

**Address by the Commissioner for Gender Equality, Ms Josie Christodoulou, at
the event titled “Women in ICT” organised by the Deputy Ministry of
Research, Innovation and Technology and TechIsland**

Dear Deputy Minister, Mr Nicodemos Damianou,

Dear DCO Secretary General, Ms Deemah AlYahya,

Distinguished guests,

First, I would like to congratulate the Deputy Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digital Policy and TechIsland for organising this event with the Digital Cooperation Organization (DCO). I am particularly pleased that a part of it is dedicated to the empowerment of women in the field of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT), showing that we are walking the talk not only on a national level, but also by enhancing cross boarder cooperation. The contributions and discussions during this session will undoubtedly yield useful and practical recommendations that will help achieve this aim.

In July 2022, Cyprus became the first EU member state to join the DCO. As a member, our country is proud to be part of the organisation’s effort to promote innovation and digital transformation with a view to creating a sustainable digital economy which is inclusive and non-discriminatory. We look forward to working with the other 15 members of DCO, from the Middle East, Asia Africa and Europe. Through joint actions and projects and by exchanging information and experiences we can explore best practices in bringing women closer to ICTs thereby creating a more equitable society.

Globally and across all life spheres, women are under-represented. Today, according to Womentech Network, only 47,7%, less than half of working-age women are participating in the global workforce. This means that for every two men employed, there is only one woman. Moreover, women earn less money than their male counterparts and are more likely to experience gender-based discrimination. Turning to the STEM scene, which is most relevant to this event, we again observe that women are underrepresented in these fields.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As you all know better than I do, information technology is one of the most dynamic fields which is constantly evolving, significantly affecting our daily lives: the way we live, the way we work and the way we communicate. The gender gap in technology is indeed narrowing but not nearly as fast as it should. Tech companies have a long way to go to reach a gender-equal representation at all levels, including in leadership positions.

The current landscape demands better representation. As our lives become increasingly intertwined with technology, representation gaps become more apparent. The need to eliminate these gaps becomes more imperative as women bring a broader perspective and apply innovative approaches in problem solving which can result in a gendered impact on the lives of both women and men.

Women have been contributing as much as men in the technology industry for years but this was never celebrated or acknowledged. A case in point is the fact that during World War II women undertook numerous wartime jobs including the role of a human computer calculating ballistics by hand so that the military could determine firing angles.

Another example is the fact that in the mid-1940s, there were around 100 female mathematicians literally performing relentless trajectory calculations by hand. The known Bletchley Park codebreaking operation during WWII consisted of nearly 10.000 people out of whom 75% were women. Yet, these women were never formally recognised as analysts in contrast to their male counterparts and they were asked to describe their job as secretarial. The examples are many, the message is one: We must recognise their achievements and encourage more women to follow in their footsteps. Women and men must know herstory too. If we do not acknowledge women's participation then we lack role models and, as we know, "you can't be what you can't see". We should encourage young women to follow professional careers in STEM by providing them with the appropriate guidance as well as the necessary support.

Fast-forward to 2025, the European Union expects the demand for STEM professionals to increase by 8%, which is much higher than the average need for professionals in other fields. Therefore, the participation of both women and men in the STEM fields is more than necessary.

Interestingly, on the flip side, research shows that women are more likely than men to attain any college degree. In most leadership skills, they score higher. Businesses with a higher proportion of women in leadership are more likely to report increased creativity and improved productivity.

So, why is there such a big gender gap? The answer lies in traditional, patriarchal stereotypes and prejudices that are still prevalent in our society. Women are still expected to focus primarily on the family, being almost exclusively responsible for raising their children and tending to their needs as well as those of elderly relatives or people with disabilities.

They are also expected to spend time on household chores. This unpaid, invisible work is inevitably at the expense of women's professional and personal growth and time. As a result, women are prevented from achieving their full potential based on their skills and preferences. On a societal level, a country is deprived of women's unique and different contribution to the economic advancement and overall progress.

Rectifying this situation is not an easy task as the stereotypes, conscious and unserious biases I just described, have been deeply rooted within our society for centuries.

The urgent message we need to convey is that women's equal participation in all areas of economic activity, including the technology sector, passes through the deconstruction stereotypes.

The government of President Christodoulides has set gender equality high on its agenda. Since March 2023, we have been working hard, creating more synergies and collaborations within the government but also with businesses, academic institutions, and civil society organisations in order to formulate targeted and implementable gendered policies.

In this direction, our office drafted the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2024-2026 and is responsible for the monitoring, coordination, and evaluation of its implementation in collaboration with all ministries and deputy ministries.

The Strategy, which entered into force in January 2024, aims to apply gender mainstreaming in all government policies, horizontally, including, of course research, innovation and technology.

Ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to highlight just a few of our policies and actions that are directly or indirectly related to the theme of this event in order to give examples of the holistic approach we are applying:

- **Collection of data**: The Deputy Ministry of Research Innovation and Digital Policy in collaboration with the Statistical Service, will soon start the collection and processing of data on women's participation in the fields of research, innovation and cybersecurity that will facilitate the evaluation of relevant programs, actions and practices.
- **Target groups**: With a view to familiarising women in rural areas with new technologies and the advantages they bring to their daily lives, the Deputy Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digital Policy is in the process of designing targeted educational programmes on digital skills, digital marketing and financial services that address their specific needs.
- **Deconstruction of stereotypes**. We must make it possible for all individuals, men and women, to reach their full potential. To do this, we believe that we must start from schools. Therefore, from the next school year, that is next September, school career advisors and educators will receive training in order to guide children in choosing their professional path based on their skills, inclinations and preferences rather than on stereotypes and unconscious biases which wrongly dictate "male" and "female" professions.
- **Incentives**: The Government, in collaboration with the Cyprus State Scholarships Foundation, announced the annual granting of 10 scholarships to women for undergraduate studies.

The scholarships last year concerned studies in the field of innovation and technology and for this year we added the field of shipping.

- **Raising awareness, promoting role models:** Last year we launched a social media awareness campaign titled “HerStory” dedicating the first edition to the promotion of women’s participation in STEM professions. Videos of successful women, as role models, in the relevant fields offered their personal stories on the opportunities they had, but also on the obstacles and challenges they faced.
- **Reconciliation of family, personal and professional life:** In an effort to address the issue of time availability for women, the government through the Recovery and Resilience Plan intends to increase the number of nurseries and upgrade existing ones in a number of municipalities. The plan includes 34 care structures, for babies as well as for elderly people. The Deputy Ministry for Social Welfare has already started the process with the collaboration of local authorities. This way, women will have the chance, if they so wish, to undertake full-time jobs exploring their professional potential.

These and a number of other actions will help us accelerate the process towards gender equality, eliminate current gender inequalities and create opportunities for men and women based on merit and not on gender.

We all agree that there is still much work to be done in order to ensure that women, who make up 51% of the global population, are in fact fully equal members of society.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In closing, I would like to assure you that the government, by creating synergies and designing implementable policies and actions in an extrovert manner, aims towards substantial equality between women and men. The narrative must change. We must stop seeing gender equality as another problem that we need to solve but as the solution and the path to a more sustainable and strong future for all.

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