



Input for the

Working Group on Discrimination Against Women and Girls (WGDAWG) and
Digitalization

Centring Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD) Women in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

Summary

CDWD women have largely remained on the margins of the mainstream, and thus, unable to access the benefits of technological advancements. Digital technologies pose multiple discrimination beyond issues of being further left behind due to lack of access: the technology ITSELF is rife with discrimination: algorithmic bias from development using data, designs and assumptions that reflect societal biases and discrimination, entrenching bias and existing inequalities. Not only does lack of access to digital technology leave Roma and Dalit women further behind in the economy, but digital technologies are contributing to discrimination - and have growing potential for greater discrimination - discriminate against them and leave them further behind. Limited access to education, resources, and digital infrastructure constraints their ability to acquire essential digital skills and participate in the digital economy. Without access to digital technologies and the internet, Roma and Dalit women miss out on educational opportunities and information that could empower them economically. Digital technologies play a crucial role in today's economy, including in job searches, entrepreneurship, and accessing financial services. When Roma and Dalit women are excluded from these technologies due to the digital divide, they face barriers to accessing economic opportunities and achieving financial independence. Even if Roma and Dalit women have access to digital technologies, they may lack the necessary skills and training to fully utilise them. Gender disparities in education and employment opportunities can further widen this gap, leaving these women at a disadvantage in the digital economy. Roma and Dalit women may face stigma and discrimination in both online and offline spaces, which can deter them from actively participating in digital platforms and seeking out online resources. Negative stereotypes and biases may also shape perceptions of Roma and Dalit women's capabilities and potential, further marginalising them in digital spaces.

Introduction

1. Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (GFoD) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, on intersectionality from a racial justice perspective.
2. This submission uses the term “Discrimination based on Work and Descent” to include caste-based discriminatory practices, as stated in CERD General Recommendation 29, which held that “descent” in ICERD Article 1(1) covers caste-based discrimination. CERD affirmed that discrimination based on “descent” includes *caste and analogous systems of inherited status*, impairing human rights.¹
3. GFoD represents these historically marginalized and systemically excluded communities facing caste and analogous forms of discrimination, such as (but not limited to) Dalit communities in South Asia, Roma community in Europe, Quilombola and Palenque community in Latin America, Haratin, Osu and other similarly oppressed communities in Africa —known as Communities Discriminated on Work & Descent (CDWD). These groups, while distinct, share a common experience of systemic discrimination compounded by intersecting factors.
4. An estimated 270 million people globally belong to communities who face *discrimination based on work and descent*. Women and girls in these communities experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.
5. Discrimination based on work and descent (DWD) focuses, however, on occupational descent, where the position within the social stratification (unlike in racism, the color of the skin) becomes the core factor of discrimination. DWD is inherently intersectional because it involves multiple overlapping forms of marginalization tied to inherited social status, ancestral occupation, gender, race, and socio-economic factors.
6. The global push towards digitalization and the accelerating adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) present a dual reality for the world’s most marginalized women: the potential for unprecedented inclusion alongside the catastrophic risk of entrenching historical discrimination. Women and girls within these communities face intersectional discrimination based on caste/descent, gender, and socio-economic status, resulting in a “triple burden of caste, class, and gender”. Systemic exclusion prevents them from accessing fundamental rights related to education, healthcare, housing, and employment. As AI and digital infrastructures become prerequisites for accessing public services and economic opportunities, the already precarious status of CDWD women is acutely threatened by a deep and pervasive gender digital divide.
7. This submission, framed within the mandate of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls (WGDAWG), highlights how the lack of digital access, biased training data, and institutional neglect in the digital space perpetuate historical violence and exclusion against CDWD women, while emphasizing the urgent need to harness AI responsibly to achieve substantive gender equality for these communities.

¹ CERD General Recommendation XXIX on Article 1, Paragraph 1, of the Convention (Descent), <https://www.refworld.org/legal/general/cerd/2002/en/11409>

8. For CDWD women, digitalization is currently characterized by a severe lack of access, rather than opportunity, reinforcing pre-existing marginalization stemming from poverty, illiteracy, and systemic neglect.
9. In India, Dalit women face a significant first- and second-level digital divide. Only 23% of Dalit families have household internet access, and many lack the digital literacy required to navigate online application portals for financial aid. Consequently, up to 40% of potential scholarship beneficiaries in rural areas may miss out due to digital requirements, perpetuating the high dropout rate for girls. Similarly, the educational lag among Pygmy and Mbororo communities in Cameroon suggests that digitalization risks becoming an obstacle to their development, as many are "analphabetic" of computer tools.
10. The gender digital divide exacerbates access issues for Roma women in Bulgaria, preventing them from using technology effectively to secure employment or seek legal aid. In North Macedonia, the high unemployment rate for Roma women, often confined to informal jobs, is compounded by a lack of knowledge and conditions to use digital technology, even for accessing public services like birth certificate applications. Furthermore, the complexity of online applications for loans or micro-credit schemes is a barrier, evidenced by the fact that only 18% of loans under the Prime Minister Mudra Scheme in India reached Dalit women.
11. In Nigeria, despite the existence of the progressive Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA/L), women and girls in the Osu community are often unaware of the rights and protections the law offers, a gap that digital outreach could help bridge.
12. Roma women in Bulgaria face systemic discrimination and distrust in state institutions. Their access to support is hindered by the digital divide, limiting their ability to navigate complex institutional processes or file complaints.
13. AI holds the potential to improve public safety through AI-driven applications that recommend safer routes and provide emergency alerts. However, CDWD women face persistent threats rooted in agrarian conflict, traditional practices, and ethnic violence. Waata women in Kenya, for instance, face environmental safety risks such as attacks from crocodiles and hippos while fetching water from the River Galana. Without access to technology or the trust to engage with security institutions, these potential safety benefits remain out of reach.
14. The existing employment reality for CDWD women makes them uniquely vulnerable to the risks posed by AI-driven automation and discriminatory algorithm training.
15. CDWD women are overwhelmingly concentrated in highly precarious, informal, and stigmatized occupations that rely on manual labour, making them susceptible to displacement by technological automation.
16. India: 94.1% of Dalit women work in the unorganized sector, often manual scavenging, sanitation, and domestic work, which are physically hazardous and socially stigmatized.
17. Bulgaria: Roma women are disproportionately employed in low-wage, exploitative roles such as waste collection and domestic work.
18. Colombia: Palenquera women historically and currently engage in informal vending (e.g., selling cocadas and sweets) under harsh conditions resembling forced labour.

