

Young Latin American Women Declaration

Enabling access to empower young women and build a feminist Internet Governance

Introduction

*“6. Calls upon all States to bridge the gender digital divide and enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the **empowerment of all women and girls;**”¹*

Gender is part of us, it is socially bounded to our bodies, to our actions, to our way of seeing the world and to our every move. Along with it we encounter challenges, battles, constraints, that we seek to navigate be it online or offline. As young women from Latin America, we recognize that gender is not binary, however, this brief declaration focuses in only one part of a wider discussion that includes (or perhaps *must* include) other voices.

Gender is a sociocultural construct that determines, based on social processes, what a woman and a man should or should not do. In the Internet, the same thing happens and we find important gender gaps that limit women’s rights to access, interact and create online. These restrictions are determined by diverse factors like education, economic resources and the reasons why a person wants to be connected once there is a possibility to access the Internet.

According to a report² jointly published by Intel and Dalberg Global Development Advisors women in developing countries frequently lack access to the Internet, meaning we are 25% less likely to be online than men around here and it is exactly this "gender divide", still existing in 2016, that we aim to shorten.

As the Best Practice Forum (BPF) Gender and Access has previously noted³:

Almost 60% of the world's people are still offline (World Bank, 2016), and are thus unable to benefit from the many opportunities ICTs offer for empowerment and development. This digital gap is more acute for women, as it is estimated that 12% fewer women than men can benefit from Internet access worldwide; rising to 15% in developing countries and almost 29% in least developed countries (ITU, 2016).

¹ [emphasis added] Resolution A/HRC/32/L.20 of the Human Rights Council. June 27th 2016

² Intel and Dalberg Global Development Advisors. Women and the Web - Bridging the Internet gap and creating new global opportunities in low and middle-income countries. 2012. <http://dalberg.com/documents/Women_Web.pdf>. Viewed in September 29th 2016.

³ <http://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/content/bpf-gender-and-access>

The Internet presents a dichotomy based on gender and age and to believe that the assumption that young people are born "connected to the Internet" is, as a matter of fact, a fallacy⁴. Thus, we have here a paradigm: what happens to young women who are accessing and consuming information? How and what are they creating? Are they being *able* to create? What are they having access to and how *are* they accessing? Last, but not least, what happens with those who are not yet connected?

Perhaps there is a preceding question: What does it mean to be a young woman (in Latin America) and not yet connected?

Internet access empowers women, offers us opportunities to learn more, to search and apply for new jobs, strive and fight for access to equal income rates and to express ourselves and our femininities. And let it be noted that these are only few ways in which women can benefit from the access to the Internet, let alone young women.

The fact is, as we dig deeper into connectivity, and as our lives are more dependable in using the Internet and/or interconnected systems, we must reflect upon the paths, challenges and opportunities that emerge. *Do we feel secure online? If yes, when and where? If not, why?*

If we guarantee access, freedom and security for women on the Internet, we will create an Internet with less gaps and, furthermore, we will be able to create equal opportunities and have empowered women. Young women from 2016 will soon be connected adults, and we want to have the tools to access, build and navigate in the same circumstances and conditions.

The *Young Latin American Women Declaration* aims to present our views and perspectives on the present Internet and also to appeal for an inclusive work that reflects not only about women, but also includes our perspectives not only as native and active participants of the Internet, involved in Internet governance and interested in fighting for a free and open Internet for everyone.

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A narrative approach: #genderyouthLAC sharing stories

Despite of representing a smaller part of the wide-array Internet users latin american women, that find themselves inserted in the Internet, are forced to go through some situations such as discrimination, harassment, digital violence, that intend to prevent us from existing online.

⁴ "[Y]outh does not overcome all barriers to Internet use. While the Internet gender gap is somewhat smaller among the young, it is still sizeable. Among 18-29 year olds, there are still only seven women online for every 10 men (as compared to one woman to every two men online among 40-49 year olds). Education and income significantly constrain Internet adoption by young women, just as they do among older women." ([World Wide Web Foundation](#), 2015).

