***Preparation of the Report of the OHCHR on ways to bridge the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective***

**REPLY BY LATVIA**

**1. Please identify the obstacles and barriers to access the Internet faced by women in your country. Please elaborate on the nature of these obstacles (e.g. social, cultural norms, literacy gap) and how they manifest themselves in practice.**

Latvia’s Internet policy is designed with a view **to ensure the Internet access to the whole society without any discrimination**. The proportion of private persons who use the Internet on a regular basis increases consistently; the range of e-services is expanded constantly. In 2013 the Cabinet of Ministers adopted the “Information Society Development Guidelines 2014–2020” (hereafter – Guidelines)[[1]](#footnote-1) – the current National e-Government strategy – defining the priorities for the information and communication technologies (hereafter – ICT) area. One of the basic principles foreseen in the Guidelines is to create the opportunity and the means to access and use the information and ICT’s for everyone, thereby helping to ensure human rights, promoting education, regional development, poverty reduction, gender equality, digital inclusion, general availability, public transparency, appropriate use of resources and public participation.

The Guidelines envisage a variety of measurements aimed at determination of the Internet availability, for example, proportion of households (with 16-74 year old inhabitants) having a broadband Internet connection, proportion of staff using a computer and the Internet on a daily basis, proportion of private persons (16-74 years old) who use the Internet on a regular basis, the average level of information and ICT skills development, the proportion of people who have never used the Internet, the proportion of people who shop on the Internet, the proportion of people that make use of the Internet for cooperation with national and local government institutions, households which have access to the Internet.

**2. Please indicate if your Government collects disaggregated data on the basis of sex regarding Internet access (..).**

Please, find enclosed the data on Internet usage, purposes of Internet usage and usage of mobile Internet on the basis of sex.

**3. What measures has your government taken to facilitate and expand access to Internet for women? Please elaborate on the impact of those measures.**

Latvia is constantly implementing a variety of measures aimed at expanding access to Internet to the whole society.

In order to create a common platform for e-skills development, as well as to promote European and national level of e-skills since 2010 the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development in cooperation with theLatvian Information and Communications Technology Association(LICTA) is organizing annual information campaign “European e-Skills Week”. During this week everyone has a chance to learn more about ICT’s and how society can benefit from them.

In 2015 more than 23 600 people used this chance to learn about the possibilities of improving their knowledge in the field of ICT’s. In 2015 European campaign “Get Online Week 2015” and the European campaign “e-Skills for Jobs 2015” were carried out.

The aim of the campaign in 2016 was to raise awareness of the opportunities that digital skills offer in the field of employment. In 2016 for the first time in variety of the E-skills week’s events and online tests girls/women participated more than men (girls 62%, men – 38%).

Since 2010 LICTA is working on the project „ICT industry and the partner training in the development of innovative technologies and business”. In the framework of the project training has been provided to experts in order to ensure their professional development.

Since the beginning of 2013 Latvian small and micro enterprises have a possibility to improve their ICT skills through the involvement LICTA coordinated training “Information technology training for small and micro enterprises to promote competitiveness and productivity".

During ”European e-Skills week 2013” Memorandum on e-Skills partnership was signed by the interested public authorities, associations, non-governmental organizations and business enterprises. By signing the Memorandum, representatives agreed to cooperate in four areas: ICT training in accordance with the labour market requirements, young people inclusion in the ICT sector, interactive contemporary teaching and improvement of the digital skills.

In March 2015, during the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the EU, the conference “e-Skills for Jobs 2015” was held in Riga. In this conference 72 international, regional and national organizations and enterprises signed Riga E-skills Declaration, which includes ten significant e-skills development principles, including the need to address youth unemployment in Europe through digital skills, priorities of "e-Skills for the 21st Century" policy and scale-up implementation, promotion of European leadership.

Since September 2015, 5 computer science learning curricula are being offered in schools. This opportunity has been used by 157 schools around Latvia. This serves as a precondition of introducing the new competence-based education standard. There are several measures planned in the field of education, for example, it is envisaged to develop an integrated curriculum in education area for children from the age of 5 years up until the 6th grade (including algorithmic thinking and information literacy), to develop digital teaching materials for general education, etc. Ergonomic improvements are planned to be made in the study environment and support for introduction of innovative ICT solutions to the study process is expected to be provided for the implementation of the improved general education content in regional secondary schools, improvement of teachers’ qualification, incl. business skills, leadership, creativity, ICT and foreign language skills, etc.

To promote a safe internet use the Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (hereafter – CDPC) in 2015 in cooperation with professionals prepared educational video material for adolescents on promotion of emotional wellbeing and reduction of bulling in school environment and online (two short movies - “Katrina” on bullying at school and “Roberts” on cyber bullying).[[2]](#footnote-2) These movies are meant to be used during the lessons; as well the CDPC has published guidelines for school teachers who would use above mentioned movies in their work. Target group: adolescents and teachers.

**4. What are the challenges by your Government in implementing policies and programmes to bridge the gender digital divide and to enhance the use of enabling technology in order to promote the empowerment of all women and girls? Are there regulatory and supply-side constraints (i.e. low affordability and a lack of digital skills), or barriers on the demand side? Please elaborate on the measures taken or identified to address them (i.e. access to internet in public libraries, universities, public wifi access point etc.).**

The Internet accessibility in Riga has been constantly improved and free high-speed Internet is now easily accessible in more than 930 locations in Riga, including parks, city squares and other open-air spaces. There is now one free Wi-Fi network per 750 residents; three for each square kilometer.