19. AI recruitment tools, if trained on historical employment data that reflects caste and gender bias, risk reinforcing past discrimination by systematically disqualifying CDWD women from formal, high-wage sectors, even if the tools are intended to mitigate human bias. Since most CDWD women earn significantly less than their non-CDWD counterparts—for instance, Dalit women earn 45% less than non-Dalit women in India—AI bias could widen already profound economic inequalities.
20. AI systems, such as facial recognition, are often less accurate for women and people of color. Given the institutional racism and pervasive distrust experienced by CDWD communities in law enforcement and judicial systems—where Roma defendants, including women, encounter discrimination at every stage of criminal proceedings in North Macedonia, and Dalit women face police apathy in India—the introduction of biased surveillance technologies could severely increase misidentification risks and expand oppressive state surveillance.
21. The persistence of harmful practices, such as the Devadasi system in India, which forces Dalit girls into sex work under religious guise, and the high rate of trafficking of Dalit and Haratine women, creates vulnerability that could be exploited digitally through means like non-consensual deepfakes, which are already used to harass and blackmail women, driving them out of the online public sphere.
22. Despite these challenges, CDWD women consistently demonstrate remarkable resilience and agency, organizing themselves to advocate for their rights and create pathways for empowerment. This existing capacity for collective action can be significantly leveraged by responsible digitalization.
23. In Nepal, the Dalit community employs a "Glocal" strategy, connecting local issues with international forums, demonstrating a drive to utilize broader platforms for advocacy. Similarly, Quilombola women use social media to strengthen activism and articulate their demands, such as maintaining an agenda linked to territorial questions, gender, feminism, and confronting violence and racism.
24. CDWD women are creating robust informal economic networks to survive systematic exclusion. For example, Osu women in Nigeria have formed cooperative groups for financial support, pooling resources to fund necessities and education. Introducing microfinance and vocational training programs tailored to their needs, integrated with accessible digital platforms, could formalize these efforts and provide sustainability.
25. The implementation of policies targeting CDWD inclusion is chronically hindered by a lack of detailed, gender-sensitive, and disaggregated data. AI and digitalization can be used responsibly to establish comprehensive data collection systems that capture gender and ethnic disparities. This evidence is vital for designing targeted interventions, securing budget allocations for CDWD-specific needs, and promoting accountability, moving beyond anecdotal advocacy.
26. AI tools can be harnessed to break down linguistic barriers, enabling women in remote or marginalized areas to access global educational resources and online courses. This is critical for Roma women in North Macedonia who face language barriers and for Palenquera women in Colombia who speak Palenquero Creole.

27. To ensure that the digital revolution actively dismantles the discrimination faced by CDWD women, rather than reinforcing it, the WGDAGW should prioritize the following recommendations:

- Implement culturally appropriate and affordable digital literacy and vocational training programs specifically for CDWD women and girls, addressing the documented lack of technology ownership and use. These programmes must offer childcare support and flexible scheduling, addressing traditional gender roles and high NEET rates, especially for Roma and young Dalit women.
- Invest in physical infrastructure (internet access, boreholes, health centres) in CDWD settlements, recognizing that digital exclusion cannot be separated from the lack of basic amenities (water, electricity).
- Mandate the collection and use of disaggregated data (by caste/descent, gender, and region) in the design, development, and auditing of all public sector AI tools to prevent the amplification of historical biases present in existing data sets.
- Implement robust governance and oversight frameworks to scrutinize AI tools—particularly those used in recruitment, credit scoring, and law enforcement—for discriminatory outcomes against CDWD women and people of colour.
- Simplify institutional processes and provide accessible information (including in local languages/dialects) regarding legal rights and social protection schemes (e.g., in Bulgaria and Nigeria). Utilize technology (e.g., mobile apps, online portals) to facilitate the reporting of violence and discrimination, ensuring confidentiality and security.
- Establish dedicated legal aid centers, mobile legal clinics, and community paralegal networks integrated with digital support to assist CDWD women in navigating the justice system.
- Strengthen legal frameworks to explicitly address intersectional discrimination faced by CDWD women, covering both caste and gender. In India, expand the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act and establish an Abolition Task Force to combat practices like FGM and the Devadasi system.
- Establish and digitally enable microcredit and cooperative programs tailored for CDWD women (e.g., supporting the initiatives of Osu, Quilombola, and Roma women). Provide financial assistance, mentorship, and access to formalized markets for their unique products and services.
- Document and promote the history and resilience of CDWD women leaders and communities using digital platforms to counter negative stereotypes and ensure global recognition, mirroring the advocacy goal of organizations like GFoD.



Address – Suite 10A, 777 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017

Website - <https://globalforumcdwd.org>

Twitter - @CastoutSlavery

Email - gfod@globalforumcdwd.org