

Women Talent Pool 4th Edition Opening Session
March 15th, 2018

Orange Headquarters, Paris

Speech of EU Digital Commissioner Mariya Gabriel

Dear President of Women in Leadership, Madam Thaima Samman,

Dear members of the board,

Dear participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to be here with you today for the Women in Leadership Forum. This invitation means a lot to me, since as you know, women's empowerment is not only one of my priorities, but also, and more importantly it is a matter that touches to the progress and prosperity of our modern societies.

Yes, ladies and gentlemen, the Future of Europe will be digital. There is no doubt about it. However, I strongly believe that this digital future needs to be centred and put to the service of the interests of people, women and men, together, alike.

This is why, the digital transformation of our economy and our society needs a "Citizens on commands" approach.

I am personally committed to ensuring that all European Citizens will fully benefit of the digital revolution and that our European principles and values are at the basis of the pavement of our future.

In this sense, the role of women and their full participation towards the digital transformation of Europe is crucial and urgent.

So, the question is what is the contribution of women to the Digital Europe?

Well, the answer is clear; more women in digital jobs could generate a yearly increase to European GDP of 16 billion euros.

Further, the participation of women to tech and digital businesses would improve the start-up and entrepreneurial environment and the industry would gain thanks to the increase of diversity.

Women are motors of growth and boosters of progress.

This is the reason why I am proud and honoured to have been named Godmother of the Women Talent Pool programme. Indeed, this initiative has the power to get talented women professionals together and give them the tools, so that they can step in the highest responsibilities.

Allow me now to jump directly to the value of equality between men and women with the increasing impact of the digital shift on our economy and society at large.

As every person should have the tools to take control of her or his life, it is urgent to take action. Today, and even more in the future, digital skills and competences will be at the centre of our daily lives, and instrumental for citizens to realise their full potential.

Empowering women in the digital sector is not only about getting women to use ICT. Women use it all the time; intensely, creatively, and simply as much as men do. It is about making sure that women are not left out when building our increasingly digital future.

We cannot deprive our industries and businesses from women's talents. Thus, if we want them to shape the future, hand in hand with men, we need them to get involved into science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, the so-called STEMs, education streams and careers.

I like to keep things concrete and figures deserve our attention.

Our study "Women in the Digital Era" published last week for the International Women's Day shows that progress towards equality is at a dead spot and that the gender gap is deepening.

Indeed, women's participation in ICT and STEM education and professions is not only low, but also decreasing.

The figures are simply alarming:

- There is 4 times more men than women in Europe that study ICT; even more worrying, women who enrol into ICT studies has decreased since 2017;
- Only 19% of ICT entrepreneurs are women;
- and only 17% of the 8 million people working in ICT are women and the share is not progressing.

Let me put it very clearly: addressing this gap is one of my top priorities.

So, you will be wondering, how do we address the gender digital divide?

My answer is a multi-sectorial approach that attacks the profound, complex and transversal causes of the problem.

The European Commission has developed a series of actions and initiatives to empower women to play a more active role in the digital age.

These initiatives combine both political actions and concrete projects.

For instance, in January 2017, we adopted the **Digital Education Action Plan** that aims at tackling the gender gap in the technology and business sectors, by promoting digital and entrepreneurship competences amongst girls.

Also, we have the European '**Code of Best Practices for Women and ICT** which serves as a rallying point for stakeholders, who commit in favour of women's participation in the sector.

The **Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition** which incentivizes companies and organisations to carry out activities to tackle the digital skills gaps, for all Europeans. This is crucial, as half of our fellow citizens consider their skills incomplete.

Further, in the context of the European Digital Skills awards, last year I included the category of the promotion of digital skills for women and girls and a **special prize** honoured the achievements of IT-for-She, who helps develop digital skills for girls and women.

As you may see, through these initiatives, and believe me, there are more, the objective of the European Commission is to eradicate the gender digital skills gap. These skills are simply too important to be circumscribed to a selected few.

Digital skills should to be acquired early in life, and taught throughout our entire lives, all the more as their benefits have a great significance. Introducing computational thinking, problem solving, critical reasoning, logic, team work and creativity are, indeed, competences relevant for many walks of life.

