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

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The European Parliament adopted by 598 votes to 45, with 40 abstentions, a resolution 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;

- take equal opportunities for women and men and the digital gender gap into due account while negotiating programmes within the next multiannual financial framework and funds and loans under the Recovery Plan.

Reducing the digital divide

Parliament 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 work-life balance directive and present binding measures on wage transparency by the end of 2020;

- 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;

- work closely with and involve women and women's civil society organisations in order to better address the concerns that exist in women's daily lives, and to promote women's economic and digital inclusion;

- encourage young working women to take up professions related to emerging areas such as cyber security;

- combat digital exclusion of all vulnerable groups (people with disabilities, women from different socio-economic backgrounds, older women and women in rural areas, refugee and migrant women).

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 and 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

Parliament 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.