Proposal of Policies Supporting Retention of Women in IT

CEPIS Women in ICT Task Force

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Council of European Professional
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Contents

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1   Introduction

Across the CEPIS professional informatics associations there are approximately half which have some focussed activity for Women in Tech. The remainder of the associations are waking up to the concerns about digital skills shortages and the possibility to lessen some of the gaps with the 'missing' women and will prove a fertile ground for activity in the coming years.

The Women in Tech groups that we have access to have been questioned and surveyed and believe that whilst quite a lot is being done for attraction of women to the technical professions, less is done in the equally important field of retention. We have collected below some suggestions for the furtherance of the work that these groups are doing, which could be directly and beneficially influenced by the European Commission.

2   Policies for Attraction of Women to the IT Professions

- Support for TV and films which portray women ICT professionals in a good/desirable/funky light
- Financial support for girls' IT clubs and taster coding sessions for girls
- Publicity and encouragement for 'Take your daughter to work day' for technical professionals
- IT professionals to go to schools to talk about their roles
- Cross-over schemes where professionals from other industries are retrained into IT
- Support for training for NEETS (Not in Education Employment or Training) to IT professions (also supports upward social mobility)
- Insistence on recruitment professions having a code of ethics for IT recruiters based around diversity
- Anti-bias policies as part of greater activities (girls can do math as well, women are not the only ones responsible for family matters (children, care for elder people etc.)
- Make girls/women aware that they can influence the design of future technical systems (such as media, medical, consumer products) since ICT is more and more an essential factor in different sciences and technologies
- Digital transformation means a growing need for people with ICT education; this is a good opportunity to insist that we access the whole of the female workforce and not just the 8-20% that we see across Europe
- Insist on a code of practice for diversity within application coding teams where Artificial Intelligence is being worked on, to ensure elimination of potential bias in AI applications.

- Direct communication with parents, teachers etc. at schools to build their support for the value of technical education and subsequently, roles, for girls and women

3   Policies for Retention of Women in the IT Professions

- Mandatory flexible working policies for all across all businesses
- Support for maternity returners' programmes
- Collection and dissemination of Best Practice such as:
    - Staying connected via email during maternity leave, Invitation to a few events (meetings, Christmas party, office outing)
    - Keeping your laptop during maternity leave
    - Buddying schemes, mentoring period after re-entrance
- Insistence on the reduction of the gender pay gap in IT professions in each country
- Mandatory gender pay audits for companies over a certain headcount
- Mandated reporting of country gender pay gap in IT to EU Commission or similar
- Sponsoring awards schemes (in order to create role models for working women)
- Ensuring that universities applying to Horizon 2020 Technology awards (and similar) comply with strict gender equality 'activity'
- Supporting national guidelines/regulations on the percentage of women on Boards of Directors
- Sponsorship for awards which produce role models for 'older women in tech'
- Anti-bias policies at companies (avoid 'bro culture' cf. Google)
- Transparency of tendering policies at companies (e.g. for better career options)
- Permanent training/education in ICT-related fields to become familiar with new technologies/software (ICT is a quickly developing field)
- Pregnancy and maternity leave should be taken into account to a certain degree for the career and for annual bonuses
- Support in child care (crèche, kindergarten, after-school care) by larger companies

4   Suggestions from our Member Organisations Which Have Active Women in Tech groups (Survey, January 2018)

In January 2018, we polled our member organisations to understand what activities they were aware of in their country and who we might ultimately work with. We also asked them about the validity of the statistics they were seeing since we had some reservations about what was being reported to Eurostat. The survey suggests that we were right to be cautious about the figures. We also asked if they had any suggestions for what might be done to improve the take-up of roles for Women in Technology across Europe. We show some of the suggestions below.

"The introduction of female only IT- courses, perhaps at different expansion stages, such as women-only introduction days, summer courses, tutorials, study entry semesters, upgrade training courses or whole programs could be helpful. Especially the group of career changers seems to be very promising. There are a lot of studied women with a social science background, which would like to change into the IT sector, but have no clue how to."

"The EC should continue to take into account gender-related topics in the development of the European Digital Single Market."

"The possibility to access any field in Finland is quite independent on gender. Functioning within the field may still be a problem, however; and the focus in Finland ought likely to be there rather than on entrance to the field."

"There needs to be more work done to change people's perceptions about Technology and STEM areas and promote diversity in these areas so that they not considered as exclusive domain for men."

"Better implementation of IT and computing in secondary education (almost for all) in countries as it is the age when girls decide not going to IT as a study option. Use examples of successful women who are really educated in IT and engineering (not CEO or other "experts", entrepreneurs, etc. who are really educated in business administration or other disciplines and finally are managing IT companies)"

"An international coding conference for teachers, students, researchers and developers. e.g. like the Scratch-conferences in Amsterdam (2015) and Bordeaux (2017)"

"Funds for promoting activities aimed at attracting women in STEM/STEAM and ICT"

About CEPIS:

The Council of European Professional Informatics Societies is a not-for-profit organisation that represents over 450 000 ICT professionals in greater Europe. The mission of CEPIS is to improve and promote a high standard among informatics professionals in recognition of the impact that informatics has on employment, business and society, to grow the pool of future IT professionals, to promote digital competence for the workforce, and to advocate for a socially responsible, secure, ethical, inclusive and environmentally friendly application of IT in Europe.