Therefore, the following stories aim to showcase the relationship between young women and the Internet. The how can we overcome the bad and/or challenging aspects and relationship and benefit from it.

"I work in a law firm and most of my coworkers are men. In order to have a better communication, we created a WhatsApp group, which has helped us a lot. However, since most of them are men, they feel free to share what we can call "men jokes" that includes, at least, memes of naked women and sexual images. Furthermore, they usually talk in a double sense; they think every conversation can be related to sex. I really do not like them because it contributes to the idea that the woman is just a good body. I feel awkward when I am notified with these images, but I cannot do anything, they say I should get used to that"

(Lawyer, 24 years old, Peru)

"I am graduated in law, and I used to work in a top tier government legal office. Despite of being a left-oriented people, my co-workers were mostly men who used to believe only in their gender supremacy and, therefore, shared all the useful work information inside a whatsapp group. Apart from being the main strategic locus in which they shared last minute information, the group also discussed our fellow women colleagues, their personal impressions on each one of them and, for example, how could they prevent us from being friends, alongside with conversations about soccer and men related issues. In order to fight it, and as a backlash to the boys group, we created another group composed by women, to empower ourselves given the lack of information that used to exist at the time. After the group, not only we became good friends, but we learned not to believe exclusively in what our boss says about a colleague not being fond of your work. And, if we can acknowledge anything from this episode is that we should have also focused on backing up our fellow women colleagues opinions and ideas in every single situation, as men generally do, as a way of hacking the given status quo and strengthening the relationship between us women."

(Lawyer, 25 years old, Brazil)

"I see gender as an all-encompassing and never-ending performance. We are embedded in it from the moment we wake up till the last blink before sleep. We may dress our "work identity", our "friend identity", our "mother/daughter" identity, but we are always constantly being these identities. We perform and are women. Gender is part of our lives, we can deny it and even run from it, but it is part of how social relations have been structured. This is not different when we connect ourselves. I believe we are able to navigate gender in and through access. I feel that in many online spaces I'm able to shape what

people see and that kind of power over my "digital body" helps me (partly) shield any association with "looks" that may discredit my work. Unfortunately, instead of shielding as a reactive action, we should be able to feel free to express ourselves and the Internet should be a space where we could get ahold of who we are as well protect ourselves. On the other hand, I also found safe spaces: (e.g.) Women-only groups in Facebook where girls feel comfortable in sharing thoughts, doubts and concerns."

(Researcher, 23 years old, Brazil)

"Everything changed the day I got a preview to the march of # 24A photo to join a local campaign" Free and Safe Streets ", what would be wrong to say I prefer "my rights to a compliment?". I began to receive many notifications, all in twitter, In 6 hours 60 tweets where I harassed, and many of those comments received me like or was retweeted by other accounts.

What happens then? How ? Escape aggression notices kept coming.

Where was my tranquility, and beyond all, why I can not be free and express whatever in my space, why it bothers them so much, why?

They wanted to rape me.

When I read that message, I was alone in the central bus bound for Mexico City, were six long hours where my head kept repeating "I wish, and rape you."

(Social Communicator, 26 years old, México)

I like comics since I am kid. All these years I have realized that the world of comics is run by men. However, recently, big publishing houses are releasing new comics with female characters as the hero. This motivated me to create a Facebook page to disseminate news around these new comics and invite other girls to comment. As girls, we are used to hide our interest in comics. My Facebook page is now popular and what has impressed me the most is that the majority of my followers are men. I think that happens because they feel curious about a female view in comics, they cannot believe this is happening nowadays. I am very thankful with Internet for this opportunity.

(Publicist, 26 years old, Peru)

One of the best experiences I had in my career came from Internet. I think not everybody can understand how social media can create opportunities. The girls of my country see social media just as a tool to share their life, but I think there it is much more. My top story started in Twitter. A foreign producer asked, in Twitter, if someone from my country follows his account, I saw the tweet and instantly replied "me!" Suddenly, the producer wrote me back offering work and an online free course of eleven weeks, and obviously I accepted. I can say that on those weeks I learned more than on my courses at

the university. I hope, one day, more women can realized what Internet can offer us and start taking advantages of being online.

