

GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWERING WOMEN **IN THE DIGITAL AGE**

Information and communication technologies – most notably the internet – have revolutionised the way people interact. The digitalisation of society provides for numerous opportunities. At the same time, new challenges require a common political approach. The completion of the single digital market is one of the priorities of the Juncker commission, focusing mainly on the economic perspective of current developments. But the digital arena is not at all only relevant with regards to economic development and job creation. It is going to be a crucial realm to create social cohesion and a more democratic Europe. In order to fully exploit the potential provided by the information society, the importance of gender equality and the empowerment of women within the digital arena need to be particularly highlighted.

Democracy and Equality

The digitalisation of our society allows for new ways of interaction across cultural and geographical boundaries, campaigning to denounce and defend human rights and freedom, strive for equality, and fight discrimination. Having access to this form of communication will also have an increasing impact on the formation of participatory and equal democracies. The participation of women is thus of uttermost importance in order to allow for a truly equal society. Existing societal power structures should not be reinforced within the digital landscape. The digitalisation of interaction can be an important step forward in allowing equal access to decision making within our societies.

Education, training and access to the labour market

Especially in times of economic crisis we need to make use of the opportunities that digitalisation can entail. It opens up new job opportunities and allows for the development of more flexible working patterns as well as reconciliation of private and professional life. Every year 120,000 new jobs are created in the ICT sector. It is expected that 900,000 job openings will not be filled due to a lack of specialised personnel by 2020.

At the same time the EU faces a considerable gender gap in relation to ICT jobs and ICT training. Only 30% out of seven million ICT employees are women. Women account for 60% of new graduates in the European Union. However, they are largely underrepresented in science, ICT and the research sector. In 2013, only 29 out of every 1,000 female graduates have a computing or related degree (as compared to 95 men). Only four out of these 29 women started working in the ICT sector. Compared to other sectors the situation

of women in decision-making positions is even worse: Only 19.2% of ICT sector workers have female bosses, compared to 45.2% of non-ICT workers (Commission 2014).

The study by the Commission also found that the ICT sector would benefit considerably, if more women would choose an ICT career: Organisations which are more inclusive of women in management achieve a 35% higher Return on Equity and 34% better total return to shareholders than other comparable organisations. It is thus of vital importance as well as of economic interest that the opportunities and positions of women in the ICT sector are improved considerably. Gender barriers to ICT education and training have to be removed and the visibility of women in ICT has to be increased.

Sustainable development

The Europe 2020 strategy introduced the Digital Agenda for Europe as one of seven flagship initiatives, highlighting the key enabling role that the use of information and communication technologies has. At the same time a more inclusive approach empowering especially women is necessary in order to reach the overall goals of the EU 2020 strategy: The Commission expects that an increase in women in the ICT sector could lead to an increase of nine billion in GDP per year. In order to make use of these potentials, political steps need to foster an enabling environment for female entrepreneurs. Funding schemes as well as investment programs can be of central importance in order to making sector more attractive for women.

Violence against women

New forms of social interaction and participation also create new forms of discrimination, harassment and violence. This development restricts women's access to digital ways of communicating and thus confines their freedom and their self-determination and reproduces oppression in our societies. According to the latest study of the FRA institute on violence against women (2014), one in ten women (11%) has faced "unwanted sexually explicit emails or SMS messages" and/or "inappropriate advances on social networking sites since the age of 15; one in 20 (5%) in the last 12 month before the survey. 5% of women in the EU have experienced one or more forms of cyber stalking since the age of 15 (Forms of cyber stalking include: Sending emails, text messages or instant messages that are offensive or threatening; posting offensive comments about the respondent on the internet; sharing intimate photos or videos of the respondent, on the internet or by mobile phone).

Timeframe

Hearing in the Committee: 15. of September 2015

Green "Online Feminist Summit": 21. and 22. of October 2015

Discussion of the report in the Committee: 3. of December 2015

Vote in the Committee: February 2016

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