

## **What policies do we need to make the Internet affordable to all?**

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### **Summary of text:**

Binary definitions of online and offline are still used frequently at international and national levels. Such definitions of basic Internet are misleading. Access to the Internet depends not only on having meaningful connectivity, but also on having affordable access and a supportive social environment which facilitates women and men's full agency and abilities in their use of the Internet. The minimum threshold for meaningful connectivity alone requires sufficient Internet speed, the ability to connect with enough data at any time, and ownership of an appropriate device.

The gender gap in meaningful connectivity means that women are less likely to pursue education, schedule health appointments, or use online public services, among other barriers. Gaps in literacy and skills also sideline women from fully enjoying the range of opportunities provided by the Internet and digital services. The digital opportunity of rural women is particularly constrained, since they face both gender-based barriers as well as rural limitations.

As noted by the A4AI [Cost of Exclusion Report](#): "Women already achieve incredible things in the digital economy. However, their experiences as content creators and entrepreneurs are more an exception than part of everyday life. Those who have been early leaders in their fields have been left vulnerable to scams and abuse. Millions have been left behind without sufficient support to access the internet, know how it works, or realize their full potential in using it. If governments want to see a digital economy as a core engine to a post-Covid recovery, they must invest in gender-equitable foundations to include everyone."

### **Key recommendations:**

- Governments should develop a Digital Strategy with gender-specific targets, which is time-bound, subject to continuous monitoring and evaluation and which engages women and gender experts in the processes of policy design.
- Governments should be intentional in creating policies and programs which facilitate access for women, including subsidizing smartphones and laptop devices, and incentivizing operators to establish differentiated pricing arrangements and reduced tariff data plans.
- Universal Access and Service Funds (USAF) and other permanent funds should be directed to projects aligned with closing the gender digital divide, such as digital skills training programs or community connectivity infrastructure projects. Almost 38 percent of low- and middle-income countries do not have a USAF, and when they do, they are largely under-utilized.