(Media Producer, 24 years old Peru)

I am a doctor and I work in a small town in the Andes, where people do not have access to Internet and most of them speak, besides Spanish, Quechua which is a native language. The only access I can get is in the health center, where the government has placed a satellite antenna, and therefore the connection is not good. People here know barely about Internet, and I feel sad about it. If someone has an idea about Internet is because they have been on the city to study or to sell corn and potatoes. Usually most of the people that travel to the city are men, so the girls stay at home, that helps to keep the gap in digital knowledge between girls and boys. I think that if we connect this small town to the world through Internet, these girls can empower themselves and share how beautiful is their hometown and the varieties of potatoes and corn they have. Internet can change the life of these girls, who maybe would never have the chance to go out of their town.

(Doctor, 24 years old Peru)

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Putting things into perspective

Access

We, the ones who are writing and supporting this declaration, have access to the Internet. However, this is not the case of several young women around the world. This fact worries us and makes us ask ourselves: *why are there so many women with no Internet access?* According to the World Wide Web Foundation in its Women's Rights Online – Translating Access into Empowerment paper, women in the developing world are 50% less likely to get Internet access than men⁵. Moreover, According to the GSMA report presented at the Connected Women 2015, women are 14% less able to have access to mobile phones⁶.

⁵ World Wide Web Foundation. Women`s Rights Online - Translating Access into Empowerment. 2015. URL <http://webfoundation.org/docs/2015/10/womens-rights-online_Report.pdf > Viewed: 29 september 2016.

⁶ The report Reducing Gender Exclusion also gathers information regarding mobile access in middle and low income countries Colombia and Mexico as well as other 11 countries across the globe GSMA. Connected Women Global Development Alliance. Connected Women 2015 Bridging The Gender Gap: mobile access and usage in low and middle-income countries. <<http://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Connected-Women-Gender-Gap.pdf>>. Viewed: 29 september 2016.

And since the ones who have access to Internet through their phones not always are educated, they are 33% less likely to use those phones to access to Internet than men. Following that idea, women are 25% less likely to look for jobs online than men⁷.

Furthermore, even if patriarchal attitudes are less common between men that have Internet access, 28% percent of male users in developing countries must believe that they need to look out the access to Internet of women⁸.

This situation gets worst when in the monetary cost of access reach up to 10% of a person's monthly income⁹.

More than 1,700 billion women in low and middle income countries do not have access to mobile telephone services - 14% less than men without access, what consequently represents a gender exclusion of 200 million women. In Latin America, there are approximately 149 millions of women without access to mobile phone - a huge impact to the digital inclusion of women, since the mobile phone are currently the main mean of Internet access¹⁰.

In the matter of age, it is true that new generations are having more access to Internet. Though, the gap has not yet disappeared, among 18 to 29 years old, for every 10 men, there are just 7 girls online¹¹.

As has been described, the situation is not the best, there is something that is happening and we want to share our ideas. We have seen that the causes of this major problem are: lack of education, fear, machismo culture, monetary cost of access, and the lack of response from government-led public policies.

The lack of education makes more difficult to go online; and by education we are not just referring to digital education, we are talking in a broad matter. If the girls are not educated, they won't be able to navigate the Web even in their own language. And, in remote regions where there are low education and literacy levels, a girl will only experience a small part of Internet because most of the content online is in English - which is still a barrier for some developing countries.

Another point, that comes with the lack of education, is the fear of being online. Besides the overall concern with privacy and data protection, and despite the perception that this fear may be decreasing as younger generations get connected, we did not overcome it.

⁷ World Wide Web Foundation. Women's Rights Online - Translating Access into Empowerment. 2015. URL <http://webfoundation.org/docs/2015/10/womens-rights-online_Report.pdf> Viewed: 29 september 2016.

