Work-life balance in the ICT sector

Women in the ICT sector

The digitalisation of virtually all sectors of economic activity is providing unique opportunities for economic growth and for a greater inclusion of women in the labour market. The need for STEM and ICT skills is growing in all sectors, from healthcare to manufacturing, opening up new employment options for everybody. Recent forecasts show that by 2020 there will be a shortfall of at least 700,000 ICT professionals in Europe.

Currently only around 17% of the almost 8 million ICT specialists in Europe are women. While the average growth forecast for all occupations between 2013 and 2025 is 3%, the demand for STEM professionals is expected to grow by 8%. With the ICT workforce ageing rapidly, replacement workers need to be trained up.

Boosting the number of women in ICT is a major opportunity for the EU. The sector needs highly skilled employees, and women make up the majority of graduates from tertiary education. Redressing the gender imbalance in the ICT sector would also be a good opportunity for women to enter jobs that are more highly paid than those in traditionally female sectors. This would help reduce the persistent gender-based pay gap across the EU, which is a product of longstanding gender segregation throughout the labour market.

EIGE's study was built around two assumptions. First, that the low proportion of women in the ICT sector is not the result of individual preferences, but of systemic obstacles. Second, that the limited participation of women is detrimental for individual ICT companies, the sector as a whole, and the wider economy.

The study found that it is in fact harmful stereotypes and a lack of digital-confidence on the part of women that are the greatest barriers to gender equality in ICT. These are some of the biggest reasons behind the slow pace of change in the number of women entering tech professions. A great deal remains to be done in terms of changing attitudes and adapting legislation to encourage women to choose a career in ICT.

Our aim in the following pages is to introduce a number of the arguments in favour of gender-equality and work–life balance measures, supported by workplace examples which show how barriers can be overcome.