



2020/2216(INI)

30.3.2021

OPINION

of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

for the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection

on shaping the digital future of Europe: removing barriers to the functioning of the digital single market and improving the use of AI for European consumers (2020/2216(INI))

Rapporteur for opinion: Maria da Graça Carvalho

SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality calls on the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

- A. whereas the use of the full potential of women's digital skills can contribute significantly to boosting the European economy, especially given that there are around one million vacancies in Europe for digital experts, that 70 % of companies are delaying investments because they are unable to find people with the right digital skills¹ and that in some job categories, more than 90 % of jobs require specific types of digital skills²;
1. Recalls that women are under-represented in the information and communication technologies (ICT) sector and that a digital gender gap exists across digital technology, putting women at a disadvantage; recalls, furthermore, that women account for 36 % of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) graduates, 30 % of the technology workforce, including 22 % in the domain of AI, and 17 %³ of ICT specialists in Europe, that the predicted boost to the EU economy would be EUR 16 billion⁴ a year if women technology graduates were not hindered from following through to digital jobs at the same rate as men, and that, in order to confront the gender stereotypes that greatly influence study and career choices and the gender bias in AI and products, which is manifested through the design, input and use of AI systems, the promotion of gender equality within the digital single market will contribute to bridging the digital gender divide;
 2. Takes note of the fact that 30 % of entrepreneurs in the EU are women, but they only receive 2 % of the non-bank financing available⁵, making it harder for them to participate in the digital economy;
 3. Recalls that the ICT sector is the sector with the highest percentage of all-male company boards and welcomes the Commission's intention to encourage the adoption of the 2012 proposal for a Directive on improving the gender balance among non-executive directors of companies listed on stock exchanges and related measures (the Women on Boards Directive);
 4. Stresses that the Fundamental Rights Agency's survey on violence against women shows that high incidences of sexual harassment have been reported in STEM education sites, including in schools, universities and workplaces, which further excludes women from the sector;
 5. Highlights that gender equality is a core principle of the European Union and should be

¹ Commission report of 17 June 2020 on the impact of demographic change (COM(2020)0241).

² Commission communication of 1 July 2020 on the European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (COM(2020)0274).

³ Commission communication of 5 March 2020 entitled 'A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025' (COM(2020)0152).

⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/women-digital-0>

⁵ Fackelmann, S. and De Concini, A., *Funding women entrepreneurs: How to empower growth*, Innovation Finance Advisory for the European Commission and the European Investment Bank, 29 June 2020.

reflected in all EU policies; calls for the fundamental role of women in achieving the European digital strategy goals to be acknowledged in line with the gender equality objectives; recalls that women's participation in the digital economy is crucial to shaping a flourishing digital society and to boosting the EU's digital internal market; underlines the importance of ensuring gender mainstreaming and developing indicators in digital education at all levels, in the Digital Single Market Strategy and in the AI industry and in raising awareness among women of training and positions related to the digital economy and the opportunities they represent;

6. Calls on the Commission to continue addressing the gender gap through a multi-level approach within the ICT sector and to establish policies to fully assess the causes and factors behind such phenomena as gender stereotypes, discrimination or creating suitable working and learning environments, to increase the participation of women in STEM and AI and to advocate measures at all levels of education and employment in the digital sector, in particular by setting up mentoring schemes with women role models from an early age onwards, by supporting lifelong learning, training and schemes to boost their e-skills, paying particular attention to elderly women, by facilitating access to services, as well as access to research funding, facilities and teleworking, especially in certain rural areas where the COVID-19 pandemic has underlined the lack of access to the internet, digital technologies and infrastructures; calls for AI to be taken into account from a gender perspective when developing policy and legislation, and, if necessary, for current legislation, including EU programmes, to be adapted;
7. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to increase financing opportunities for female entrepreneurs so that they have equal opportunities to compete in the digital single market, for policies which unlock and support female entrepreneurial potential and the expansion of the European Business Angels Network and the European Network of Mentors for Women Entrepreneurs; calls on the Commission to ensure the full implementation of the ministerial Declaration of Commitment on 'Women in Digital';
8. Calls on the Commission to assist the Member States in taking the necessary steps to ensure that women can benefit from the opportunities telework can provide by allowing them to work from home and to strike an effective balance between paid professional and caregiving responsibilities by ensuring the efficient implementation of the Work-Life Balance Directive⁶ in order to ensure a more equal distribution of caregiving responsibilities in families, as well as ensuring that women have access to the necessary social protection systems and childcare; calls for an evaluation of the impact of teleworking, in particular regarding working hours, social isolation, the separation between work and private life, and psychological pressure;
9. Asks, in relation to measures in employment, for the Council to unblock and adopt the Women on Boards Directive; urges the Member States to fully transpose and implement the Work-Life Balance Directive; calls on the Commission and the Member States to reduce the gender gap in the digital economy through targeted measures, including European funds to finance female-led projects in the digital sector, the

⁶ Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and caregivers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU, OJ L 188, 12.7.2019, p. 79.

promotion of a minimum number of women researchers participating in ICT projects, training courses for human resources departments on ‘unconscious gender-discriminatory bias’ to promote gender-balanced recruitment, the adoption of public procurement policies and/or guidelines on the purchase of ICT services from providers that apply a gender balance in the composition of their companies and boards, and facilitating the distribution of European funds to companies that take into account gender balance criteria;