⁸ World Wide Web Foundation. Op.cit.

⁹ Ibídem

¹⁰ GSMA. Op.cit.

¹¹ World Wide Web Foundation Op.cit.

Besides that, we have cultural barriers. The biggest one is the reinforcement of a male-oriented society through machismo culture. In these cases, girls tend to be seen as human beings who are not able to survive in an online world, so it is preferable to keep them entertained on “girly” activities at home. A patriarchal view of the Internet is one that limits our ability to have equal access due to structured social constraint. This further reinforces our belief that despite access, we need to think about what kind of access do we wish. Access should come along with education, awareness and a gender-sensitive perspective on how to use/navigate it.

This problem gets bigger if we talk about income. Nowadays, there are a lot of initiatives that seek equal income between men and women; It might come as a surprise to many, but despite of being in the year of 2016, men and women holding the same position are still offered unequal opportunities. Income inequality, for example, is still a problem that haunts women and consequently structures a wealth, men has more money to pay for Internet and a better electronic device than a woman.

Another facade of income-related problematiqués is the relationship and proportionality between access and income. In Brazil, most house-oriented broadband services are excessively expensive, low quality and concentrated in the hands of few telecom companies. A single, young woman, facing unequal payment are, most definitely impacted by as well as suffer from these conditions - also means women will have fewer options to express their financial power if Internet is not deemed as a priority in monthly income distribution. With an expensive Internet and access barriers, women under conditions have fewer opportunities of access.

Another question related to the gender digital divide are the environments in which the access is stimulated. Both the Internet and the connectivity directed policies most of the time are targeted to public spaces.

Closely attached to digital gender-related exclusion is the question of understanding how access is being promoted. The public space where access policies are instituted, such as wifi access points, libraries and schools, does not hold the same impact in women's lives as it has in men's.

'Also, there are several elements that could serve as barriers to women's access to private spaces such as the type of job they have, whether it is in a company or in a home office, children related responsibilities and prejudice. Normally, connectivity policies does not quite manages to make its' way towards women. With that in mind, women tend to be the most affected by the digital divide and present themselves with higher levels of digital illiteracy than men usually do.

The promotion of Internet access outside the household has a more democratic impact, in spite of that, the levels of access are still uneven, increasing the gap between the genders fact that interferes in further consequences regarding, for an instance, qualification for the labor market, independence and access to information.

We believe that access to Internet can change the life of these girls. They can learn, gain a voice in their community and outside of it, improve their income, and create new opportunities for the future generations. Notwithstanding, these beliefs must be accompanied by gender-sensitive policies both at the national, regional and international level. Otherwise, the absence of a harmonization between education, awareness, governance, capacity building and policy-making, will only contribute to the further stalling, and/or small pace of progress in building a safe, equal, inclusive, open and accessible Internet for young women and girls - specially in developing countries.

Security and Privacy

Sexting and Digital Violence

Sexiting and digital violence have become a recurring practice on the Internet. Sharing photos of women without authorization, entering your social networks and viewing conversations, blackmailing and revenge porn have become *normalized*, if not "normal" situations young women.

In the 1st Youth LACIGF Forum - held in Costa Rica, the day before LACIGF 9 - during the Human Rights round of discussions, several participants expressed concern in connecting to the Internet, noting that they sometimes felt unsafe worried that photographs and/or other personal data/content could be used without permission.

Here is what the Feminist Principles of the Internet tell us about these topics:

10. Freedom of expression

We defend the right to express ourselves sexually as a matter of freedom of expression and of no less importance than political or religious expression. We are radically opposed to any effort by state and non-state actors to control, monitor, regulate and restrict feminist queer expression on the Internet through technology, legislation or violence. We affirm that this is part of a broader political project of moral surveillance, censorship and discrimination hierarchical citizenship and rights.¹²

17. Violence

We call on all Internet stakeholders, including users / as designers / as policymakers and the private sector, to address the issue of online harassment and violence related technology. Attacks, threats, intimidation and surveillance experienced by women and queers are real, harmful and alarming, and are part of wider gender-based violence problem. It is our collective responsibility to address and end such violence.¹³

¹² Association for Progressive Communications, APC. Feminist Principles of the Internet. <http://feministinternet.net/sites/default/files/FeministPrinciplesoftheInternetv2.0_0.pdf>. Second version, 2016.

