Empowering women and girls through the digital sector

European Parliament resolution of 17 April 2018 on empowering women and girls through the digital sector (2017/3016(RSP))

(2019/C 390/04)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to Articles 2 and 3(3), second subparagraph, of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and Article 8 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),

— having regard to Article 23 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,

— having regard to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the 4th World Conference on Women in 1995, and, in particular, the area of concern 'Women and the Media',

— having regard to the outcome document of 16 December 2015 of the high-level meeting of the UN General Assembly on the overall review of the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society,

— having regard to the Commission’s Strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019,


— having regard to Pillar II of the Commission’s Digital Single Market Strategy, which is aimed at creating the right conditions and a level playing field and environment for digital networks and innovative services to flourish, and Pillar III, which supports an inclusive digital society, in which citizens have the right skills to seize the opportunities brought about by the internet and boost their chances of getting a job,

— having regard to the Education and Training 2020 framework,

— having regard to the Commission study ‘ICT for work: Digital skills in the workplace’ and the Commission communication of 10 June 2016 entitled ‘A New Skills Agenda for Europe: Working together to strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness’ (COM(2016)0381),

— having regard to the in-depth analysis entitled ‘Empowering women on the Internet’, published by its Directorate-General for Internal Policies in October 2015 (1),

— having regard to the Commission report of 1 October 2013 entitled ‘Women active in the ICT sector’,

— having regard to the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) study of 26 January 2017 entitled ‘Gender and Digital Agenda’,

— having regard to its resolution of 24 May 2012 with recommendations to the Commission on application of the principle of equal pay for male and female workers for equal work or work of equal value (2),

— having regard to its resolution of 12 March 2013 on eliminating gender stereotypes in the EU (3),


(2) OJ C 264 E, 13.9.2013, p. 75.

— having regard to its resolution of 12 September 2013 on the Digital Agenda for Growth, Mobility and Employment: time to move up a gear (4), and, in particular, the Grand Coalition on Digital Skills and Jobs,


— having regard to its resolution of 28 April 2016 on gender equality and empowering women in the digital age (6),

— having regard to the question to the Commission on empowering women and girls through the digital sector (O-000004/2018 – B8-0010/2018),

— having regard to Rules 128(5) and 123(2) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas digitalisation has revolutionised and fundamentally changed the way people access and provide information, communicate, socialise, study and work, creating new opportunities to participate in public and political discussions, education and the labour market, opening up new prospects for a self-determined life, and having enormous economic potential for the European Union and beyond; whereas digitalisation not only has an impact on markets, but also on society as a whole;

B. whereas the information society, driven by information and communication technologies (ICTs), brings with it huge opportunities for generating and distributing wealth and knowledge;

C. whereas all around the globe, women as a demographic group are less likely to be online than men; whereas 68 % of men and 62 % of women use computers and the internet on a regular basis; whereas 54 % of men, compared to 48 % of women, use the internet on mobile devices; whereas 33 % of men install software onto the devices themselves, compared to only 18 % of women; whereas 41 % of men use online radio and television, compared to 35 % of women; whereas 47 % of men use online banking, compared to 35 % of women; whereas 22 % of men sell goods on the web, compared to only 17 % of women; whereas 20 % of men buy goods online, compared to 13 % of women;

D. whereas digital models of communication have contributed to the creation of conditions conducive to the increased dissemination of hate speech and threats against women, with 18 % of women in Europe having suffered some form of cyber harassment since reaching adolescence; whereas the number of threats, including death threats, towards women has increased; whereas social awareness of digital forms of violence remains insufficient; whereas various forms of online violence have not yet been fully taken account of by the legal framework;

E. whereas only 2 % of all women in the labour market are employed in technical, professional and scientific jobs, compared to 5 % of men; whereas only 9 % of developers in Europe are women, only 19 % of senior managers in the ICT and communications sectors are female (compared with 45 % in other service sectors) and women represent just 19 % of entrepreneurs in these sectors (compared with 54 % in other service sectors);

F. whereas there is a significant gender gap in access to professional and educational opportunities in relation to information and communication technologies and to computer skills;

G. whereas sexism and gender stereotypes constitute a serious obstacle to equality between women and men, and further widen the gender gap in the digital sector, making it difficult for women to develop fully their capacities as users, innovators and creators;

H. whereas jobs, not only within the ICT sector, increasingly require some degree of e-skills and digital literacy, and this trend will likely be amplified in the future with a broader spectrum of digital skills needed for the majority of occupations and vacancies;

