BACKGROUND
Twenty-one years after the Beijing Declaration & Platform for Action (Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995), which established a roadmap for achieving gender equality, much progress has been made. But, regrettably, the targeted goals are yet to be fully realized (World Economic Forum, 2016a). Gender-based inequalities persist across a range of areas from violence to wage gaps (UN Women, 2015). The proliferation of technological tools such as computers, mobile phones, and the internet holds the potential to help reduce these inequalities.

Against this backdrop, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) specifically target enhancing the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to promote women’s empowerment (SDG 5, Target 8). Yet even on this front, stark disparities are evident. These disparities range from gaps in access to and use of digital technologies to limits in women’s professional participation in the technology industry (ITU, 2016; World Economic Forum, 2016b). Recent International Telecommunication Union (ITU) statistics, for example, indicate that the global gender gap in internet use is increasing (up from 11% in 2013 to 12% in 2016). Likewise, the 2017 Global Gender Gap Report concludes that at current rates, it will take 217 years to close the economic gender gap (World Economic Forum, 2017). The report found that the largest labor market participation gaps are in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) fields.

THE EQUALS GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP
EQUALS: the Global Partnership for Gender Equality in the Digital Age, is an alliance of organizations dedicated to promoting digital gender equality and ensuring that significant strides are made towards this goal by 2030. The Partnership was co-founded by ITU, UN Women, UN University, GSMA, and the International Trade Center (ITC) and launched in September 2016.

Data and research evidence are critical components of the EQUALS initiative. Inadequate information (such as lack of gender-disaggregated data) can both mask unrecognized challenges and underestimate progress, leading to misguided policy and action or inaction. A mapping of initiatives working on digital gender equality identified inadequate gender-specific data as one of the main barriers to success (EQUALS, 2017).

The Partnership consists of three areas of action, the Access, Skills and Leadership Coalitions, and a fourth crosscutting function, the Research Group (Table 1). GSMA is leading the Access Coalition; UNESCO and the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (GIZ) lead the Skills Coalition; ITC heads the Leadership Coalition; and UNU-CS leads the research function.

Table 1: EQUALS Areas of Action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACCESS</th>
<th>SKILLS</th>
<th>LEADERSHIP</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achieve equal access to digital technologies</td>
<td>Empower women and girls with skills to become ICT creators / innovators</td>
<td>Promote women as ICT leaders and entrepreneurs</td>
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THE EQUALS RESEARCH GROUP
To advance the research function, UNU-CS has formed a Research Group made up of experts from around the world. The Research Group’s main functions are to:

Advise
• Assist in ensuring an evidence-based approach towards achieving the Partnership goals.
• Consult on the implementation of Partnership programs, data requirements, and indicators for tracking progress.
• Generate independent research on current and emerging issues related to digital gender equality

Support
• Provide subject matter and methodology expertise for implementation of Partnership programs.
• Conduct research to support Partner programs.
• Facilitate data and knowledge sharing.

Assess
• Measure progress towards the Partnership targets.
• Develop and disseminate research and policy outputs.

As leader of the Research Group, UNU-CS collaboratively develops and manages the research strategy of the Group based on the needs and priorities of the EQUALS Partnership. Our vision is to grow a robust and global community of researchers who will set standards for achieving digital gender equality. By developing thought-leading metrics, methods, and analyses, the research group will instill in stakeholders the practice of generating and monitoring gender disaggregated data, and motivate progress towards gender equality.

As at February 2018, the group has 35 member institutions from 16 countries (Figure 1). Members’ expertise includes gender studies, development studies, technology and society, communications, information science, computer science, business.

RESEARCH AREAS
The Research Group will be guided by several broad concerns identified by the Access, Skills and Leadership Coalitions. These include access strategies and policies, affordability, infrastructure, safety, mentorship, content, administration, digital entrepreneurship and employee retention. More and better data is needed in these areas to improve comprehension of the dimensions of gender tech gaps and to develop and test solutions.

The primary sources of data for the Research Group will be EQUALS partners, who are expected to share industry and community data to enable examination and tracking of the Partnership targets. In addition, primary research may be commissioned to fill other gaps in knowledge (depending on resource availability).

SAMPLE OUTPUTS
a) Flagship report on digital gender equality; other reports and whitepapers; other digital content
b) Research and design projects and solutions
c) Datasets (e.g. organization data, primary and secondary research data)
d) Collaboration platforms (e.g. online data sharing and collaboration site)

ACTIVITIES
UNU-CS hosted the research group’s first physical meeting in Macau in December 2017. The two-day intensive workshop was attended by 22 experts including research group members, Coalition leaders, and ITU and UN Women representatives (Figure 2).
Meeting participants agreed on two activities for 2018:

1. Inaugural report on digital gender equality
The research group will produce an inaugural report, on digital gender equality. In addition to assessing the current state of gender equality in the three EQUALS action areas, research group members will share new data, analyses and conceptual frameworks for a range of topical areas pertinent to improving gender equality (Figure 3).

The report conclusions and recommendations should serve as a planning resource to inform future activities of EQUALS Partnership members specifically and the broader community of relevant actors (policymakers, practitioners, industry and researchers). The targeted release date is September 2018. Outputs will include the main report and supplementary materials such as policy and research briefs, Q&A with authors, audio clips and slideshows.

2. Research initiatives
We have formed three working groups to focus on each of the EQUALS action areas – access, skills, and leadership. These subcommittees are working directly with their related EQUALS Coalitions to design research activities in support of the Coalition’s ongoing or planned activities.

The Access subcommittee is developing a directory of case studies of gender initiatives and mapping national policies on technology access and related issues.

The Skills subcommittee is developing concept notes on a variety of topics including: ICT skills for the fourth industrial revolution; barriers and opportunities for gender equality in ICT skills development; economic benefits of digital gender equality; data and evidence on gender equality and ICT skills; and learning and teaching methods for gender equality in ICT skills.

The Leadership subcommittee is exploring mechanisms to improve data collection on women’s leadership in the technology industry; evaluate existing government and company diversity policies; evaluate the impact of mentoring/training workshops; and help to develop criteria for a scorecard on women in tech leadership.

By facilitating the production and sharing of data and knowledge on digital gender inequalities, the EQUALS research group seeks to activate and inform strategies to address the sources, manifestations and outcomes of gender inequalities offline, online and in the digital economy.
TEAM
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Michael L. Best, Director
Juhee Kang, Research Fellow
Don Rodney Junio, Senior Research Assistant

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