¹³ Association for Progressive Communications, APC. Op.cit.

We, as women, have the right to decide about our bodies and this right should be guaranteed online, public policies implemented by governments to defend or punish acts of digital violence or sexting should not be reason to question the morality or violate women who were assaulted. Our practices on the Internet should not be a reason nor a precondition for us to be exposed to attacks and harassments. On the contrary, it should be a space for us to express ourselves without having to face the proliferation of hate-speech and hatred.

It is unfortunate that young women are still afraid of navigating and that our security as any user should not be defended.

The right to a dignified life without violence must be guaranteed in the online environment and as young women must raise the voice to practices that go against the principles of a free Internet, open and safe, where we want young women to participate.

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Closing the gap

Prior to being able to access the Internet and benefiting from it, women face uncountable barriers regarding connectivity. From lack of trust in the Internet as a safe environment to poor connectivity in undeveloped or rural areas, many are the issues that permeate the absence of women online, including the restrictions offered by some cultural norms that prevent women from using the Internet at all.

We consider the Internet as a gateway to empowerment given the fact that its environment provides women confidence and expression, - social networks and the access to Internet allows us to exchange informations, ideas, perspectives and to shorten distances from previously isolated areas to the big cities. Therefore, the Internet must also be understood as a platform for women, young women specially, to make their voices heard, ensuring ourselves the right to express our viewpoints and engage in global conversations

The barriers to connectivity faced by women reflect and reinforce gender norms. Enabling environments that allow women not only to get online, but to do it safely, is very important to us in order to be fully engaged in the Internet. Having access to an ambience where the value of the empowerment angle is not acknowledged and whose focus is set exclusively on reinforcing our vulnerabilities has no benefits whatsoever.

In order to promote a more equal Internet and the access of women, we believe it is very important to identify all layers of access – youth, mothers, elderly women, rural and traditional communities - and try to tailor access to each one of them. We do not need a rhetorical proposal from the Government.

Another important aspect to take into account is education. As has been said above, education is one of the factors that contributes to unequal access. We need to ensure that every girl can have access to basic education as the first step, and then teach them digital skills. We expect that in the future more girls can be enrolled on digital initiatives. We believe that more tech jobs can be on the hands of ladies. Who says a woman cannot run a tech company?

Last but not least, as defended by Carolina Rossini and Peter Micek, when in the provision and expansion of access to Internet, we must not forget the importance of having a human rights-based.

However, connectivity alone cannot form global development policy. People should have universal access to an affordable Internet that is open, secure, and reliable. They must also be able to exercise their access under a framework that supports freedom of expression and privacy. Respect for human rights must go hand-in-glove with the drive to connection. This is the important notion that the U.N. Human Rights Council endorsed through its resolution. It condemned countries that intentionally disrupt citizens' Internet access -- commonly called Internet shutdowns -- and reaffirmed that "the same rights people have offline must also be protected online."¹⁴

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Women in Internet Governance

What is expected of an Internet Governance Forum?

Despite of the level - national, regional and international -, we believe that Internet Governance Forums must reflect the community effort of promoting a dialogue participative with all the different stakeholders. This effort should include the development of positive measures capable of reaching out and including young women as interlocutors within these spaces. We believe that the BPF Gender and Access, now in its' second year, along with the efforts of the Dynamic Coalition and Workshops are crucial in promoting spaces of resistance, inclusion, dialogue and bridge-building. We also see these as places for us, young women, to take part and think about the Internet (and the governance mechanisms involved) we want to see in the future.

