CSW 2026 SIDE EVENT CONCEPT NOTE

Justice in the Digital Age: Advancing Women's Right to Health in Low-Literacy and Digitally Excluded Contexts

Date: 19 March 2026, during CSW70

Time: 11:30-12:45

Venue: CR-8, United Nations Headquarters, New York

1. Background and Rationale

Digital health systems are increasingly central to the realization of women's right to health, with significant potential to improve access to information and services and to support women's autonomy and informed decision-making. Digital platforms, telemedicine, electronic health records, mobile health applications, and emerging technologies can help expand access to care, particularly in settings affected by geographic isolation, health workforce shortages, cost barriers, and fragmented health systems. However, these benefits are not experienced equally by all women.

Unequal access to digital technologies, limited connectivity, and low levels of digital and health literacy continue to create substantial barriers to healthcare access, particularly for women in vulnerable and marginalized circumstances. From a justice perspective, the digital divide constitutes a critical structural determinant of health, directly associated with disparities in access and poorer health outcomes among disadvantaged women and girls. When access to healthcare becomes conditional on digital literacy or technological fluency, equality of opportunity is undermined and justice is compromised.

In this context, health is understood as a holistic state of physical, mental, and social well-being, shaped by social, economic, and digital conditions. While the *One Health* approach appropriately recognizes the interdependence of human, animal, plant, and ecosystem health, it does not systematically address the specific realities, needs, and contributions of women. This gap limits the ability of health systems, particularly digital and data-driven systems, to respond effectively and equitably to women's right to health.

Women facing multiple and overlapping barriers related to literacy, poverty, language, migration status, and geographic location are disproportionately affected by digital health systems that are not designed with users in mind. Platforms that assume literacy, connectivity, and digital fluency can unintentionally exclude women from accessing essential health information, continuity of care, and informed decision-making. This exclusion reflects broader structural challenges in digital health governance, system design, and policymaking, where women's experiences and needs are not consistently reflected.

Moreover, digital health information and tools, including those powered by artificial intelligence, may produce biased or incomplete outputs due to the persistent underrepresentation of women in health data and medical research. Insufficient sex-disaggregated data can lead to inaccurate health information, suboptimal diagnosis, and less effective treatment for women. Addressing differences in disease presentation, progression, and outcomes between women and men, and strengthening education, research, and data quality, are therefore essential components of justice-centered digital health systems.

Against this backdrop, this proposed CSW 2026 side event directly supports the Commission's focus on Justice by addressing digital exclusion in healthcare as a structural barrier to women's equality and women's right to health. As health systems continue to digitalize, women in low-literacy and marginalized contexts face systemic challenges that limit equitable access to care. The event will highlight rights-based, evidence-informed digital health approaches that promote fairness, accountability, inclusive design, and the meaningful participation of women in health policy and system development. By convening governments, academia, and civil society, the side event will generate policy-relevant insights aligned with Member States' commitments to social justice, women's equality, and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDGs 3, 5, and 10.

2. Objectives

- Highlight how barriers related to literacy, connectivity, data, and system design limit women's access to digital health.

- Explore evidence-informed approaches to digital health that improve access, quality, and fairness for women.
- Elevate women's experiences and contributions to the design and governance of digital health systems.
- Identify policy-relevant actions to ensure digital health transformation advances equitable health outcomes.

3. Expected Outcomes

- Increased recognition of digital health exclusion as a justice issue,
- Policy-relevant recommendations for rights-based digital health systems,
- Strengthened partnerships across governments, academia, and civil society,
- Contribution to CSW 2026 justice-focused outcomes.

4. Speakers

Opening remarks by the Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations

Panel Discussion

Moderator:
Dr. Olga Tzortzatou Nanopoulou, Nanopoulos Foundation

Dr. Graciela Soto - Albert Einstein College of Medicine, US Women Caucus, The Grail NGO
Professor Connie Newman - American Medical Women's Association Representative
Eleanor Nwadinobi - Medical Women's International Association (MWIA)
Dr. Karine Sargsyan, Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, USA

Moderated Discussion and Audience Q&A

Closing Remarks by the Permanent Mission of Portugal to the United Nations

5. Organizers and Partners

Organizers: Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations, Nanopoulos Foundation, International Cancer Experts Corps and NGO CSW Geneva (Working Group on Health)

Co-Sponsors: Permanent Mission of Portugal to the United Nations, The Grail NGO, American Caucus NGO (CSW), Dianova International, Medical Women's International Association (MWIA), American Medical Women's Association (AMWA), Make Mothers Matter (MMM), Federation of Medical Women of Canada (FMWC)

Partners: FAWCO, Albert Einstein College of Medicine, NYU, Oxford University, Cedars Sinai Medical Center, World Council of Churches, International Council of Women (ICW-CIF)