Complimentary to political actions, I am also very attached to grass-roots driven initiatives, such as the EU Code Week, and the newly launched Digital Opportunity Traineeships.

The EU Code Week can take pride in its 2017 figures, with participation over 1.2 Million, and an impressive 46% female participants' rate. We shall go further in this direction, and the objective is that half of the schools in Europe shall take part this project by 2020.

Building on the experience and the best practices collected through these initiatives, I have also launched a pilot project called Digital Opportunity Traineeships. It focuses on cross-border traineeships for up to 6,000 students and recent graduates between 2018 and 2020. It aims at giving students, of all background, the opportunity to get hands-on digital experience in fields, which are praised by the market. The pilot project will be implemented under the Erasmus+ programme, and the first traineeships will take place as of spring 2018.

A dedicated communication campaign has started, and we hope to be able to reach a high number of students, and companies in digital. I warmly encourage you to take part to the

project, and host, whenever you can, trainees involved in this initiative. I trust this project will help more women to improve their digital skills and consider a career in the digital sector.

Indeed, this last statement is highly important: How to attract women and girls to STEM education and professions?

Reaching out to women requires a range of tools and people to make a difference: politicians, professors, businesses, NGOs, role models, teachers, parents, media.

Indeed, the choice of an academic or professional stream is not a linear decision. Many factors enter into account: social environment, family, values, perceptions.

But what happens when girls are only confronted to seeing that ICT is only for boys? What happens when girls and boys are only exposed to stereotyped characters in their TV series and games?

A recent study of Microsoft revealed that girls do not want to study sciences or technology because of the lack of inspirational role-models. Our study confirmed it.

That it is real life women or fictional characters in films, TV and social media, a fair representation of the role of women in our society and our economy is essential.

In this sense, I am convinced that amplifying women's voices and their contribution in the different fields of sciences, technology, engineering and mathematics is crucial.

This is the reason why, I also launched on the 5th march the campaign "No Women No Panel".

Today, in 2018, it is unacceptable that conferences and panels are not gender balanced. Thus, I am committed to refuse to participate to panels and public events where women are not fairly represented and where I would be the only woman speaker.

So far, 8 Commissioners have joined me and many more people through social media. I hope you will also become ambassadors to this campaign.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am convinced that women-in-ICT is an opportunity. It's about enabling and empowering. Something that should excite every talented, ambitious woman out there, policy-makers included.

Women in ICT say they find their careers exciting, diverse, challenging, and full of opportunities.

From a financial perspective as well, studies have shown that tech companies, built or run by women, are more capital efficient, with higher revenues, and more likely to survive. So it

seems that we have a clear case for women in digital. The industry needs their talent, and our economy needs their innovation.

For all these reasons, my strategy for Women in Digital aims to work on the 3 axes earlier exposed:

- Combatting gender stereotypes
- Promoting STEM among girls
- Encouraging digital entrepreneurship for women

Last but noty least, I would like to turn the spotlight on a key condition for the success of our actions, that is **acting together**.

Indeed, when facing the necessity to gather support, we have no choice but to listen to each other, to get out of our comfort-zone and build the best solutions in our common interest.

Let me make it very clear, advancing women rights is not a women matter; it should be everybody's business.

My personal commitment at European level has taught me the benefits of working in a diverse environment. The European institutions have diversity, as part and parcel, of their DNA. Gender balance contributes to diversity, but it shall not be the tree that hides the forest. The unique richness of our institutions lay in its ability to reflect the diversity of our modern societies. This is the reason why, I defend a more holistic approach of diversity, which is not only geographical, but also social and that targets equality between men and women, reflecting the world we are living in.

To conclude, I invite you to let watchful eyes on our actions. Advancing women rights is a difficult subject for our society as a whole. It is, in no instance, circumscribed to digital.

We need the commitment of men, women, schools, universities, industry, policy-makers, CEOs, governments, etc.

The path before us is still long, but I remain confident that by working together, we can make the difference.

A future where every girl and women can realize their full potential will only be brighter, more peaceful and more prosper for all.

I hope I can count on you to accompany me on this exciting journey. Thank you very much for attention