Thanks to the work of many women who have come before us, the Internet is a space designed for the diverse practice of people interested in this subject, but it is necessary to ensure that our participation is taken into account. According to the Internet feminist principles:

6. Decision making in the governance of the Internet¹⁵

¹⁴ Peter Micek and Carolina Rossini. Connectivity Can't Unlock the Internet's Promise Without Human Rights. <<http://internetinitiative.ieee.org/newsletter/september-2016/connectivity-can-t-unlock-the-internet-s-promise-without-human-rights>>.

¹⁵ Association for Progressive Communications, APC. Feminist Principles of the Internet. <http://feministinternet.net/sites/default/files/FeministPrinciplesoftheInternetv2.0_0.pdf>. Second version, 2016.

We are in favor of challenging patriarchal spaces and processes that control Internet governance, and to include more feminist and queer people in decision-making. We want to democratize the formulation of policies affecting internet and disperse property and power in global and local networks.

We acknowledge and applaud the panels that have an equal distribution between women and men participants, but we must also remind the importance of the participation of women in these forums. IGF2015, held in João Pessoa, Brazil, counted with 38%¹⁶ female participants. Although progress has been made throughout the IGFs, we do see that this result is part of an ongoing focus to promote inclusion and to elevate gender as a priority.

Last July, the Youth Observatory organized the first Youth LACIGF, in the event 31% of the participants were young women from Latin America and the Caribbean working in different sectors of the Internet. During the Youth LACIGF, they presented their views on different topics such as digital rights, security, connectivity, digital violence, sexting, among others. This first exercise in the region, the Youth LACIGF, gave us a clear example of the importance of listening and gathering the voices of those who are participating and contributing to the construction from Internet.

Although, back in 2015, when we asked how could we integrate our participation in the Internet Governance Forum, Avri Dória from the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), said:

How to integrate gender issues in a field that does not recognize the relevance of gender related discussions ? Internet Governance, according to the working definition, does not refer primarily to individuals, but to organizations and a genderless Internet. However, nowadays the number of men accessing the Internet represents twice the number of women accessing the Internet. The Internet has no gender, and the problem is that the predominant gender is incapable of acknowledging that.

Given the stories shared and facts analyzed in this first *Young Latin American Women Declaration*, we consider that:

- It is important to promote the subject of young women inclusion, as a necessity not a fashion or a hype subject.
- The promotion of training and support of young women towards the proper use of the Internet is significant, we are from the generation that will take the baton and we are not able to do so without preparation, accompaniment and support of our fellow experienced women.

¹⁶ Internet Governance Forum. Evolution of Internet Governance: Empowering Sustainable Development. Gender report cards: analysis and results. Available at: <http://www.intgovforum.org/cms/documents/igf-meeting/igf-2016/takingstock/726-gender-report-card/file> >. 2015.

- The discussion of issues regarding security and privacy in the Internet is imperative, we must no longer allow young women to suffer harassment and violence online.
- Speeches and representatives must necessarily include the perspectives of young women.
- Governments, institutions, companies and organizations must work in order to propose measures concerning the promotion of connectivity of all young women in Latin America and Caribbean.
- It is necessary to join efforts to reduce the gender gap in access of young women, especially women and indigenous communities or tribes.
- Guarantee the offline rights of young women online.
- Promote campaigns for digital empowerment of young women.
- Promote and publicize feminist principles for the Internet.

As stated earlier, we consider the IGF as a reflection of the speeches and social practices adopted by everyone within the Internet Governance Ecosystem. Given this, we must use these forums in order to assert our voice and include ourselves - young women - in these discussions. If we don't have the opportunity to participate and make our voice and claims be listened to, then we must ask you: who will do it for for us?

We talk about connecting the next billion, about including more and more people into the Internet, but what *kind of Internet do we envision?* Is the "online" going to continue a mere expression of social constraints or is it going to be an active and open venue for all of us to be able to express, resist and transform the unequal into equal, the gendered disparities in and through coexistence and respect?

Young women from the Youth Observatory

30/09/2016.