



## **Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe**

**Joint Conference by the 2018 Italian OSCE Chairmanship and the OSCE Gender Section**

### ***“Digital Transformation – Challenges and Opportunities for Women to Shape Economic Progress in the OSCE Area”***

**Time and Place:** Vienna, 30 October 2018, Hofburg Palace, Ratsaal  
**Target group:** Delegations of OSCE participating States (pS) and Partners for Co-operation (PfC), OSCE executive structures, STEMM<sup>1</sup>-related professionals, entrepreneurs, practitioners, civil society, academia, NGOs.

**In light of the challenges and opportunities arising from the digital transformation of the economy, the aim of this conference is to identify and analyse persisting and arising inequalities constraining women’s meaningful economic participation. In order to address existing barriers and identify new risks that may widen the gender gap, experts from among OSCE participating States will share effective good practices and tangible policy responses.**

**This conference is in line with the priorities of the Italian 2018 OSCE Chairmanship in the Economic and Environmental Dimension and in particular with its focus on technological innovation as possible source of inclusive growth.**

**The outcome of the conference will be a list of policy recommendations aimed to support OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation addressing challenges and opportunities arising from the digitalisation with a view to support women and girls’ equal participation to the economy.**

#### **Background**

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<sup>1</sup> Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine

OSCE commitments on enhancing women's socio-economic participation are anchored in the Ministerial Council Decisions on Promoting Equal Opportunity for Women in the Economic Sphere (MC/DEC/10/11) and Promoting Economic Participation in the OSCE Area (MC/DEC/8/17). Due to their contribution to economic development, sustainable growth and the promotion of prosperous and cohesive societies<sup>2</sup>, women's economic empowerment has been recognised by our Organisation as a priority. In particular, the aforementioned Decisions call on participating States to **strengthen tangible policy measures with regard to the development of female professional and entrepreneurial skills, as well as the promotion of awareness-raising activities, aiming at promoting female equal opportunities in the economic sphere.**

As a result of digitalisation which will further create new entrepreneurial opportunities<sup>3</sup>, skilled STEMM professionals will be in greater demand in the labour market. However, recent studies reveal an increased digital gender gap over recent years in education and entrepreneurship<sup>4</sup>, with fewer women taking up ICT-related jobs and education. Studies also found that, although female-owned start-ups are more likely to be successful, there has been a decrease in women's participation, leadership and investment in the digital entrepreneurship.

The same barriers that have limited women's economic advancement thus far may deprive them of opportunities in the digital era, such as cultural norms and stereotypes, lack of access to internet technologies in some rural areas, and greater difficulties for women to obtain access to finance to start or grow a new business may lead to women benefiting less from new job positions in STEMM-related areas<sup>5</sup>.

Digital transformation also leads to new challenges. The greatest 'digital' job growth is predicted to be in business services, health, education and social services, which are traditionally female-dominated. Increased gender differences in study areas and job families, as outlined above, may mean that women will benefit less from the new STEMM-related career opportunities.

Whether digitalisation will close or widen the gender gap in the digital economy will largely depend on policy-making. By providing an opportunity to exchange best practices on how to govern the ongoing digital transformation in a way to maximise women's economic participation, the Conference aims to support the OSCE participating States and Partners for Cooperation in shaping forward looking policies in several sectors, ranging from education and skills to social and industrial policies.

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<sup>2</sup> Women's Economic Empowerment is one of the six priority areas of the OSCE as identified in the 2004 Ministerial Council Decision for an OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality (MC.DEC/14/04), which is the key OSCE document on gender equality.

<sup>3</sup> Study by Kiel Institute for the World Economy, July 2017, "The Effects of Digitalization on Gender Equality in the G20 Economies", available online at [https://www.ifw-kiel.de/pub/e-books/digital\\_women-final\\_report.pdf](https://www.ifw-kiel.de/pub/e-books/digital_women-final_report.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Study launched by the European Commission "Women in the Digital Age", issued in March 2018 (<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/increase-gender-gap-digital-sector-study-women-digital-age>).

<sup>5</sup> OECD Policy Brief on the Future of Work, May 2017, "Going Digital: The Future of Work for Women". <https://www.oecd.org/employment/Going-Digital-the-Future-of-Work-for-Women.pdf>