Gender Digital Divide Assessment (GDDA) in Uzbekistan

What are the gaps

The GDDA shows that 87% of women use the Internet daily. Both men and women use the Internet mainly at home and access it predominantly through mobile connections. Some remote locations have a significant lack of fixed Internet connectivity (e.g., in Bakhmal only 21% of men and 11% of women have fixed Internet access).
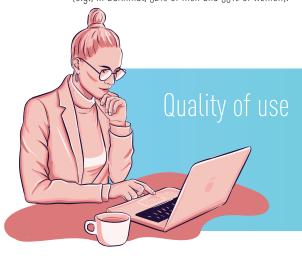
In remote locations, only 11% of men and 7% of women use the Internet in public places such as makhallya committees, Internet cafes, coworking centers, and shopping centers with Wi-Fi. In urban locations, Internet use outside the home and work is relatively high (e.g., 49% of men and 40% of women in Tashkent and Tashkent region).

Smartphone ownership among women is higher than men, which runs against the global average gap of 15% in favor of men. In urban locations, 90% of women and 85% of men own smartphones. Similarly, in remote areas, 84% of women and 80% of men use smartphones. However, in some remote locations, smartphone ownership is still low (e.g., in Bakhmal, 52% of men and 55% of women).

The GDDA identified four main factors that affect digital skills attainment. Gender - almost 24% of women are less digitally-skilled than men. Age - Nearly 10% of women over the age of 35 years are less digitally-skilled than women under 35 years. Income - people with the higher income 36% more likely have more advanced digital skills. Education - people with higher education 19% more likely have more advanced digital skills. Importantly, the data showed that men and women tend to stop developing their skills after marriage.

> The quality of using the Internet is closely related to Internet availability, the level of digital skills and the availability of relevant content. Work in these areas is one of the main priorities for increasing the productivity of using the Internet.

All vulnerable groups (women, older people, people with disabilities) and married people tend to use fewer digital financial services (for example Payme, Click, Apelsin, etc.) to receive and send money or for business purposes. The use of these services increases with the growth of income and education. The largest gender gap is observed when using the Internet for business, obtaining government services, online games, and paying for services.

Quality of use

Man
30 y.o.
Higher education
Urban citizen
5-7 mil income

Woman
9% less for e-commerce
10% less use mobile apps to pay for services
13% less send and receive money transfers

Woman
30 y.o.
No higher education
Urban citizen
3-5 mil income

People with disabilities experience more digital divide than average in the population. The GDDA shows that people with disabilities connect 10% less to the Internet using mobile phones, have 16% fewer desktop computers and 8% fewer laptops.

The basic digital skills gap in this vulnerable group is 32%. However, advanced skills such as programming (21% higher) and maintaining computers (7% higher) are higher than for the average population.

Government and society are committed to increasing women's digital inclusion, which is gradually changing social norms. For example, the study found that very few respondents chose "My family does not allow me to use the Internet" as a barrier to inclusion (only 1% of women in Namangan and Dekhkanabad).

However, the study showed that there are very few women role models in society and in the tech sector - especially among businesses. The largest private tech companies do not publish information about their management; women investors do not invest in technology projects.

The interviews with stakeholders from the public sector and academia showed that many of them carry gender stereotypes, in many cases unconsciously.

Why are the gaps

a. Despite enormous progress in expanding coverage of both fixed and mobile internet to the entire country, affordability issues still leave many people offline

For the majority of the population, Internet access is still unaffordable with 51% of women respondents indicating financial barriers as the biggest problem to access the Internet. The lack of income is the most prevailing barrier in Shurchi (74% of men and 82% of women) and Nurafshan (72% of men and 86% of women).

Both men and women cited the cost of the Internet and a lack of skills as two of the main barriers to full use of the Internet and digital technologies. In the online survey, the respondents named additional barriers such as lack of content in the Karakalpak language, lack of security of correspondence in instant messengers, and restrictions on social networks.

The underdevelopment of the connectivity infrastructure of public places in remote areas hinders the active use of the Internet outside of home and work.

b. Higher digital skills attainment does not appear to be valued, especially among older and lower-income populations

The absence of a National Digital Literacy and Skills Competencies Framework prevents a consistent national approach to identifying and developing core skills in diverse communities, work, and education contexts. A Framework could define core digital skills for individuals to be able to participate in society and work and provide a systematic approach to benchmarking, monitoring, and reporting on attainment.

