Closing the digital gender gap: women’s participation in the digital economy

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The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality adopted an own-initiative report by Maria da Graça CARVALHO (EPP, PT) on closing the digital gender gap: women’s participation in the digital economy.

Strengthening women's participation in the digital economy

The digital transition opens up new opportunities, but also raises many challenges in terms of equal opportunities in the labour market, equal treatment in working life and the search for gender balance.

The Gender Equality Index 2019 reveals persistent gender inequalities in the digital sector. Eurostat data for 2018 show that around 1.3 million people in the EU are studying information and communication technologies (ICT), and that girls and women account for only 17% of all ICT students in the EU. Gender stereotypes strongly influence subject choices, and very few teenage girls in EU Member States (less than 3%) show an interest in working in ICT.

Against this background, Members called on the Commission to:

- address the wide gender gaps in the ICT sector as part of the Digital Agenda for Europe through concrete measures specifically aimed at increasing the participation of women and girls in this sector;

- provide adequate funding for programmes to encourage more girls and women to study and work in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), and to set up entrepreneurship programmes that fund women and girls who start tech projects or new companies.

Reducing the digital divide

The report addressed a set of recommendations to the Commission, the Member States and society at large on how to reduce the digital gender gap in various fields, such as education, media, culture and audiovisual or women's civic, political and economic participation, for example:

- ensuring gender mainstreaming in the field of digital literacy at all levels;

- addressing in depth the problem of the low number of women studying or working in the ICT field;

- transpose and implement the Directive on work-life balance and put in place policies to improve the situation of self-employed workers, in particular women entrepreneurs in the ICT and digital sectors;

- promote gender equality in ICT and ICT-related businesses and in the digital economy and adopt horizontal olicies to reduce the gender gap in the digital economy through targeted measures;

- assess the causes and factors behind the high rate of women dropping out of digital careers;

- encourage the engagement of women in innovation and increase funding opportunities for young digital businesses run by women;

- encourage the audiovisual and media industries to show an increasing number of women in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and ICT professions;

- take into account gender equality when devising eGovernment initiatives;

- encourage young working women to enter the professions related to cybersecurity;

- stimulate digital accessibility and affordability as tools for achieving gender equality in development strategies.

Combating gender-based violence and cyber violence

In the face of increasing harassment and violence against women in the digital world, the report called for funds and campaigns to raise awareness and educate women on how to secure their accounts and communications to protect themselves online. These campaigns should combat gender-based violence and gender stereotypes, educate men on how to behave towards women online, and ensure women's freedom of expression and meaningful participation in public discourse.

Member States should facilitate reporting channels and support the development of training tools for the police, the justice system nd the digital sector to empower law enforcement authorities to effectively investigate and prosecute malicious attackers and to support victims of online harassment and violence.

Members called for new legally binding measures and a directive to prevent and combat gender-based violence, including cyber violence, which often targets women.

Data collection

The report called on the Commission and the Member States, as well as platforms and businesses, to collect comparable gender and age-disaggregated data on ICT use and to propose initiatives, including research, to better understand the root causes of the digital gender gap.