



# Closing the Global Gender Digital Divide

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The 67th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was held in New York City between March 6 and 17, 2023. The agreed conclusions adopted by Member States constitute the first comprehensive global blueprint for the rights of women and girls when it comes to technology, innovation, and education in the digital age. This includes access to technology, education in STEAM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math), and safety and the protection of human rights in digital spaces.

Around the world, there are very few places that are looking at technology and innovation with a gender lens or even attempting to regulate or guide new technology in order to prevent gender, racial, or wealth gaps in access to or education in using these tools. These agreed conclusions will help to guide governments, private companies, and civil society in the creation of new initiatives and tools related to innovation and technology.

The global digital gender divide is pronounced, particularly when it comes to participation and leadership of women and girls and access to and use of technologies, connectivity, digital literacy, and education. We see this through increased violence against women in public life, both in the form of online harassment and physical violence. We see its negative effects on the mental health of young people, particularly girls, who face societal pressure to present their perfect image on social media sites like Instagram.

We saw the digital divide in education starkly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Those with access to laptops or tablets and a high-speed internet connection were able to keep up with their schooling. However, those without access to the internet had to sit in cars in McDonalds or library parking lots for the free Wi-Fi. And if that wasn't possible, they just dropped out of school. In some places, girls who dropped out of school

because of shutdowns were married off so their families didn't have to worry about not having enough money to take care of them. We have yet to see the data on the full impact of these pandemic restrictions on children and youth, but we do know there will be a disproportionate impact on girls.

The most amazing part of attending CSW either in person or online is the ability to listen to the stories of women from around the world. We are all facing similar challenges and issues, just with different contexts. For example, access to the internet in rural areas of the United States is just as difficult as access in rural areas in other countries. However, the stories of resilience are so inspiring and give me hope that we can create a just world for all.

The UCC fielded a small virtual delegation of women to CSW 67 this year. Keep an eye out for the opportunity to participate in CSW 68 next year. CSW is usually held the first two full weeks of March.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rev. Tracy Howe is the Team Leader and Minister for FaithINFO for the United Church of Christ.

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