



BLOGPOST

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International Women's Day in Times of Change: Resilient, Convergent, Heroic

By Lise Fuhr, Director General, ETNO

This year's International Women's day will be an important page in history books. With an ongoing pandemic and the war in Ukraine, its celebratory appetite has been lost. Nevertheless, we need to stay strong, united and constructive. We need to focus on positive steps in closing the European digital gap while paying homage to heroic women going through tough times.

The digital gap is narrowing (at a slow pace)

Let me start with what I think is optimistic news for women in Europe: the digital gap is moving towards equilibrium, at least partly. The yearly "Digital Economy and Society Index 2021" ([DESI](#)) by the European Commission shows that 64% of both women and men use eGovernment platforms. When taking one further step, the digital gap widens: the internet is used by 85% of women, compared to 87% of men.

Access to digital infrastructure and services coupled with basic digital skills are a prerequisite for grasping the digital opportunity of tomorrow. With FTTH networks [available](#) to more than half of the European population, as well as 5G networks available to almost two thirds of Europeans, we now need to make sure that digital innovation is equally available to men and women. Not only to achieve the EU Digital Decade [Targets](#), but also to increase the digital resilience of our Continent for a future that looks more and more difficult to predict.

Taking the "EU Digital Decade Targets" highway

Europe's Digital Decade Targets aim at having a full convergence by 2030 between ICT specialists. Men and women shall hold a total number 20 million jobs on European soil, distributed equally. We can get there on time, but change needs to happen now. Why so?

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The latest [DESI](#) data unveils a severe disproportion in the ICT job market: only 1 in 5 ICT specialised jobs are held by women. And that's not the worst news: no significant progress has been recorded in the past few years. 2030 might seem distant, but there is a mountain of progress that needs to be achieved each year to get there in a time where digital has more and more influence on our daily lives.

We need to look beyond just our sector and identify areas to be tackled immediately. One way is to encourage women to pursue a career in STEM. Here is a relatively positive sign to start with. If the women to men [ratio](#) for ICT specialists holding a job is 1 in 5 on the job market, the figure is lower for STEM students: only 1 in 3.

While I am not celebrating that there is twice more men than women, I want to focus on the positive sign: the trend is upward. Today's STEM students will become tomorrow's ICT professionals. However, more needs to be done – having a political vision is not enough, we need to have program that encourages real actions to help and attract more women into STEM.

Dream, inspire, dare

That is also why on a more individual level, I am a proud member and ambassador of the [Women4Cyber](#) foundation. We need to inspire young students and professionals that are dreaming about joining the cyber space. Through policy work, informal chats or masterclasses, there are plenty of initiatives available.

We also need to get inspired by current cyber leaders who are shaping the sector today. In last year's [blogpost](#) on International Women's Day, I spoke about who inspired a young version of me to take a career in the digital field. This year I would like to leave you with the "Hacking gender barriers: Europe's top cyber women" [book](#) published by the Women4Cyber foundation. I hope that some young female students will find inspiration in the book to tackle the stereotypes and follow their cyber dream because we need women to also tackle security in the digital world.

Diversity in tech and telecom sectors: Europe is progressing

The telco sector is no exception in a gender-unbalanced ICT sector. We have come a long way, and we have to continue improving. While the ETNO team has constantly been in almost perfect gender-balance, the telco workforce in Europe is not there yet.

We see reasons to be optimistic, though. Our sector counterbalances the overall stats of the ICT sector, ETNO members [counting](#) 35% female of the total workforce, slightly higher than the US (34%) or Japan (28%).

ETNO has been involved in projects aimed at improving the gender balance of its workforce. One such example is the "[Digital Upskilling for All!](#)" project that brought together specialists looking for best practices to improve gender balance in the telecom sector. Financed by the European Commission, the project will culminate with the closing Conference in May this year, when the final recommendations will be presented to all participants.

Resilience

When we talk about Europe, we must keep in mind that it takes more than the European Union. We share more than the Continent. We are united by values, dreams and struggles.

I would like voice my sincere admiration to the Ukrainian population. They are all real heroes, showing to the whole world what resilience means. In particular, I feel humble and admiring when I see the efforts done by Ukrainian women. As Ukraine's First Lady Olena Zelenska recently [said](#): the "current resistance has a particularly female face. My admiration and bow to you". I do the same.

In a country where women [outnumber](#) the male population by 3 million, their collective struggle goes beyond the obvious. From protecting their separated families, to mobilising resources, or risking their lives to keep critical sectors running, they are an example for us all watching in shock. I believe I speak on behalf of many women in Europe. We see you, we admire you. May you all be safe; may you all continue being heroes until peaceful times will come – you are true role models to the next generation of women in Europe.