

Girls in ICT

The persistent lack of representation of women in the digital sector is challenging. In 2020, only **18.5%** of ICT specialists employed in the **EU** were women (Malta's average was 10.7%).¹ These low figures continue, in spite of national and international efforts to address the situation such as the establishment by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) of the International Girls in ICT Day, held every year on the fourth Thursday in April, since 2011. Girls in ICT Day highlights the need to promote technology careers for women.

To commemorate this year's International Girls in ICT Day, to be celebrated on 28th April, the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) interviewed **Fiona Tesi** who is a **Senior Manager** at **Tech.mt**. This Public-Private Partnership was established in 2019 by the Government of Malta and the Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry to promote Malta as a tech centre for innovative technologies.²

Women still face considerable challenges and barriers to pursuing a career in the sphere of STEM subjects. Ms Tesi explained that in helping to minimise the gender gap in the digital sector, Tech.mt *"is currently offering free training opportunities to young women between the ages of 18 and 29"* who are unemployed and/or looking for a career change towards the digital sector. *"Such training opportunities can help reduce skills mismatches and provide a smoother transition into the labour market,"* reiterated Ms Tesi.

In order to raise awareness about digital skills and the gender gap and promote solutions to increase the number of EU girls and young women into the digital agenda, The Women4IT, a multi-stakeholder partnership funded by the EEA and Norway Grants Fund for Youth Employment and supported by nine partners across Europe, is being implemented in seven countries, namely, Malta, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Spain.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/isoc_sks_itcps/default/table?lang=en

² <https://all-digital.org/techmt/#:~:text=Tech.mt%20was%20established%20in,tech%20centre%20for%20innovative%20technologies>.

The inclusion of women in the technological sector helps to reduce inequalities. Women and men often see things from different perspectives, bringing forward unique ideas. Ms Tesi added that *“the tech industry needs more of the female gender as they are undervalued in what they can offer to this sector.”*

Despite efforts to recruit women and girls into ICT- related jobs, the field remains dominated by men. *“Unless women are given adequate support structures to help them combine work and family commitments, women will still find it challenging to keep hold of their job while coping with other responsibilities.”*

Moreover, she deems that *“by adopting gender-smart work policies, gaps unaddressed by laws are filled and inequality at the place of work is minimised.”* Another challenging factor women face in the digital sector *“is the small number of women to be looked up to as role models in the same field, but luckily things are slowly changing.”*

Education is key to tackle the gender gap in the digital field. Ms Tesi underlined that girls must be equipped with digital skills by prioritising education in ICT subjects from a very young age. *“We must harness the power of technology and use innovative solutions to extend our reach and impact. It is our responsibility to ensure that, instead of being barriers, technology and the Internet become enablers for girls and women.”* She admits that *“Malta can achieve a higher presence of women in the ICT sector only if policies are adopted and legislation is enforced to promote gender equality and female empowerment by all stakeholders.”*

Additionally, *“role models of strong, successful females thriving in their careers have the power to break stereotypes.”* By creating a mentorship programme at secondary or post-secondary schools or bringing in speakers, parents and educators working in the field, can instil confidence in girls who would like to pursue careers in historically male-dominated sectors.

“Research³ shows that role models have an amplified benefit for girls and women due to gender biases. Girls get inspired and associate themselves when they see other girls

³https://www.researchgate.net/publication/247838950_To_Do_or_Not_to_Do_Using_Positive_and_Negative_Role_Models_to_Harness_Motivation

succeeding in areas of interest to them and change their mindset and behaviours of how to climb the study and career ladders.”

Technology is already an essential part of our lives and it’s only going to be even more vital in the future. *“If you want to have a role in developing the future, keep developing your skills and abilities in this respective field. It is an exciting industry to work in and the opportunities are endless,”* maintained Ms Tesi when asked to pass a message to girls who aspire to pursue a career in ICT. She concluded that *“technology is not just for techies! The new ways of working as well as the many other benefits of a career in STEM are just a few of the reasons why such learning paths should be considered.”*

Addressing the digital gap will result in losing out on female talent, entrepreneurship and innovation to the detriment of the whole of society.

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