

Concept Note: **CSW70 SIDE EVENT**

Unlocking HER Potential: Gender equality through equitable access to assistive technology

Context: Commission on the Status of Women

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the United Nations' principal intergovernmental body dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, and a core normative and policy-making platform within the UN system. Convened annually at United Nations Headquarters in New York, CSW provides a formal multilateral space for Member States, UN entities and accredited civil society organisations to advance global commitments on gender equality, women's rights and the implementation of international normative frameworks, including the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

For UNOPS and its hosted entities, including ATscale (the Global Partnership for Assistive Technology), CSW constitutes a strategic institutional platform to align operational delivery with global normative agendas. For ATscale specifically, engagement at CSW provides a critical opportunity to elevate assistive technology as a cross-cutting enabler of gender equality, ensuring that global commitments to women's empowerment are translated into practical, scalable solutions that reach women and girls with disabilities and functional limitations. This positioning reinforces UNOPS' role as a solutions-based, people-centred, mission-driven and impact-oriented organisation, demonstrating how implementation and system-wide gender equality commitments can be mutually reinforcing.

CSW70 (2026) Theme

The CSW70 priority theme calls for ensuring and strengthening access to justice for all women and girls through inclusive systems and the removal of structural barriers. Equitable access to assistive technology directly advances this agenda. It is a critical enabler of multiple internationally recognized human rights and, for many women and girls, a precondition for participation, autonomy, and access to remedies.

- **Access to justice and inclusive institutions:** Assistive technology enables women, particularly women with disabilities and older women, to physically access courts and public institutions, obtain legal information in accessible formats, communicate effectively in proceedings, and navigate digital justice systems. Without accessibility, legal rights remain theoretical rather than enforceable.
- **Addressing structural and intersectional exclusion:** Women and girls facing intersecting discrimination, including disability, age, displacement, and humanitarian vulnerability, are disproportionately excluded from assistive technology due to cost, stigma, service gaps, and policy fragmentation. Expanding equitable access addresses these systemic barriers and strengthens inclusive legal frameworks.

- **Life course participation and decision making:** Across the life course, assistive technology removes functional, environmental, and digital barriers that limit women's access to education, employment, governance, caregiving roles, and leadership. It enables voice, agency, and representation in public life.
- **Autonomy, health, and the care economy:** Assistive technology strengthens bodily autonomy, including safe and dignified navigation of healthcare systems during pregnancy and childbirth. It also reduces the disproportionate unpaid caregiving burden borne by women and girls, expanding their ability to engage in economic and civic life.
- **Elimination of violence:** Safe and rights based digital and assistive technologies are essential to preventing technology facilitated gender based violence and ensuring that survivors, particularly women with disabilities, can safely report abuse and seek protection and remedies.

Advancing equitable access to assistive technology therefore operationalizes both the CSW70 priority theme on access to justice and the review theme on participation and violence elimination, particularly for women and girls experiencing compounded forms of exclusion.

Official CSW70 Side Event Proposal

Organizing Entity: ATscale, the Global Partnership for Assistive Technology, hosted by United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) co-organized with UN-Women.

Co-sponsor: Governments of Australia, Pakistan, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and International Disability Alliance (IDA).

Date: Tuesday 12 March 2026 | **Time:** 4.45 - 6.00 PM (ET)

Format: In-person, with webcast, sign language interpretation, and French and Spanish interpretation provided in room.

Proposed Venue: CR-9

Background and Rationale

The policy brief provides compelling evidence that while assistive technology has the potential to fundamentally change the experiences of women and girls, supporting access to education, employment, digital inclusion, and safety, they remain disproportionately excluded. This exclusion is rooted in systemic barriers, including prohibitive costs (cited by 87% of organizations), fragmented service delivery and policy gaps.

By addressing these gaps through gender-responsive policies, it is possible to unlock the potential of women and girls, full inclusion of women and girls who need assistive technology, is therefore a precondition for contributing to realizing the promise of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5(Gender Equality). Without AT, these commitments cannot be fully fulfilled.

The session will be structured around the launch of the policy brief, and will facilitate a high-level dialogue that moves from evidence to action. It will feature a presentation of the brief's key findings, followed by a moderated panel discussion and Q&A session. This format aims to translate evidence into concrete policy priorities, and policy recommendations, focusing on real-world solutions and political commitments. The discussion will highlight how multilateral partnerships and targeted policy interventions can create scalable, gender-responsive systems for broader assistive technology access.