(4) OJ C 93, 9.3.2016, p. 120.
(6) OJ C 66, 21.2.2018, p. 44.
I. whereas improving digital skills and IT literacy presents a unique opportunity to improve work-life balance by increasing access to education and training and facilitating the inclusion in the labour market not only of women and girls, but also of people with special needs, such as persons with disabilities, and of the inhabitants of rural and remote areas far from urban centres; whereas digitalisation of the workplace may bring some challenges which need to be addressed; whereas increasing the number of women in ICT, one of the highest paying sectors, could contribute to their financial empowerment and independence, resulting in the reduction of the total gender pay gap and the enhancement of women’s financial independence; whereas only around 16% of the almost eight million people working in ICT in Europe are women;

J. whereas digitalisation offers new opportunities for entrepreneurship for women, including small-scale digital entrepreneurship, which in many cases does not require significant initial capital, as well as enterprises pursued within the framework of the social economy, which enhance social inclusion; whereas there is a need to support female digital entrepreneurship as it is one of the fastest growing and prospering sectors in the economy, offering numerous opportunities for innovation and growth, and women constitute only 19% of entrepreneurs in this field;

K. whereas the entry of more women into the ICT sector would boost a market in which labour shortages are foreseen, and in which the equal participation of women would lead to a gain of around EUR 9 billion in EU GDP each year; whereas women remain heavily underrepresented in ICT degree programmes, where they constitute only around 20% of graduates in the field, with only 3% of all female graduates holding a degree in ICT; whereas women face numerous difficulties in integrating into and staying in the ICT sector; whereas 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; whereas women's participation in the digital labour market decreases with age; whereas women under 30 with a degree in ICT make up 20% of the ICT sector, compared to 15.4% of women aged between 31 and 45 and 9% of women over 45;

L. whereas the study entitled ‘Women active in the ICT sector’ estimates that there will be 900 000 unfilled positions in the ICT sector in Europe by 2020; whereas the ICT sector is growing rapidly, creating around 120 000 new jobs every year;

M. whereas the ICT sector is characterised by a particularly high degree of vertical and horizontal segregation, as well as a gap between women’s educational qualifications and their positions in the ICT sector; whereas less than 20% of ICT entrepreneurs are women; whereas the majority (54%) of women in ICT jobs occupy lower paid and lower skill-level positions, and only a small minority of them (8%) occupy high-skill software engineering positions; whereas women are also underrepresented in decision-making within this sector, with only 19.2% of employees in the ICT sector managed by women, compared with 45.2% of employees elsewhere;

N. whereas women aged 55 and over are at particular risk of unemployment and labour market inactivity, with the average EU employment rate for women aged between 55 and 64 being only 49% in 2016, compared with 62% for men; whereas a low level of IT literacy and e-skills further amplifies this risk; whereas improving and investing in the digital competences of women aged 55 and over would boost their employment opportunities and offer a degree of protection against exclusion from the labour market;

O. whereas according to 2014 Eurostat data, more women (42.3%) than men (33.6%) go on to higher education, yet women are present in greater numbers in the humanities than in scientific fields; whereas only 9.6% of women students in tertiary education study ICT-related degrees, compared to 30.6% of men; whereas women remain largely underrepresented in initiatives such as the EU Code Week, ICT for Better Education, the Startup Europe Leaders Club and the Grand Coalition for Digital Jobs, which are aimed at further fostering e-education and e-skills;

P. whereas low participation on the part of women and girls in ICT-related education, and later in employment, is the result of a complex interplay of gender stereotyping that starts at the early stages of life and education and continues into professional careers;

1. Calls on the Commission to exploit and better target the Digital Agenda and the Digital Single Market Strategy with a view to addressing the serious gender gap within the ICT sector and fostering the full integration of women into the sector, particularly in relation to technical and telecommunication professions, and to foster the education and training of women and girls in ICT and other science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects;
2. Welcomes the actions to support the integration and participation of women in the information society included in the Strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019; calls on the Commission to implement the actions aimed at reducing the gender pay, earnings and pension gaps, thus fighting poverty among women, and to put a premium on promoting female employment in the ICT sector, fighting gender stereotypes and fostering gender equality at all levels and in all types of education, including in relation to gendered study subject choices and careers, in line with the priorities set out in the Education and Training 2020 framework;

3. Encourages the Commission and the Member States to work in a spirit of open cooperation within the Strategic Framework for Education and Training 2020 on finding solutions and sharing best practices on early digital education, including e-skills and coding, which are inclusive for girls, as well as, at the later stages of education, on programmes aimed at increasing the share of women who decide to pursue STEM subjects and graduate with STEM degrees, as this would allow women to gain complete access to electronic services on an equal footing with men, and to profit from the employment opportunities for engineers and IT specialists that are predicted;

4. Calls for the EU and the Member States 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 Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), including in the context of school curricula, in order to strive for women’s empowerment in the digital age at European and global level;

5. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to address the gender gap in the ICT sector by stressing the business case for diversity and by creating additional and stronger incentives for both companies and women such as providing role models, mentoring programmes and career paths, in order to increase the visibility of women; encourages Member States to support and take action on, among other things, the development of online content that promotes gender equality, the promotion of access to and the use of ICT as tools to combat gender discrimination in areas such as gender violence, and the attainment of work-life balance;

6. Welcomes the EU’s Action Plan 2017-2019 on tackling the gender pay gap (COM(2017)0678); highlights the need to strengthen compliance with the principle of equal pay for equal work for women and men anchored in the TEU, and calls on the Commission to implement the initiatives included in Action II of the Plan aimed at attracting more women into STEM professions, which, according to the EIGE, could lead to a closure of the gender wage gap by 2050 due to the higher productivity of STEM jobs;

7. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to make funds available and to improve access to existing funds in order to promote and support women entrepreneurs, particularly in the framework of the digital transformation of industry, to ensure that any company, irrespective of its size, the sector it operates in or its location in Europe, can benefit from digital innovations; stresses, in this context, that digital innovation hubs, which are key to facilitating the digital transformation, should put a specific focus on women entrepreneurs and start-ups owned by women; calls on the Commission to fully and comprehensively address the gender gap within the process of digitalisation;

8. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to support lifelong learning as well as training and schemes which help participants to adapt better or to prepare for a potential change of career path in accordance with the growing demand for e-skills in many different sectors, paying particular attention to women aged 55 and over, in particular those with caregiver responsibilities, and women who have taken a break from their career or are re-entering the workplace, in order to ensure that they are not left behind in the increasingly rapid shift towards digitalisation, and in order to safeguard them from exclusion from the labour market;

9. Underlines the effectiveness of using the internet for campaigns, forums and boosting the visibility of female role models, which accelerate gender equality; urges the Commission and the Member States to promote women’s networks online, as they involve a bottom-up approach to women’s empowerment;

10. Calls on the Commission to foster the creation of networks among civil society and professional media organisations in order to empower women to play an active part and to recognise their specific needs in the media sector;

11. Stresses the key role of civil society in internet governance; calls on the Commission and the Member States to engage constructively with and support digital civil society organisations;

12. Encourages all authorities and civil society players to support the introduction and implementation of e-services, e-skills and digital forms of work that can boost the work-life balance in our societies, while making sure that a double burden on women is avoided; calls on the Commission and the Member States to identify the opportunities and challenges of digitalisation, also with regard to working conditions, such as unstable forms of employment and work-related mental health problems;
13. Underlines 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, informal and non-formal education, and in all types of education and training, including for teaching staff, in order to reduce and remove digital skills gaps, and to encourage girls and young women to embark on careers in the sciences and ICT; points to the importance of constant dialogue with the social partners in order to overcome the gender gap in this field:

14. Encourages the Member States to introduce age-appropriate ICT education at the early stages of school, with a particular focus on inspiring girls to develop an interest and talents in the digital field, and urges the Commission and the Member States to promote STEM education for girls from a young age, given that girls move away from STEM subjects at an earlier stage of their educational path due to the gender stereotypes surrounding these subjects, a lack of role models, and segregation in activities and toys, resulting in an underrepresentation of women in these subjects at university, which extends into the workplace;

15. Encourages the Member States and the Commission to promote, in particular by means of information and awareness-raising campaigns, the participation of women in business sectors that are stereotypically considered ‘male’, as in the case of digitalisation; stresses the need to organise awareness-raising, training and gender-mainstreaming campaigns for all the actors involved in digitalisation policy; underlines the need to support the acquisition of e-skills by women in sectors that are not ICT-intensive, but will require digital skills and competences in the near future;

16. Calls on the Commission and the Member States, as well as businesses, to promote gender equality in ICT by collecting gender-disaggregated data on the use of ICT, developing targets, indicators and benchmarks to track the progress of women's access to ICT, and to promote examples of best practice among ICT companies; calls on the EIGE to compile data on how digital services can be better employed for the benefit of women and gender equality;

17. Underlines the importance of identifying 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; urges policymakers to address these issues properly, and to see to it that a framework is put in place to ensure that law enforcement agencies are able to deal with digital crimes effectively; calls on the Commission and the Member States to guarantee the protection of girls from advertising in the digital environment that could incite them to behaviour harmful to their health;

18. Calls for the EU institutions and the Member States to run campaigns in order to raise women's awareness of the benefits of ICT, as well as the risks involved, and to provide them with the necessary education and knowledge on how to protect themselves online;

19. Calls for the EU institutions, agencies and bodies, as well as the Member States and their law enforcement agencies, to cooperate and take concrete steps to coordinate their actions to counter the use of ICT to commit crimes related to trafficking in human beings, cyber-harassment and cyber-stalking, given that they are often cross-border in nature and that EU-level coordination is vital in order to prosecute these crimes; invites the Member States to review their criminal law to ensure that new forms of digital violence are defined and acknowledged;

20. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.