Gender gap in digital still high in Europe, but tailored training programmes like Women4IT are helping to close it.

The continuous lack of sufficient representation of women in the technology sector is worrisome. As of 2020, only 18.5% of ICT specialists employed in the EU are female, and women account for one-third of STEM graduates. Moreover, approx. 33% of women in Europe are inactive in the labour market due to caring responsibilities – a phenomenon that has only worsened during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, pan-European initiatives such as Women4IT have shown that, when supported through tailored digital skills training, young women currently not employed or in education have an extraordinary success rate of starting an ICT career. Only last year, **70% of the women trained by Women4IT gained full-time employment in the digital sector** within 3 months after graduating from the programme.

As the European Commission steps up its ambition to tackle the gender gap in the digital sector through its Digital Decade targets on skills and the recent proposal on Women on Boards, European experts further explored bridging the gender divide in technology at the **Women4IT Conference: The Path Towards Gender Equality in Digital** on 20 January 2022.

Opening the event with her keynote, DIGITALEUROPE Director General Cecilia Bonefeld-Dahl said:

> *"We have a collective responsibility to make the tech sector more inclusive, and all actors have a role to play. But first and foremost – you can't be what you can't see. With more female role models out there, we can inspire a new generation of young women to become creators of technology."*

Themis Christophidou, Director of DG EAC at the European Commission, added:

> *"With increased connectivity, vibrant technological solutions, and more digital work opportunities than ever, today's girls could be tomorrow's leading engineers, data scientists and IT architects. Yet, the gender digital divide, limited career prospects and harmful stereotypes and gender norms continue to hold them back. We need to start with education and training, and with our Digital Education Action Plan, we do exactly that. (…) Individual actions, awareness-raising, and small-scale funding are not enough on their own. What we need is for all actors to work together: public authorities, education institutions, industry and civil society. Women4IT is a great example of this.*

The event panellists also made a few compelling points on ways to close the gender gap in digital. According to Daniela Ciuma, Human Resources Manager at Victory Square Partners (Romania), **companies should be more open to candidates with hard skills gained through alternative education** or run their own upskilling programmes for professionals with less experience. Director of the Latvian State Employment Agency, Evita Simsone emphasised the **benefits of building private-public partnerships** dedicated to this mission, while Joanna Pruszyńska-Witkowska, Vice President and Co-founder of Future Collars, focused on the role of **empowerment and responsible mentorship** in breaking the harmful stereotypes on gender and technology society has cultivated.

Finally, the conference served as an opportunity to hear directly from the Women4IT graduates, who shared their stories, learning experience and benefits of the programme:

> *"I had just recently moved to Ireland, and it was a really tough time. I was unemployed, we had a strict lockdown, so it felt good to be part of a group. [The Women4IT training] helped me to understand more about the market here in Europe, all the technical terms that I now use in my field, upskill, and update my knowledge; it was a great network as well."*
> *– Letícia Martins, Digital Marketing Executive Trainee (Ireland)*

> *"The course teacher encouraged us to believe in ourselves as women, as professionals, and create our own path through the tech sector. (…) Figuring out how to fit in the market is challenging, but after the course, I have had great opportunities – I work for small businesses, which are making an impact and are owned by women. I feel honoured to be helping them to take their projects to the digital world." – Virginia Arroyo Armenteros, Digital Media Specialist Trainee (Spain)*

In 2022, Women4IT will continue its training efforts in the seven piloting countries and aspire to help other organisations implement the project solutions in new regions across Europe.

Have you missed the Women4IT Conference? You can re-watch all sessions here.

About Women4IT

Women4IT – an initiative funded by the EEA and Norway Grants' Fund for Youth Employment – aims to empower young women across Europe to enter the digital economy. By providing **fully funded, individually tailored digital skills training reflecting current market needs**, Women4IT equips women with a set of in-demand digital competencies and employability guidance, setting them on a path to a future-proof career in technology.

In 2021, Women4IT successfully implemented its first piloting efforts in 7 European countries: Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Romania and Spain. So far, it has trained 646 young women, out of whom 454 found full-time employment in digital jobs or became entrepreneurs in the first three months after the course. In addition, more than 2.500 tested their digital skills with the Women4IT profiling tool, and 35.000 women and girls were reached with awareness-raising campaigns.

If you are interested in collaborating with Women4IT, please contact DIGITALEUROPE Project Manager, Katarzyna Udała (Katarzyna.udala@digitaleurope.org) and Project Leader Māra Jākobsone (Mara@likta.lv).

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