Forum of Women Parliamentarians
Item 3

FEM/38/3. Inf-1
26 August 2024

Contribution to the work of the 149th Assembly from a gender perspective

Sunday, 13 October 2024, 11:30 – 13:00
Plenary A (level 0)

I.   Arrangements for the debate

The Forum of Women Parliamentarians will discuss the draft resolution on the agenda of the 149th Assembly, *The impact of artificial intelligence on democracy, human rights and the rule of law* (Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights). Participants will discuss the draft resolution from a gender perspective and issue recommendations on gender-related amendments to be submitted by the Forum of Women Parliamentarians to the Standing Committee.

After a short presentation on the draft resolution, the Forum will debate it in plenary. On the recommendation of its Bureau, the Forum will designate a rapporteur, who will present recommendations from the debate to the Forum at its afternoon sitting.

II.   Focus of the debate

The debate will focus on the main gender aspects of the draft resolution.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is everywhere. It continues to hurtle down the scientific highway, crossing frontiers and changing the way people live their lives. As the deployment of algorithmic systems and AI applications is growing in size and significance, algorithmic discrimination and AI-facilitated harassment and violence has become a matter of rising public concern.

AI has transformative potential, but it is fundamentally a human creation – its development and deployment are largely influenced by the biases, values, and priorities of those involved, in processes ranging from data collection to the training of algorithmic models, their evaluation and use. Bias is systemic and inherent in the functioning of information systems powering search engines and other web applications.[1] As a result, AI development and deployment risk exacerbating existing inequalities, further entrenching them in society.

AI models largely mirror societal patriarchal structures and are often trained on male-dominated platforms. An analysis of 133 AI systems across different industries found that about 44% showed gender bias, and 25% exhibited both gender and racial bias. ChatGPT3, for example, is found to be extensively trained on Wikipedia.[2] The latter contains 1.5 million biographies about notable writers, inventors, and academics, but less than 19% of these biographies are about women.[3] Experiments on

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[1] See Safiya Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York: New York University Press, 2018) and Vanessa Ceia, Benji Nothwehr, and Liz Wagner, *Gender and Technology: A rights-based and intersectional analysis of key trends* (Oxfam Research Backgrounder, 2021), 40.

[2] Council of Europe, Study on the impact of artificial intelligence systems, their potential for promoting equality, including gender equality, and the risks they may cause in relation to non-discrimination (2023), 19.

[3] Francesca Tripodi, "Ms. Categorized: Gender, notability, and inequality on Wikipedia", *New Media & Society 25*(7) (2021), 1687-1707.

Google's search engine showed that images of black girls and black women are highly sexualized,[4] while research on the consumer credit industry revealed that AI systems determining creditworthiness learn from historical data, such as patterns of women receiving lower credit limits than men, therefore reproducing the same inequitable access to credit along gender (and race) lines. Examples showed that a female customer may be denied credit due to an algorithmic bias that assumes that women around age 40 are likely to be divorced and therefore have less economic power.[5] In the meantime, women currently working in AI constitute only 30% of the workforce, according to the Global Gender Gap Report 2023.

AI's influence extends into the political arena. Women in politics can face misogynistic coverage amplified by social media algorithms and biased algorithmic filters, which often prioritize male voices and perspectives. This undermines women's influence in shaping policy and governance. Women in politics and their teams also often face online gender-based violence and harassment exacerbated by AI, such as pornographic deepfakes used to undermine their reputation and ongoing political engagement, sending the message that women don't belong in politics.[6]

Women human rights defenders and young women activists are also increasingly targeted by malicious AI usage, such as deepfakes and automated harassment campaigns. These tools serve to spread false information, discredit and intimidate them. In return, such practices undermine the safety and efficacy of women in advocacy roles, further deterring their participation in public life and stifling their voices in democratic processes.

Against this backdrop, it becomes increasingly evident that in a rapidly advancing AI industry, the lack of gender perspectives, data, and decision-making will perpetuate profound inequality for years to come. Nonetheless, there is also a pressing opportunity for human intervention, particularly through parliamentary action, to guide AI on a more ethical and inclusive path and harness its full potential in the protection of human rights – including women's rights – and sustainable development.

Parliamentarians are uniquely positioned to lead the agenda for gender-sensitive AI development, regulation and governance. This includes advocating and adopting legislation that regulates AI systems from a gender perspective and ensures transparency and accountability through mandatory discrimination risk and equality impact assessments of algorithmic systems. Gender-sensitive AI also requires promoting and resourcing inclusive and diverse AI development guidelines. In addition, addressing gender gaps in digital skills and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education remains a prerequisite for any meaningful action in ensuring a gender-sensitive AI sector. When it comes to AI governance, diversity and inclusion are key to ensure accountability and avoid biases. Lastly, for parliamentarians to effectively champion gender-sensitive AI governance, it is imperative that women are ensured their rightful place in parliamentary decision-making structures, including in science, technology and innovation debates and structures.

The guiding questions for the debate will include the following:

- *How can parliaments ensure that AI policies and regulations uphold fundamental human rights, prevent gender-based violence and protect the rights of women and girls?*

- *How can parliaments build their own capacity to legislate and advocate for inclusive and equitable AI governance?*

- *What can parliaments do to ensure the equal participation of women in the development and governance of AI technologies?*

- *How can parliaments require international bodies and private companies to prioritize gender-sensitive AI that upholds human rights and promotes gender equality on a global scale?*

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[4] See e.g., Safiya Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York: New York University Press, 2018).
[5] See Jessica Wulf, "Automated Decision-Making Systems and Discrimination: Understanding causes, recognizing cases, supporting those affected", *AlgorithmWatch* (2022), 6-7.
[6] www.techpolicy.press/deepfakes-and-elections-the-risk-to-womens-political-participation.