10. Strongly supports the Commission’s initiatives in raising awareness on digital opportunities such as the ‘no women, no panel’ approach, the EU Code Week, the Digital Skills and Jobs Coalitions, the EU Prize for Women Innovators, #SaferInternet4EU initiatives across Europe, the New Skills Agenda for Europe and lifelong learning perspectives;
11. Considers that AI can significantly contribute to overcoming gender discrimination and address the challenges faced by women in order to promote gender equality, provided that an appropriate legal and ethical framework is developed, conscious and unconscious biases are eliminated and the principles of gender equality are respected; stresses the lack of diversity in the AI sector within teams of developers and engineers, and the importance of using gender-disaggregated data when developing products, AI standards, algorithms and applications; calls for the Commission and the Member States to ensure that AI is developed in a way that respects and promotes equality; encourages the relevant actors to work on preventing gender and cultural biases and stereotypes, to provide training for employers, workers and teachers, and to promote the participation of women together with diverse teams of key societal actors in the design, development and implementation of algorithms, machine learning, natural language processing and AI applications;
12. Calls on the Commission to put forward a regulatory framework to address the bias, unjustified discrimination and inequalities inherent in high-risk AI systems, including biometric systems; calls for greater diversity through an intersectional approach and gender balance among AI designers, and for sufficient and quality training for AI designers on transparency, discrimination, gender stereotypes, racial and ethnic origin, and cultural bias;
13. Expresses concern that the gender gap in digital skills puts women at a disadvantage in the emerging digital markets; stresses the importance of empowering consumers, particularly women, through teaching basic ICT skills and launching awareness-raising campaigns in order to enable them to take full advantage of the benefits of the digital single market;
14. Highlights that the structural gender bias present in academia, research and business in the digital sectors slows down career progression for women, reduces their career opportunities and results in an under-representation of women in the digital economy; calls on the Commission to ensure that such biases are countered, to the greatest extent possible, during the funding, application and decision-making processes through their design, and calls further on the Commission to allocate more funding to support female academics, researchers and entrepreneurs;
15. Highlights that a high level of STEM skills is critical to the process of innovation in

cutting-edge ICT areas such as AI or cybersecurity, and will therefore be increasingly important to the future competitiveness of the European Union on global markets;

16. Calls for special attention to be paid to the needs of women and girls as targets of harassment and to the rise in cybercrime and cyber-violence in the digital world, that, in consequence, is also deterring women, girls and minorities from inclusive participation in digital markets, and asks for the Commission's proposal on the digital services act (COM(2020)0825) to address these issues; calls for campaigns to raise awareness and educate women in how to protect themselves online in order to combat gender-based violence and gender stereotypes; urges the Commission and the Member States to develop training tools for digital services and the AI industry, to recognise workers' right to disconnect and to work closely with and involve women's civil society organisations in order to better respond to and alleviate the concerns that exist in the everyday lives of women and girls when designing and implementing consumer and public tech policies, paying special attention to vulnerable groups, such as women and girls from minorities;
17. 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 telecommunications professions, and to foster the education and training of women and girls in ICT and other STEM subjects;
18. Considers it essential for the achievement of gender equality in the development, production and marketing, and in the use of digital services and AI consumer products, applications and online-platforms that comprehensive education in schools and workplaces be created and that they recognise and eliminate gender biases in their own behaviour and work;
19. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to recognise the online harassment towards individual entrepreneurs who are women and to take action to tackle this issue.

INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

Date adopted	25.3.2021
Result of final vote	+: 28 -: 2 0: 4
Members present for the final vote	Simona Baldassarre, Robert Biedroń, Vilija Blinkevičiūtė, Annika Bruna, Margarita de la Pisa Carrión, Rosa Estaràs Ferragut, Frances Fitzgerald, Cindy Franssen, Heléne Fritzon, Lina Gálvez Muñoz, Arba Kokalari, Alice Kuhnke, Elżbieta Katarzyna Łukacijewska, Karen Melchior, Andżelika Anna Możdżanowska, Maria Noichl, Sandra Pereira, Pina Picierno, Sirpa Pietikäinen, Samira Rafaela, Evelyn Regner, Diana Riba i Giner, Eugenia Rodríguez Palop, María Soraya Rodríguez Ramos, Christine Schneider, Sylwia Spurek, Jessica Stegrud, Isabella Tovaglieri, Ernest Urtasun, Hilde Vautmans, Elissavet Vozemberg-Vrionidi, Marco Zullo
Substitutes present for the final vote	Aušra Maldeikienė, Irène Tolleret

FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

28	+
ECR	Andželika Anna Mozdżanowska
PPE	Rosa Estaràs Ferragut, Frances Fitzgerald, Cindy Franssen, Arba Kokalari, Aušra Maldeikienė, Sirpa Pietikäinen, Christine Schneider, Elissavet Vozemberg-Vrionidi, Elżbieta Katarzyna Łukacijewska
Renew	Karen Melchior, Samira Rafaela, María Soraya Rodríguez Ramos, Irène Tolleret, Hilde Vautmans, Marco Zullo
S&D	Robert Biedroń, Vilija Blinkevičiūtė, Helène Fritzon, Lina Gálvez Muñoz, Maria Noichl, Pina Picierno, Evelyn Regner
The Left	Eugenia Rodríguez Palop
Verts/ALE	Alice Kuhnke, Diana Riba i Giner, Sylwia Spurek, Ernest Urtasun

2	-
ID	Simona Baldassarre, Isabella Tovaglieri

4	0
ECR	Jessica Stegrud, Margarita de la Pisa Carrión
ID	Annika Bruna
The Left	Sandra Pereira

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention