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GENDER DIGITAL DIVIDE IN THE ERA OF GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY

Introduction. Despite the current rapid pace of development, there are still all sorts of discrimination in the XXI century. As we live in the era of “information society”, the information inequality is now the highest form of discrimination caused by numerous factors. Gender identity is one of such factors. Issues, related to the peculiarities of gender and its psychological and social disparities, are among the most discussed and controversial in today’s information society. For this reason, one can mention about the phenomenon of gender digital divide as the most acute form of modern segregation.

The objective of this paper is to analyze the gender identity factor that defines the level of involvement in the information society and to elaborate certain possible ways to address the gender digital divide.

One of the most effective components that determiners the development of society in the XXI century is new information and communication technologies (ICT). However, ICT is one of the key factors defining inequality between different social and economic groups. Today, gender equality and women empowerment value more than ever. So, taking into account the widespread distribution of ICT, overcoming the gender digital divide is one of the major challenges of the modern global information society.

Women around the world face serious economic, social and cultural issues that limit or completely deny their access to ICT, opportunities to use these technologies and to receive benefits from it. This phenomenon can be described as “gender digital divide” [1]. Women are viewed now as the principal economic force in most developing countries. As the economy increasingly depends on information, problems of women’s access to ICT and their use become more and more important. Because of the exorbitant gender bias in the use of ICT in education, culture and

other spheres of life, women need encouragement and support to take their place in global information society [2].

ICT open up new opportunities for women in employment, particularly in the service sector. The practice of gender segregation, however, is already widely spread to provide work in this sector. Men are much more often engaged in highly paid, creative work in the field of software, while women perform simple work in ICT. Such jobs like a cashier or an accountant are predominantly women's and low-paid.

The representation of women in the structures responsible for decision-making in the sphere of ICT is clearly insufficient and it affects negatively when making investment decisions and formulating policies and standards in the ICT industry, as all this requires gender mainstreaming. By the results of researches carried out by Google, Facebook and Twitter corporations only 10-17% of technical positions in the IT industry are held by women [3]. The question of equitable access to ICT and independence in obtaining and production of information is central to improve the role of women and to create an information society for all.

Ways to address gender digital divide are not obvious. On the one hand, it is important to recognize and use the potential of expanding access to ICT to transform gender balance of power and to empower women, especially those who are poor. On the other hand, it is important not to place all faith in ICT in addressing existing gender inequalities. Today, the increasing number of women have access to digital technologies, but it doesn't mean that the use of these technologies automatically and always provide them with more equal opportunities [4].

Conclusion. Thus, without devaluing opportunities for gender-transformative changes in the information society, it is necessary to focus on implementing effective gender policy in ICT, on the maximum involvement of women from the least developed and developing countries to participate in public life by providing them with equal access to ICT, and striving to eliminate gender inequality in education, economic and social situation, and in decision-making structures.

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