**For example, to develop Internet accessibility, Latvia implemented public library development project “Third father's son”**. Project's primary objective was to provide the opportunity for every inhabitant of Latvia to use, free of charge, the opportunities offered by the ICT’s – hardware and the Internet, as well as provide consultations in their use – in local public libraries. In the framework of this project in 874 libraries (including library branches and book issuance points) 4000 new computers were installed. All libraries installed equipment that provides users with Wi-Fi indoor and outdoor nearby library. All computers were equipped with the latest software that allows library visitors to use the most up-to-date methods to find information and to process it. Latvian Library for the Blind and its seven branches in Latvia for the first time were equipped with special hardware for visually impaired and blind people. In addition 17 libraries were connected to the Internet and Internet connection speed was enhanced in 853 libraries.

**5. Please indicate if a national Internet policy exists in your country and if this policy includes reference to human rights and gender considerations.**

The Guidelines define gender equality as one of the basic principles in the field of information society [*more detailed information is provided in response to the 1st question*].

Cyber Security Strategy of Latvia (2014-2018)[[3]](#footnote-3) highlights the importance of observing human rights and fundamental freedoms in cyber space, especially freedom of expression and, *inter alia*, refers to the UN Human Rights Council’s resolution on the protection of human rights on the Internet.

According to Electronic Communications Law all end-users and subscribers have equal rights to receive electronic communications services. The Electronic Communications Law also provides for protection of user data, including personal data. According to Electronic Communications Law electronic communications operator has responsibility to individually inform the user about the opportunity to install a content filter that restricts the availability of materials containing propaganda of cruel behavior, violence, eroticism, pornography, and which pose a threat to the child's mental development, as well as provide free content filter setup, if the subscriber requests it from the electronic communications operator.

Regulation (EU) 2015/2120 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 November 2015 laying down measures concerning open Internet access and amending Directive 2002/22/EC on universal service and users’ rights relating to electronic communications networks and services and Regulation (EU) No 531/2012 on roaming on public mobile communications networks within the Union establish common rules to safeguard equal and non-discriminatory treatment of traffic in the provision of Internet access services and related end-users’ rights.

**7. Does your Government have any specific laws of policies to address gender based violence online? What are the challenges faced by your Government to ensure accountability of perpetrators of human rights violations committed against persons for exercising their rights and fundamental freedoms on the internet?**

The legal framework in force in Latvia and international obligations assumed by Latvia provide that human rights are ensured without discrimination of any kind. Article 78 of the Criminal Law provides for criminal liability for incitement to national, ethnic, racial or religious hatred or enmity. Article 149.1 and Article 150 of the Criminal Law provides for criminal liability for discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin, nationality or religious affiliation or for the violation of the prohibition of any other type of discrimination, if substantial harm is caused thereby, and for act aimed towards inciting hatred or enmity because of the gender, age, disability of a person or any other characteristics, if substantial harm has been caused thereby. A more severe liability is provided for these criminal offences if they have been committed by a public official, or a responsible employee of an enterprise (company) or organization, or a group of persons, or if they are committed using automated data processing system.

Identification and combating of hate crimes and hate speech manifestations in the virtual environment is closely related with cybercrimes. At national level, this issue is addressed in guidelines “Cyber Security Strategy of Latvia (2014–2018)” because an automated data processing system can be used as a medium in circulation of information that is illegal and offends honour and dignity.

All victims have rights and possibilities to (personally or through electronic means) report to the law enforcement authorities about violations of their human rights. Also in case information inciting to hate or violence has been noticed, every person has a possibility to report to the respective social network administration as well as to use such Internet sites as <http://www.drossinternets.lv/page/116> (website of the Latvian Safer Internet Centre); naidanoziegumi.lv (website dedicated to hate crimes); <http://cilvektiesibas.org.lv/en/> (website of the Latvian Centre for Human Rights) for reporting purposes. The relevant information is transferred to the law enforcement authorities and is carefully scrutinized.

In order to advance protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms online, the Guidelines envisage organizing informative campaigns for Internet users about safety in virtual environment and potential risks in this context. Their aim is to offer a wide range of information about possible vulnerabilities and violence on the Internet and these campaigns are being developed in close cooperation with Internet security companies and the State Inspectorate for Protection of Children's Rights and other public authorities.

To reduce the violence on the Internet as much as possible the Latvian Safer Internet Centre (thereafter – Centre)[[4]](#footnote-4) in 2015 created training programme for police officers focusing on several objectives, for example, development of skills to react on crimes related to violence on the Internet. In its activities the Centre closely cooperates with a variety of stakeholders, for example, the Latvian Internet Association, the State Inspectorate for Protection of Children's Rights, the Local Governments Training Center, the State Police, Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, Ministry of Defence, the National Centre for Education, CERT.LV, Riga Technical University, Riga Teacher Training and Educational Management Academy, eTwinning Project and Centre "Dardedze".

*January, 2017*

1. *Available in English:* [*http://www.varam.gov.lv/eng/darbibas\_veidi/e\_gov/?doc=13317*](http://www.varam.gov.lv/eng/darbibas_veidi/e_gov/?doc=13317) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://youtu.be/lTGqR50Pfv0

 https://youtu.be/OvbNOHJ-7hI [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Available in English: <https://www.unodc.org/res/cld/lessons-learned/lva/cyber_security_strategy_of_latvia_2014-2018_html/Cyber_Security_Strategy_of_Latvia.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Available in English: http://www.drossinternets.lv/page/116* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)