Existing digital skills development programs and projects exclusively target youth. The survey data, however, shows that needs are most significant among older age (over 35 years) brackets and people with disabilities. In addition, women of all ages need more opportunities to learn programming skills. Most digital skills programs are largely based on the assumption that people with disabilities have access to devices other than smartphones, which is not necessarily correct.

c. Social norms takes time to change

Uzbekistan's leadership has demonstrated their commitment to supporting and promoting gender equality, including programs such as GAP. The President speaks about the importance of involving women in economic activity. The state and development partners are launching more and more programs to attract girls to the IT profession through training, hackathons, and support for startups. As a result, women's use of the Internet and smartphone is becoming a more acceptable norm.

Social change takes time and requires the involvement of both women and men. Lack of female representation and programs on gender equality negatively affects women participation in economic and social life. Without examples to follow, society in general and young women in particular will not understand what is possible and should be treated as a norm. The lack of career programs will not allow a new generation of women leaders to grow.

Impact of the gaps

Economic empowerment. The digital economy is now 15.5% of the global GDP and is growing at more than double the rate of the traditional economy. Anyone not online is being left out. The gender digital divide also negatively impacts a country's economic growth and development.

Eliminating biases. Anyone not using digital technologies does not contribute to the exponential growth of data. Leaving people offline creates biases in datasets by making them unrepresentative of the full population and exacerbates existing inequalities.

Equal access. Without equal access to digital technology and solutions, women cannot equally participate in our ever-more digital societies, including their ability to speak out about issues that affect them.

Barriers found

Internet coverage	Digital Skills and Literacy
Relevant Content	Device Ownership
Social Norms	Affordability

Recommendations to bridge gender digital divide

Improve access

Expand and improve the national network of public Internet access points, prioritizing less connected locations. To overcome the problems of availability and affordability of the Internet, the GoU, in partnership with the private sector, should continue to grow connectivity in community places such as IT centers and public libraries and promote these places as access points for the general population. The government could prioritize less connected regions, e.g., Bakhmal and Dehkanabad.

Address device affordability in partnership with the private sector. Considering the government's priority to develop BPO services, making devices like laptops, computers and tablets more affordable is key to increasing ownership. Without these devices, the potential workforce for BPO services will be constrained. One of the possible solutions might be a partnership with a PC/laptop manufacturer to launch the affordable device program ¨Computer in Every Home¨ to provide devices at-cost.

Support digital skills and competencies

Develop a National Digital Literacy and Skills Competencies Framework. Such a framework could define core digital skills for individuals to be able to participate in society and work and provide a systematic approach to benchmarking, monitoring, and reporting on skills' attainment. Prioritizing the development of digital skills and literacy programs that meet the needs of the older population and people with disabilities and are designed primarily for smartphone access are critical.

Influence social norms change

Create programs to promote women mentors and leaders. Uzbekistan women need more mentoring and role models from IT and more transparency from the largest tech companies. In addition, the dedicated training for public officials, leadership and civil society about the gender digital divide and inclusion are important.

Conduct a national awareness campaign that centers positive male testimonials to help change entrenched gender narratives. Changing social norms requires long-term, multi-stakeholder commitment. Understanding and taking into consideration the broader cultural context when developing programs to address the gender digital divide is key. Fathers and husbands play a major role in decisions about women's social and economic activities. A national awareness campaign could help change attitudes toward women's roles. The awareness campaign "I am proud of my (wife, sister, mother, and daughter)" may use testimonials from real men and deliver them through various media.

Outcomes of recommendations

Increased economic growth for Uzbekistan. Increasing the digital inclusion of women and girls could boost global GDP by approximately USD $524 billion by 2025. The thorough use of digital technologies can provide economic empowerment for women.

Improved professional and educational opportunities for women. The Internet and devices can help women to access knowledge, online education, and e-markets. An opportunity to access remote work may help women overcome mobility constraints and access more financial sources without compromising their family role. The support of widespread education and income growth proved to be a positive instrument for improving digital skills and the general use of digital services and solutions.

Market attractiveness. Gender digital inclusion will expand markets (new customers) for digital service providers such as fintech, healthtech, edtech, etc. A better understanding of the needs of women will target product design and marketing communication. Market growth will bring more local and international investment opportunities. High-quality female workforce will benefit the BPO sector development.

About the Gender Digital Divide Assessment

The Gender Digital Divide Assessment (GDDA) in Uzbekistan is a joint project of UNDP and the Ministry for the Development of Information Technologies and Communications of the Republic of Uzbekistan ¨Advancing Digital Transformation in Uzbekistan.¨ The GDDA is conducted in partnership with ITU and aims to strengthen the capacity of the Government of Uzbekistan to promote inclusive digital transformation. Surveys of 8,607 people online and 1050 people in person were conducted in July to September 2022. The upcoming report outlines key findings of the UNDP GDDA and recommends priority actions for the government and international organizations.