

International Girls in ICT Day – 22nd April 2021

“Girls have to contribute towards innovation and technology. We all need to come together and develop the world”¹ underlined Jakomba Jabbie, who at 16 years of age “started a robotics club in her school” in the Gambia “to encourage more girls to give science and technology a try.”²

Jabbie said that she “created a robotics team at school to show the girls that we can also participate in the area of technology, to talk to them and to make it a space for all of us.”³

With technology playing a role in all kinds of careers including art, history, law, primary teaching and graphic design, learning technological skills at a young age will set girls up for economic independence, and the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector needs more girls and women.⁴

In this context, on 8th April 2011, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) announced the establishment of an International Girls in ICT Day, held every year on the fourth Thursday in April.

International Girls in ICT Day celebrates girls and young women and encourages them to pursue studies and careers in the technology sector. This year, this international day will be observed on 22nd April, marking its 10th Anniversary in a context where the share of women among ICT and engineering graduates in the EU is 17%.⁵

This gender division is subsequently mirrored in the labour market. In fact, despite the high demand for ICT specialists within the EU, women make up 17% of the 8 million ICT specialists working in the EU today. ⁶

One of the barriers to getting more women applying for ICT jobs is male-dominated workplaces, where women struggle to find their place. Moreover, *“gender divisions across ICT*

¹ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2019/4/from-where-i-stand-jakomba-jabbie>

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/international-girls-in-ict-day>

⁵ Source: EIGE - Gender equality and digitalisation in the European Union

⁶ Ibid

workplaces indicate that a women’s ability to enter and stay in ICT jobs is quite dependent on the critical mass of women who are already there.”⁷

Moreover, male domination in ICT jobs is a consequence of gender stereotyping, which further reinforces ideas about femininity and masculinity, and the roles of women and men within society. Additionally, *“the lack of women in science and technology development exacerbates gender bias in the technology itself.”⁸*

Thus, it is essential to better promote the benefits of being a woman in the technological sector, to make sure promotion opportunities are equal between women and men, to smash gender stereotypes, and to ultimately elevate more women to positions where they will become role models to future generations.

These efforts are most needed today due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the fact that the economic effects of the pandemic have hit both women and men, around 47% of women working in technology believe that the effects of this crisis have delayed their career progression.⁹

According to an online survey for ICT respondents conducted across 19 countries, including: UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Canada, Australia and Brazil, since March 2020, 48% of women have found juggling work and family life stressful. This is especially the case if the couple has children, with 63% of mothers working in technology agreeing that they have done most of the home-schooling or have helped their children with homework more than their partners (52%) since March 2020.¹⁰

This shows that we need to be more proactive not to reverse the gains made over the past years for women in the technological sector. In this regard, to overcome some of the challenges that women in technology face, the European Commission has adopted The Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027) that outlines its vision for high-quality, inclusive and

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ <https://media.kasperskydaily.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/85/2021/01/18101159/Kaspersky-Women-in-Tech-2021-Report-V2-Final.pdf>

¹⁰ Ibid

accessible digital education in Europe.¹¹ This Action Plan, presented in September 2020, calls for stronger cooperation at European level to learn from the COVID-19 pandemic, during which time technology is being used at an unprecedented scale in education and training.

Moreover, the Action Plan stresses the need to ensure that girls and young women are equally represented in digital studies and careers. A similar objective is set in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG5, which aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls through, among other domains, ICTs.¹²

In Malta, the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) works to safeguard gender equality through awareness-raising campaigns. The NCPE also provides training sessions to different groups of women and men as well as girls and boys on gender stereotypes and their negative effects on people's lives. Moreover, the NCPE is empowered by Chapter 456 of the Laws of Malta to investigate complaints of alleged discrimination as per its remit.

International Girls in ICT days highlight the need to encourage technology careers for women. As stated by Brahim Sanou, Former Director of ITU's Telecommunication Development Bureau, empowering "*girls to choose a career in ICTs is not just good for girls and their families, it can be a major accelerator of socio-economic development at the national level*".¹³

The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) can be contacted on: 2295 7850 or equality@gov.mt or our Facebook page.

16th April 2021

¹¹ https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/digital-education-action-plan_en

¹² <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Digital-Inclusion/Women-and-Girls/Girls-in-ICT-Portal/Pages/Why-a-Girls-in-ICT-Day.aspx>

¹³ <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2016/04/girls-in-ict-day-highlights-need-to-promote-technology-careers-for-women/>