Building the Gender Balance in the ICT Profession

Europe's competitiveness and growth is closely linked to ICT. Many European countries are currently experiencing record peaks in unemployment levels, yet the ICT sector continues to grow in spite of the crisis. Nor is the influence of ICT limited to the sector itself, in this era of ubiquitous computing, ICT is increasingly embedded across all sectors thus underpinning Europe's potential growth on an unprecedented scale. However ICT will only boost Europe's economy if there is a constant supply of professionals with the right skills. Currently, estimates indicate that up to 700,000 ICT vacancies will be unfilled by 2015[1]. This is a serious issue for the ICT profession, the sector and for Europe's employment and growth potential.

The participation of women in the global labour force has never before been so high, with women representing the majority of the workforce in some countries[2]. Women and girls are thus essential for the success of the economy and can greatly contribute to closing the digital jobs gap. In Europe however, less than one fifth of ICT professionals are female[3], and the low numbers of women entering ICT-related education indicates a significant untapped human capital resource.

As the representative body of national informatics associations in Europe, the Council of European Professional Informatics Societies (CEPIS) is committed to promoting gender equity in ICT. To this end, CEPIS has established a Task Force on Women in ICT that brings together expertise from nine countries and aims to create a driving force to change the image of the ICT profession in Europe. This group of experts has identified the following 5 recommendations as priorities to increase girls and women participation in the ICT profession:

Create European Girls in ICT Day

A European Girls in ICT Day that builds on the success of national level events could raise awareness of what an ICT career really is. National Girls in ICT events take place in some European countries[4], scaling up these events and replicating them in other countries is challenged by the lack of political support and funding. A European event, that recurs annual, would help address these issues. The ICT professional bodies in each county have a role to play in establishing such annual events in conjunction with industry. European financial instruments could be used to support these initiatives. The CEPIS Women in ICT Task Force supports the international efforts[5] taking place and recommends a European event that takes place annually and is closely linked to national actions.

Champion the Issue

The appointment of Digital Champions as drivers of the Digital Agenda for Europe in each country can create both positive role models and effective vehicles to catalyse action. National Digital Champions should be encouraged to include gender balance as part of their mandate in promoting digital skills and undertake to work with industry, government and education systems to create a culture of gender equity in ICT.

Inspire European Youth

Young girls who may consider a career in ICT often lack strong female role models. Without such role models, the talent pipeline for our future ICT professionals is jeopardized. CEPIS is

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[1] European Commission, 'Monitoring e-Skills Supply and Demand', 2009
[2] Economist, 'Women in the workforce: Female Power' 2009
[3] See Professional e-Competence in Europe: Identifying the e-Competences of European IT Professionals (page 15)
[4] For example: Germany: http://www.girls-day.de/Girls_Day_Info/English_Information and Iceland:
[5] International Telecommunications Union, International Girls in ICT Day

launching a Platform of Women in ICT role models[6], showcasing successful women in a variety of dynamic ICT roles. Promoting inspiring role models that demonstrate the creativity, versatility and flexibility of the careers in ICT will help change the image of ICT for young girls.

Teach Tech Right

Teacher training should be adapted to ensure that all teachers are equipped with the competences needed to use ICT to facilitate learning in all subjects, thus enabling the integration of technology throughout the learning experience. Schools should be encouraged to develop a digital vision to drive the successful integration of new technology in the education system. At the national level, computer science should be taught by qualified teachers and should be included as core component of the school curriculum in order to develop the skills and interest of girls as well as boys in ICT from a young age. Immediate steps can be taken to provide information sessions in schools to bring greater visibility to ICT education, jobs and careers as an attractive option for girls.

Incentivise Industry

Fiscal incentives can be provided for companies that adopt gender equity as part of their organisational culture, hiring practices, and career advancement programmes. At a national level, incentives such as tax breaks or facilitating access to funding can provide a strong economic motivation for companies in the ICT sector and ICT-embedded sectors to expedite a more gender friendly corporate culture at all levels.

This position paper represents the work of the CEPIS Women in ICT Task Force which comprises representatives of 10 national informatics associations in Europe:

Belgium	Saskia Van Uffelen on behalf of the Federation of Belgian Informatics Associations
Bosnia & Herzegovina	Aida Ajanovic on behalf of the Association of Informatics in Bosnia and Herzegovina
Germany	Christine Regitz and Ute Waag on behalf of the Gesellschaft für Informatik
Greece	Manolis Labovas on behalf of the Hellenic Professionals Informatics Society
Iceland	Arnheidur Gudmundsdottir on behalf of the Icelandic Society for Information Processing
Italy	Chiara Braghin, Valentina Ciriani, and Daniela Rovina on behalf of the Associazione Italiana per l'Informatica ed il Calcolo Automatico
Malta	Brian Warrington on behalf of the Computer Society of Malta
Spain	Maribel Sanchez on behalf of the Asociación de Técnicos de Informática
Switzerland	Sonja Hof on behalf of the Swiss Informatics Society

About CEPIS

The Council of European Professional Informatics Societies (CEPIS) is a non-profit organisation seeking to improve and promote a high standard among informatics professionals in recognition of the impact that Informatics has on employment, business and society. CEPIS represents 35 Member Societies in 32 countries across greater Europe. For more information: www.cepis.org

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[6] CEPIS Role Models Platform: cepis.org/femaleictrolemodels