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DEFINING A COMMON APPROACH FOR EMPLOYERS' AND EMPLOYEE ORGANISATIONS TO ADDRESS FUTURE CHALLENGES IN THE ICT SECTOR

PIN-SME and UNI Europa ICTS Common Position on:

GENDER BALANCE IN THE ICT SECTOR

“Currently the ICT sector does not take advantage of the female talent...We need to act”¹.

As fewer women chose to take up a career in the ICT sector or even decide to study sciences or technological matters (with the exception of math and life science) it is crucial for the development of the sector to address the issue of gender balance on various levels.

A report released by the European Commission DG INFSO in March 2010² displays recent figures on the participation of women in the ICT sector³ in the European Union. It shows that in 2008, approximately 25% of the employed population in Europe worked in High-tech Knowledge Intensive Services (KIS⁴). Furthermore, the report refers to a UK paper showing that only a small number of women working in the ICT field in the UK obtain leadership or management positions; women managers (15%), IT operations technicians (30%) and IT strategy planning professionals (11%).

A study conducted by European Schoolnet⁵ sheds light on the situation on the educational level. The study shows that out of the population of 20-24 year olds in Europe in the year 2005 (32 million), 58% went into higher education and out of those 22% (4.1 million) studied Math, Science and Technology (MST⁶). Out of those MST students 30% were female. Within the field of MST, the subtopic of Computing had a 24% ratio of female students, hence more balanced than engineering (with 19% female students) but less balanced than architecture (35%), maths (50%) or life sciences (61%).

¹ Neelie Kroes, European Commissioner, Information Society Women and ICT Status Report 2009, http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/itgirls/doc/women_ict_report.pdf

² Information Society Women and ICT status report 2009

³ Due to a lack of a coherent definition of the term “ICT sector” and hence comparable figures, complimentary statistics are applied to give an overview of the situation.

⁴ According to Eurostat/OECD classification and part of the The high Tech Knowledge intensive sectors, which include high technology manufacturing, medium level technology manufacturing, knowledge intensive services (KIS) and high technology KIS.

⁵ Women in IT – the European situation and the role of public-private partnerships in promoting greater participation of young women in technology”, European Schoolnet, M. Durando, P. Wastiau, A. Joyce, 2008

⁶ “MST” includes life sciences, physical sciences, mathematics and statistics, computing, engineering and engineering trades, manufacturing and processing, architecture and building.

It has been shown as well that women that are interested in sciences tend to prefer medical professions, especially in Biology and Pharmacy, over a career in technology related jobs and, in particular, the ICT sector.

In 2009 IDC made a survey for the Commission on the ICT sector showing that 45% of ICT software projects were delayed because of a lack of project managers. Consequently this is having a huge impact on GDP and is an important factor to take into account in relation to the low number of women in the field.

The reasons for this development are manifold, but one particular aspect that influences the lack of interest of women in the ICT sector is certainly the bad image of ICT jobs and the sector in general. This fact has already been pointed to in the context of the "shadowing days"⁷ which are organised by the European Commission DG INFSO to show young women that technology is not at all strictly for geeks. PIN-SME took part in the Shadowing Conference in 2008⁸.

For a lot of people, working in ICT is associated with a mainly male working environment and working culture ("nerds"). Such a culture represents a problem for women to join a workplace where they are highly underrepresented and where their interests and needs might not be sufficiently considered.

Moreover, long working hours, the lack of childcare facilities, few opportunities for career development etc. and the problem of reconciliation of the professional and private life in general do not improve the image and the appeal of the ICT sector.

Consequently, the very low representation of female employees in general in ICT and the lack of women in responsible and managerial positions foster the problem of a more male working environment

In order to achieve a better gender balance in the ICT sector, it is therefore necessary to change the negative image of the sector and to attract more women into ICT jobs. A first necessary step in this direction is to continue to sharply promote more women in responsible positions and to develop important female role models. The ICT sector often faces the problem that women that have been successfully working in a company choose to leave and join another employer where they can take over more responsible functions and join management positions. In the long term, it is therefore necessary to develop measures and activities that enable women to join challenging, responsible and interesting functions within the sector and to act as role models for others. This will positively influence the working environment and the working culture within the sector and, in the long term, attract more women into ICT professions.

UNI Europa and PIN-SME would like to suggest the following actions to address the gender balance in the ICT sector and to increase the representation of women in responsible positions:

- Integrate more women in management and as project leaders. This could be achieved by providing better instruments in e-learning and general education focusing on project management, team leadership skills etc. Companies, trade unions and training institutes should cooperate in the design of appropriate instruments targeting a female public within the EU guidance.

⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/itgirls/shadowing/index_en.htm

⁸ Decrease of students and employments offers in ICT. Reality or fiction. Bruno Robine V.Pt PINSME.

Reference Isabelle Collet PHD and Researcher at Paris X Naterre University : " In ICT sector, the image of asocial "GEEK" should be changed as well as women success stories should be shown".

- Provide women with concrete job opportunities within the ICT sector: Complementary to the specially designed training, women should have the possibility to put their knowledge into practice and to join the labour market. Following a specific training, SME companies could provide the alternative of traineeships with the perspective of full employment. This could be realised through a cooperation of all representative stakeholders. A concrete tool could be the creation of a European internet platform for traineeships in SME's for women.
- Integrate women from technological and scientific professions that are non ICT related: especially women with a background in other scientific or technological branches, with fewer job openings, should be given the option to "convert" their scientific knowledge and to adapt it to the needs of ICT companies. For example, specialisations in SAP or project management could help women to transfer their skills and competences and to join the ICT labour market, e.g. after a career break. All representative bodies should cooperate in designing appropriate training courses or qualifications (e.g. master in SAP).
- Raise awareness about job opportunities and job profiles in the ICT sector at high schools and universities: It is important to address students that might want to take up ICT professions in the future and to address the education sector to promote ICT professions.
- Improve the working conditions if needed in the ICT sector to better integrate women: perception of working conditions, the lack of work-life balance and working time arrangements could be a source of concern to women and prevent them from taking up ICT jobs. Of course, the integration of women in ICT companies can be more successful if the overall working conditions are better adapted to promote a gender balance in the sector. This relates, among other aspects and according to the different situations in the EU Member States, particularly to flexible working arrangements, childcare facilities, career development and career breaks.

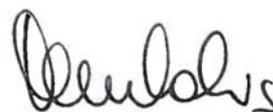
PIN-SME and UNI Europa would like to emphasise the need of improving the working environment, and consequently the image of the ICT sector, to enable more women to take up ICT professions in the future and specially to create conditions to increase the number of female projects managers in the field. Addressing the need for female role models, i.e. more women in management and leadership positions in ICT will be an important step to improve the gender balance in the sector.

Approved on 26/09/2011 by



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