

Side Event: Unlocking HER Potential: Gender equality through equitable access to assistive technology at the seventieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70)

Date: 12 March 2026 4:45 - 6:00pm

Time: 75 minutes

Location: CR-9, United Nations Headquarters, New York, USA

Organizers:

- ATscale, the Global Partnership for Assistive Technology, hosted by UNOPS co-organizer.
- UN Women co-organizer.
- Governments of Australia, Georgia, Ukraine, Pakistan, and Palestine [TBC] – can reach out to one more MS from Africa for co-sponsorship
- Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) - IDA [TBC], WEI

Format: In-person event with web cast, sign language interpretation, and French and Spanish interpretation provided in room.

Objective:

This event will officially launch the ATscale and UN Women joint policy brief, *Unlocking HER potential: Gender equality through equitable access to assistive technology*, aimed at accelerating progress towards gender equality and meaningful participation of women and girls in all aspects of life, in alignment with the CSW70 Review Theme. The session will:

- Share the key messages and evidence from the policy brief, highlighting how assistive technology is a fundamental enabler of human rights and a prerequisite for **women's participation, leadership, and decision-making** across public, economic, and digital life.
- Highlight how systemic barriers and persistent gaps in access to assistive technology **reflect structural discrimination and gender inequalities** in public systems, affecting all women and girls and disproportionately excluding women and girls who face intersecting forms of discrimination.
- Mobilize political commitments for **key policy recommendations** to integrate gender-responsive provision of assistive technology into national legal frameworks, social protection, and humanitarian responses, in line with the Beijing Platform for Action, the CRPD, and the 2030 Agenda.
- Promote the **leadership, agency, and lived experiences of women and girls** in the governance, design, and service delivery of assistive technology to ensure effective and equitable solutions, recognizing women and girls as agents of change.

Alignment with CSW70 Theme:

This side event will also address the review theme of the seventieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women:

Review Theme: *Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence*, by demonstrating that access to assistive technology is a cross-cutting human right and a necessary precondition for women's participation, leadership, and autonomy for all women and girls. The side event will highlight:

- **Participation and leadership:** Access to assistive technology supports women's and girls' equal, and meaningful participation in all aspects of life, including education, employment, caregiving, access to justice, and leadership – particularly benefiting across their life course. By removing functional, environmental, and digital barriers, assistive technology allows women and girls to exercise voice, agency, and leadership across the life course.
- **Intersectional exclusion:** Women and girls who face intersecting forms of discrimination – such as women and girls with disabilities, older women, and women in humanitarian settings – are disproportionately excluded from access to assistive technology due to cost, stigma, service gaps and policy failures. Assistive technology can enable their meaningful participation and decision-making.
- **Empowerment and autonomy:** Assistive technology supports women's bodily autonomy, access to education, and economic agency. It assists with safe and dignified navigation of healthcare systems during pregnancy and childbirth, and strengthens the ability to live independently and make decisions about their own lives and reduces the disproportionate and unpaid **caregiving burden** on women and girls.
- **Digital safety and violence elimination:** The event will stress the need to **integrate safeguards against technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TF-GBV)** into digital accessibility solutions and national digital inclusion programmes, to ensure that technology empowers women without exposing them to new forms of harm.

Expected outcomes of the side event:

- Increased understanding among Member States and stakeholders that access to assistive technology is a human right and high-impact investment for gender equality, supporting women's participation, autonomy, and leadership across the life course.
- Political commitment to implement policy recommendations that address the systemic and structural failures in access to assistive technology.
- Actionable proposals to advance the **leadership and representation of women who use AT** in national policymaking, governance and decision-making spaces.
- Improve coordination and use of gender-responsive AT data to support monitoring progress and accountability and evidence-informed policymaking on inclusion and equality.

Background of the Policy Brief:

The policy brief provides compelling evidence that while assistive technology has the potential to fundamentally change the experiences of women and girls—supporting access to education, employment, digital inclusion, and safety—they remain disproportionately excluded. This exclusion is rooted in systemic barriers, including prohibitive costs (**cited by 87% of organizations**), fragmented service delivery and policy gaps.

By addressing these gaps through gender-responsive policies, it is possible to unlock the potential of women and girls, full inclusion of women and girls who need assistive technology, is therefore a precondition for contributing to realizing the promise of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality). Without AT, these commitments cannot be fully fulfilled.

The session will be structured around the launch of the policy brief, and will facilitate a high-level dialogue that moves from evidence to action. It will feature a presentation of the brief's key findings, followed by a moderated panel discussion and Q&A session. This format aims to translate evidence into concrete policy priorities, and policy recommendations, focusing on real-world solutions and political commitments. The discussion will highlight how multilateral partnerships and targeted policy interventions can create scalable, gender-responsive systems for broader assistive technology access.

Guiding Questions for panelists:

- What are the most significant systemic and structural barriers preventing women and girls who need some form of assistive technology from achieving full and effective participation in public life across the life course?
- How can national and international legal and policy frameworks be reformed or strengthened to recognize that access to assistive technology is a human right and necessary precondition component of gender equality and disability inclusion strategies?
- What concrete examples exist of national policies that successfully integrate provision of assistive technology to enhance the participation and economic empowerment of women and girls?
- One question we invite everyone in the room to reflect on, and to engage with during the discussion, is: building on the recommendations of the policy brief, what is one concrete change, a low-hanging fruit that you could act on now, from where you sit, to remove barriers to women's and girls' access to assistive technology?

Side Event Coordination:

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