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Geneva, 10 January 2017

The Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations Office and Other International Organizations at Geneva presents its compliments to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and would like to refer to the note verbal received on 30 November 2016 regarding the request of information to prepare a report on ways to bridge the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 32/13 entitled "The promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the internet". In this regard, please find attached the reply of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the aforementioned request.

The Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights the assurance of its highest consideration.



Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
Palais Wilson
52 rue des Pâquis
CH-1201 Geneva, Switzerland



Responses to Questions related to "Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on ways to bridge the Gender Divide from a human right perspective"

Q1) Please identify the obstacles and the 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.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is pledged to harness the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), including the Internet, to foster the development, innovations, and bring about greater flourishing for everyone in the Kingdom. The use of ICTs in the Kingdom is growing annually. Women and men are enjoying equal rights to access and use the Internet. This principle is supported by the laws and regulations related to the ICTs which do not discriminate between women and men. Such a practice, along with other initiatives, brought the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to be among the top listed countries when it comes to the usage of Internet and ICTs in general. According to the Global Information Technology Report 2016 that was issued by the World Economic Forum, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is ranked No. 3 in the mobile phone subscription.

Q2) Please indicate if your government collect disaggregated data on the basis of sex regarding internet access. Please provide any other available data on internet use by women, including with regard to type of access (e.g. broadband, house hold, mobile) and the relevant studies done over the last five years. Please indicate if your government uses qualitative and quantitative indicators to assist in monitoring progress regarding the ICT sector and/or on the gender digital divide.

As has been alluded to in the previous question, women and men in Saudi Arabia are enjoying equal rights to access and use the Information and communication technologies (ICTs), including the Internet. There is no disaggregated data collected on the basis of sex regarding internet access. All type of internet access are available to both women and men equally. We use qualitative and quantitative indicators to assist in monitoring progress regarding the ICT sector. In 2015, a comprehensive survey targeted respondents aged from 12 to 65 years old was conducted by the Communications and Information Technology Commission (CITC) and King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM) that provides both quantitative and qualitative analysis with respect to the development and uptake of ICT services, use of technologies and their penetration. The data collected

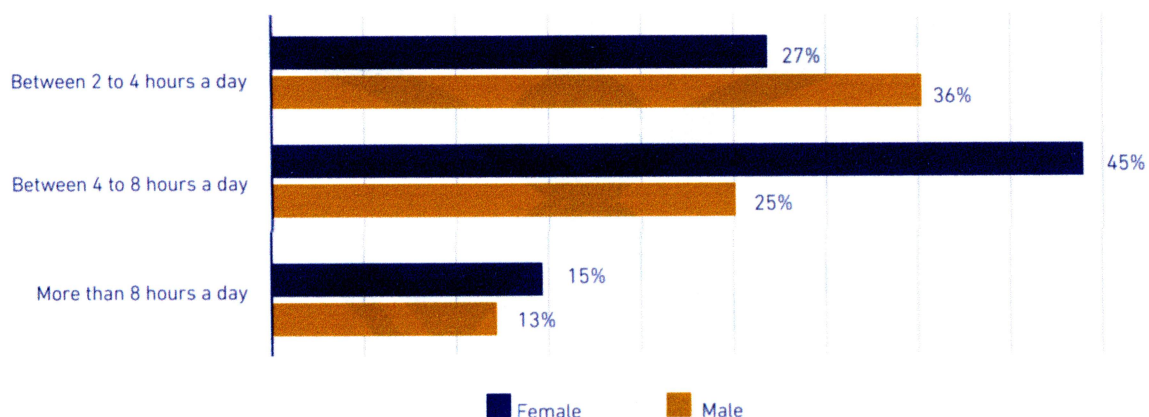


included a large sample from all over the Kingdom covering individual/household insuring a margin of error of 1.79 at confidence level of 95%. Following are the key highlights of some outcomes of that survey relevant to this question. It is to be noted here that the target respondents were aged between 12 and 65 years old:

- 96% of female in Saudi Arabia are using the Internet compared to 88% of male for the same age-group.
- Mobile voice usage is uniform for both males and females (99%).
- The use of fixed telephony is popular among females (50%) compared to (37%) among male.
- Females (78%) use more mobile Internet services than Males (72%).
- Females and males use online social networks almost similarly (around 90%).

Q3) What measures has your government taken to facilitate and expand access to internet for women? Please elaborate on the impact of these measures.

As it has been noted earlier, accessing the internet is granted for both women and men equally. They enjoy the same rights and privileges. The statistics provided in the answer to Q2 above shows that females in Saudi Arabia use the Internet more than males. The below figure shade more light on this subject.



Time Spent on Internet – Active Usage: Gender-wise

Q4) What are the challenges faced by your government in implementing policies and programmes to bridge the gender digital divide and 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 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 points, etc.)

As the statistics shown previously revealed, there are no challenges faced by Saudi Arabia regarding the use of enabling technology in order to promote the empowerment of all women and girls.

Q5 Please indicate if a national internet policy exists in your country and if this policy includes reference to human rights and gender considerations.

There are national policies that touch upon the Information and communication technologies (ICTs), including the Internet and have reference to human rights. The Saudi Basic Law of Governance states: "Correspondence by telegraph and mail, telephone conversations, and other means of communication shall be protected. They may not be seized, delayed, viewed, or listened to except in cases set forth in the Law". In addition, Saudi Law of Criminal Procedure states: "Mail, cables, telephone conversations and other means of communication shall be inviolable and, as such, shall not be perused or surveilled except pursuant to an order stating the reasons thereof and for a limited period as herein provided for.". The Saudi Telecommunications Act states that the privacy and confidentiality of telephone calls and information transmitted or received through public telecommunications networks shall be maintained. It should be noted that the above provisions apply to both women and men equally and there is no discrimination between them.

Q6) Please indicate if your government has developed specific initiative to eliminate gender disparities in digital literacy by 2030, taking into account goals 4 and 5 of the sustainable development goals (SDGs), as well as other relevant SDGs.

Recently, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia launched its vision 2030 which include initiatives to help improve communication and internet access. KSA's "Vision 2030" nationwide initiative includes a number of steps to address the projected needs from the telecommunications and information technology sector to achieve the targets set under this vision. These include:

- Enhancing the infrastructure of telecommunications and information technology
- Innovation in advanced technologies
- Investment in the digital economy



- Leveraging of e-commerce
- Digital transformation in governance and the further development of E-government

As the women already enjoying the same rights as men to use the internet, KSA's "Vision 2030" will contribute in promoting the elimination of any gender disparities in digital literacy that might exist.