Objectives of the Side Event

This event will officially launch the ATscale and UN Women joint policy brief, Unlocking HER potential: Gender equality through equitable access to assistive technology, aimed at accelerating progress towards gender equality and meaningful participation of women and girls in all aspects of life, in alignment with the CSW70 Review Theme. The session will:

- Share the key messages and evidence from the policy brief, highlighting how assistive technology is a fundamental enabler of human rights and a prerequisite for women's participation, leadership, and decision-making across public, economic, and digital life.
- Highlight how systemic barriers and persistent gaps in access to assistive technology reflect structural discrimination and gender inequalities in public systems, affecting all

women and girls and disproportionately excluding women and girls who face intersecting forms of discrimination.

- Mobilize political commitments for key policy recommendations to integrate gender-responsive provision of assistive technology into national legal frameworks, social protection, and humanitarian responses, in line with the Beijing Platform for Action, the CRPD, and the 2030 Agenda.
- Promote the leadership, agency, and lived experiences of women and girls in the governance, design, and service delivery of assistive technology to ensure effective and equitable solutions, recognizing women and girls as agents of change.

Key Messages

- Gender equality cannot be achieved without equitable access to assistive technology. Assistive technology can be a catalyst for empowerment, justice, and equality.
- Assistive technology enables women and girls to learn, work, lead, decide, and live with dignity. Yet millions are excluded not because of ability, but because systems fail to provide gender-responsive, accessible, and safe solutions.
- Access to assistive technology is essential to the realization of multiple human rights, including the rights to health, education, work, independence, and dignity. It is a critical precondition for achieving gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls.
- From pregnancy and childbirth to independent living and work, equitable AT access strengthens dignity, choice, and economic agency.
- Unpaid caregiving *is* a gender issue. Assistive technology can reduce the disproportionate care burden on women and girls, freeing time, energy, and opportunity.
- Assistive technology can be life-changing for women and girls, enabling autonomy, communication, and participation in education, employment, family life and society.

Expected Outcomes

- Increased understanding among Member States and stakeholders that access to assistive technology is a human right and high-impact investment for gender equality, supporting women's participation, autonomy, and leadership across the life course.
- Political commitment to implement policy recommendations that address the systemic and structural failures in access to assistive technology.
- Actionable proposals to advance the **leadership and representation of women who use AT** in national policymaking, governance and decision-making spaces.
- Improve coordination and use of gender-responsive AT data to support monitoring progress and accountability and evidence-informed policymaking on inclusion and equality.

Target Audience

External:

- Member States, UN entities, civil society organisations, donors, peace and security practitioners, gender equality and justice advocates.
- The event streamed, recorded and disseminated through LinkedIn and youtube

Internal:

- UNOPS GPO personnel in person for NYPO and UNOPS (via webcast)

Proposed Agenda and Format

Opening (4-5 minutes)

Moderator- Émilie Potvin, Director- Global Portfolios, UNOPS

Opening Remarks (4-5 minutes each)

- *Michelle O'Byrne, Australia's Ambassador for Gender Equality.*
- *Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, UN Women Deputy, Executive*

Keynote Address (2 minutes)

Jorge Moreira da Silva, UNOPS Executive Director

Presentation: Joint Policy Brief: Unlocking HER Potential: Gender equality through equitable access to Assistive Technology (10 minutes)

Dr. Monjurul Kabir, Senior UN Coordinational Advisor and Global Team Leader- Gender Equality and Disability Inclusion, UN Women

Moderated dialogue (25 minutes)

- *Abdul Khaliq Shaikh, Secretary of the Ministry of Human Rights- Pakistan (Member State implementing gender-responsive AT policy)*
- *Rosario Galarza, Intersectionalities and Cross-Movement Collaboration Senior Officer, International Disability Alliance*
- *Maryangel Garcia-Ramos Guadiana, Executive Director, Women Enabled International*
- *Rylin Rodgers, Disability Policy Director, Microsoft Accessibility (Representative from the private sector)*
- *Dr Karen Reyes Castro, ATscale, Senior Programme Manager, the Global Partnership for Assistive Technology representative*

Interactive moderated dialogue with participants (20 minutes)

- *Mexico, Ghana, UK (confirmed)*

Call to Action and Closing Reflections (5 minutes)

Moderator- Émilie Potvin, Director- Global Portfolios, UNOPS

Signature wall photo

Inside CR-9