Gender equality and empowering women in the digital age

2015/2007(INI) - 08/04/2016 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality adopted an own-initiative report by Terry REINTKE (Greens/EFA, DE) on gender equality and empowering women in the digital age.

The Members urged the Commission and the Council **to fully exploit the potential that the information society**, ICT and the internet have to promote women's empowerment, women's rights and freedoms and gender equality.

The institutions and the EU Member States were invited:

- to exploit and better target the Digital Agenda and the Digital Single Market Strategy with a view to addressing the severe gender gap within the ICT sector and fostering the full integration of women into the sector;
- to incorporate the gender perspective into all digital initiatives;
- to establish **multiannual action plans** aimed at: increasing women's access to the information society, improving and increasing women's use of ICT, giving women a more significant role in ICT sectors;
- to place a stronger emphasis on **free and open-source software** in the ICT sector and the digital market;
- to develop, support and implement the actions promoted by the **UN** and its bodies, in particular in the framework of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and of the World Summits on the Information Society (WSIS).

The Commission was urged to include in the upcoming Strategy for equality between women and men 2016-2020 **specific actions** to support the integration and participation of women in the information society and to strongly promote women's networks online.

Participation: Members called on the Commission and Member States to:

- to make better use of the considerable potential that digitalisation has at all levels of **political participation** and the inclusion of women in the decision-making processes;
- to promote digitalisation in politics in order to promote direct democracy and to overcome obstacles that cause difficulties for women and underrepresented groups in attempting to establish themselves in electoral and institutional environments;
- to make full use of the 'Europe for the Citizens' programme to specifically target civil society and women's organisations working in areas relating to digitalisation and ICT;
- to promote **women's full participation in the media**, including in management, and in regulatory and monitory bodies, in order to strive for a more gender-equal media realm fighting gender stereotyping; in this regard the Commission was urged to foster the creation of networks among civil society organisations and professional media organisations.

Labour market: according to Members, the entry of more women into the ICT sector would boost a market in which labour shortages are foreseen and in which equal participation of women would lead to **a gain of around EUR 9 billion in EU GDP each year**.

Members called on the Commission, Member States and social partners to promote gender equality in ICT companies and other relevant industries, representative bodies and training institutions, including in positions of responsibility, to closely monitor and follow up the progress made, and to share best practices in this area.

The Commission and the Member States should, among others:

- address the **severe underrepresentation of women** in the ICT sector, in particular among people in higher positions and on boards; Members urged the unblocking in Council of the Directive on Equal Representation on Executive Boards;
- **safeguard fundamental workers' rights and to combat precarious working conditions**; the Commission should propose new protection mechanisms adapted to the working and career patterns shaped by digitalisation, paying particular attention to the situation of women;
- recognise the full potential of the **flexibility** offered by digitalisation in the area of work-life balance;
- support **lifelong learning** paying particular attention to women aged 55 and over, in order to safeguard them from exclusion from the labour market;
- finally start actively implementing the Commission Recommendation on strengthening the **principle of equal pay** between men and women through transparency and continued positive action, preferably by means of legislation.

Education and training: Members noted that women remain heavily underrepresented in ICT degree programmes, where they constitute only around **20 % of graduates** in the field. Furthermore, the male-dominated working environment, with only 30 % of the workforce being female, contributes to the trend of many women leaving the ICT sector within a few years of completing their university degrees.

The report underlined the importance of **ensuring gender mainstreaming in the education sector** by promoting digital literacy and the participation of women and girls in ICT education and training through the inclusion of coding, new media and technologies in education curricula at all levels, as well as extra-curricular activities.

Investment and funding entrepreneurship: Members recalled that only 9% of developers in Europe are women, **only 19% of bosses in the ICT and communications sectors are female** (compared with 45% in other service sectors) and women represent just 19% of entrepreneurs (compared with 54% in other service sectors

Members asked Member States and the Commission to **make funds available**, to improve access to existing funds and, if necessary, to make funds available for female entrepreneurs to create ICT-related businesses and digital start-ups.

The Commission should in particular:

- in relation to the Digital Agenda, thoroughly monitor and evaluate the application of gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting within the framework of EU fund;
- in cooperation with the European Investment Bank, set up support programmes in relation to investing in ICT through the European Structural and Investment Funds, including favourable credit conditions and loans for firms in the ICT sector, in which at least 40 % of the workforce are female.

Fight against violence against women in a digitalised world: the report calls on the decision-makers to respond to the challenges posed by the use of ICT and the internet to commit crimes, issue threats or perpetrate acts of harassment or violence against women based on misogyny, homophobia or transphobia or any other form of discrimination.

Members called on the Member States to allocate the resources necessary for law enforcement, i.e. implementation of existing laws against cyber-violence, cyber-bullying, cyber-harassment, cyber-stalking and hate speech. They also called on the Commission to **propose legislation to address sexism** and gender stereotypes in education and the media.