camps. At the joint ECA Continental Hybrid Camp, some 2000 girls across the continent built their capacity on digital skills to bridge the gender digital gap. However, improving digital skills and embracing digital technology innovations goes beyond programming skills, to also making the use of ICT second nature, and services ubiquitous across platforms and countries. For this reason, the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment subprogramme of ECA, is focusing on digitalization as a key result area in its 2022 programme plan, aiming to develop advanced ICT capacity for girls who can use these skills to address sustainable development challenges more broadly.

The Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment subprogramme of ECA's Gender Poverty and Social Policy Division, aims to build a critical mass of women and girls in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). Working with the UNCTAD, UNESCO, UNESCWA, UNOOSA/UN-SPIDER and UNITAR-UNOSAT as well as ECA's African Centre for Statistics and its Technology and Natural Resources Division, the partnership aims to provide digital upskilling for women and girls in the use of digital content creation, digital marketing, e-commerce, digital finance, and space science. The technologies to be leveraged include social media, online tools, electronic payment methods, Digital Finance, Remote Sensing (RS), Geospatial Information Systems (GIS), Artificial Intelligence (AI), just to name a few, with a focus on using these tools to leverage women's economic empowerment and address major development challenges in the region.

These policy challenges include increasing informality, unskilled labour, emerging mobile money platforms, barriers to accessing regional and global markets for women entrepreneurs, a large number of women working in agriculture, as well as broader transboundary challenges in gender equality, women's economic empowerment, climate resilience and disaster risk reduction for the region. Building a skilled pool of women and girls in the use of digital tools and data science, will help shape the future job skill requirements for women and girls, moving beyond technical support roles to critical decision-making roles, as well as build resilience through skills development, and pave the way for women to play a greater role in digital and technology related sectors.

In this regard, the purpose of this *Expert group meeting on the digital upskilling for women and girls in Africa*, to be held from 19 to 21 December 2022, will be to obtain important information, feedback and commitment from target member States on utilizing these capacity building programmes to create avenues for women and girls to have greater access to digital upskilling and

address barriers to women moving into critical roles where they can use these skills for economic empowerment, decision-making and sustainable development.

## **2. Focus areas of capacity development and digital upskilling**

Focus areas have been selected in consultation with project target countries and are designed to address wider policy challenges in the region. The meeting will focus one session per focus area. These include:

- Cybersecurity, online safety and virtual etiquette.
- Digital content creation, for women especially those in the arts and cultural sector.
- Digital marketing, advocacy and online outreach connecting women to regional and global markets.
- E-commerce and digital finance for women entrepreneurs and informal workers.
- Space Science and remote sensing for women working in agriculture, disaster risk reduction and climate resilience.

## **3. Objectives**

The main objectives of the meeting will be to review and discuss opportunities and challenges for building a critical mass of women and girls in STEM, with a particular focus of digital upskilling for addressing major development issues. The broad objectives and discussions will include:

- To present findings from the regional brief on the current digital capacities, status of projects and initiatives and potential for embracing the digital revolution;
- Share country examples of existing and emerging initiatives to upskills women and girls as well as other projects where women can be integrated into capacity development initiatives;
- To discuss the potential challenges and obstacles of women and girls in building their capacity to utilize digital applications and tools;
- To evaluate the potential/proposed capacity development programmes being proposed by ECA as part of the policy/programme recommendation of the regional brief; and
- To strengthen partnerships and identify areas of collaboration with development partners.

## **4. Expected outputs**

Major outputs expected from the meeting include:

- Increased understanding and interest in the use of digital application tools for women's economic empowerment and sustainable development.
- Increased support for building a critical mass of skilled people, particularly women and girls, in the use of digital application tools.

- Identification/selection of focused capacity development programmes that address country needs, priorities and future plans.
- Sharing of good practices, initiatives and potential for digital transformation integrating women and addressing gender equality.

## **5. Participants**

Approximately 40 participants will join the meeting from across the region, including those from the 5 project target countries: Mauritius, Senegal, Seychelles, South Africa and Tunisia. This will include 1 participant from the Ministry of Gender or equivalent and 1 participant from the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation or equivalent, in addition to different related ministries and government departments of selected member States. Different government agencies, civil society and academia that would benefit from the use of digital tools for development purposes will be invited, along with those working in gender equality and women's empowerment. Specialists in the subject areas of digitalisation, will provide expert knowledge on the issues to frame discussions around the focus areas for capacity development.

## **6. Method of the expert group meeting**

The expert group meeting will be entirely virtual and held from 11:00-17:00 hours between 19 to 21 December 2022. Prior to the meeting, an information document (regional brief) will be circulated along with a presentation template and guidance of information to bring to the meeting. The meeting will comprise of presentations, moderated discussions and break-out groups in order to obtain as much information and recommendations from participants to guide future work.

A draft agenda for the meeting is attached for your information.

## **7. Working languages**

The working language of the meeting will be in English with simultaneous French interpretation.

## **8. Further information**

For more information about the meeting, please contact Mr. Syed T. Ahmed, Associate Economic Affairs Officer ([syed.t.ahmed@un.org](mailto:syed.t.ahmed@un.org)), copying Ms. Keiso Matashane-Marite, Officer-in-charge ([matashane-marite@un.org](mailto:matashane-marite@un.org)), and Ms. Hannan Mohammed ([mohammed27@un.org](mailto:mohammed27@un.org))