# Women in ICT – Hearing

# Committe on industry, research and energy (ITRE)

# European Parliament 25 April 2013

I had the honour to represent WiTEC in the hearing *Women in ICT* April 25. The hearing was chaired by Ms **Amalia Sartori**, chair of the ITRE committé. The panel also consisted of Ms **Hamadoun Touré**, secretary general, International Telecommunication Union, and Ms **Neelie Kroes**, vice-president of the European Commission.

Several European experts contributed during the hearing in short speeches, and we were given view of the situation for women in ICT, and of efforts and development ideas from several European persons representing a broad field of organisations. *(Programme enclosed).*

In my contribution I presented WiTEC Europe and gave some examples of our work:



My focus was on high-lighting the crucial and alarming situation of women’s decreasing part in the ICT field, with fresh statistics and analysis from Sweden, and of course the need for action.

There is some [conference documentation](http://www.womenandtechnology.eu/digitalcity/projects/w4ict/boxedNewsEvent.jsp?dom=AAABECDQ&prt=BAAFLAFR&firt=AAACPEFJ&men=BAAFKZBY&fmn=BAAFLAFU) on the net.

To give you the picture of the hearing I also enclose two resuming remarks.

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**Appendix**

* Resuming words Kroes and Sartori
* Hearing programme

# Resuming words

by **Neelie Kroes,** Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for the Digital Agenda.[[1]](#footnote-1)

*It's a pleasure to be here today. And many thanks to the ITRE Committee for taking this issue so seriously.*

*Marilyn once sang that diamonds are a girl's best friend. These days that's not true. ICT skills are a girl's best friend. Have them, and the diamonds will follow.*

*We need more women working in ICT.*

*It matters to women. Every woman should have the tools to take control of her life: and today, it's almost uniquely ICT skills that offer growing employment, innovation, and opportunity.*

*And it matters to our economy. Europe faces an ICT skills gap of nearly one million workers. Fail to fill it and we will damage our competitiveness, and let down our unemployed. Getting more women into ICT is a no-brainer to plug that gap.*

*One thing is clear: the problem isn't getting women to use ICT. They use it all the time; intensely and creatively. Often more than men do: for social media for example. From Silicon Valley to the slums of Nairobi, I've seen women use those tools to improve opportunities and improve lives.*

*We've all seen industry attempts to create "special" women's ICT products. Often, regrettably, they're designed by men, following the tired philosophy of “shrink it and pink it”. And sometimes the result is excruciating. But women don't need a “woman-friendly” smartphone or app, any more than they need woman-friendly pens or cars. That's not the problem.*

*The problem is not enough women in ICT careers. Women are less than one in three working in the sector; and disproportionately in lower status jobs.*

*Only yesterday I presented the first ever Europioneers awards for the best European tech entrepreneurs. A lot of talent was on display, and it was my pleasure to reward it. But all 15 on the shortlist were men. That shows just how far we have to go to get women more involved and visible.*

*Many are already aware of this issue; many are working hard to fix it. So I've crowd-sourced some ideas: what's already out there, and how to fix it. Thanks to all those who took part in that exercise. And I want to share some results.*

*Maybe it's about schools. After all, career decisions are often made early on. So maybe we need computer science right in the heart of the curriculum, with teachers trained to use and teach it.*

*But in fact it's not just about getting the skills: it's about using them. There's lots of women with an ICT-related degree who aren't working at all. Getting just some of those women back into work, the boost to our economy could be worth 9 billion euros each year. Enough money to pay off the entire Netherlands deficit, in just over two years.*

*And it's clear role models are important too. Meeting or hearing people working with digital skills is inspiring: from a CEO to your next-door neighbour. There's more top women out there than there used to be; later we'll hear from one of them, Sheryl Sandberg. But maybe we could also get more junior women involved in spreading the word?*

*And get some role models in the fictional world, too. So films and TV and books give a more realistic portrayal. Let's give our young girls aspirations beyond princesses and ponies.*

*The fact is, there are many passionate, grassroots initiatives out there. Things like Coderdojo for children. Our Digital Champion in Finland, Linda Liukas, has had a lot of success with the RailsGirls project. And in America, Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg and others launched code.org, to get more women and men into programming. We should shine a light on them.*

*But here's my most important point. Let's not patronise: let's change how we sell this issue. Women aren't victims in need of help: they're a talented cohort. Right now, our economy badly needs that talent. So let's use it. Not by pretending ICT is something other than it is. Yes, it is sometimes geeky: so what. It's not always easy, but if you've got a brain you should be using it. No, it's not all about a new way to attract boys: intelligent women can see beyond that anyway.*

*The fact is, this issue of women in ICT isn't a problem: it's an opportunity. Enabling and empowering. Something that should excite every talented, ambitious woman out there. A chance to make the most of your potential.*

*Because you don't need to dress it up: the fact is, ICT rocks. Women in ICT say they find their careers exciting, diverse, challenging, full of opportunity. Women can earn 9% more money in ICT, with zero gender pay gap – what other sector can boast that? And if you want to make an impact, there's no better tool to change the world.*

*Why try and disguise that? We don't have to: we just have to sell the reality.*

*And this isn't charity. Not for businesses nor for policy makers: it's economic good sense. Tech companies built or run by women are more capital efficient, with higher revenues, and more likely to survive. And, remember that women are a big part of the ICT customer base: the industry had better start understanding and including them better.*

*To plug Europe's skills gap, we have set up a grand coalition for ICT jobs, with the industry, education providers and others. It's a new way to work together: committing concretely to give more people digital skills for tomorrow. Pledges are still coming in; and I want to see some focused on women.*

*Here's a few ideas. How about awards, to recognise and celebrate women and girls working in this area? In fact we've just had one proposal in that area, which I welcome. Or how about a mentoring network – linking up younger girls interested in ICT with career-age counterparts? I would be the first to join such a network! Or how about a new accelerator targeting women entrepreneurs?*

*Of course, women are not a homogeneous group, and nor are European countries. Reaching out to them requires a range of tools, and a range of people helping to make a difference. Like politicians and professors; businesses and NGOs; mentors and role models; teachers and parents. I hope all of you here today, can take these messages home with you, and help us find some solutions; I hope MEPs will take this back to your constituencies.*

*As I said, this isn't a problem, it's an opportunity. We are not doing women a special favour: the industry needs their talent, and our economy needs their innovation. Digital women are worth more than diamonds. Thank you.*

By **Amalia Sartori**, chair of the ITRE committé[[2]](#footnote-2).

*The hearing provided a vital opportunity for an exchange of views on the issues like why number of women studying and choosing careers in ICT is decreasing, why women are under-represented at all levels in the ICT sector and the need to attract women into ICT jobs in order to realise full equal opportunities and to empower them to participate fully in the information society.*

**PROGRAMME**

**Opening**

15.00 - 15.10

Opening of the hearing and introductory statement by Ms **Amalia**

**Sartori**, Chair of the ITRE Committee

15.10 - 15.20

**Hamadoun Touré,** Secretary-General, International Telecommunication

Union

15.20 - 15.30

**Neelie Kroes,** Vice-President of the European Commission

**Panel 1**

**Women in ICT careers: how to explore female talent?**

15.30 - 15.40

**Gianna Martinengo,** President of DidaelKTS and President of the

Women and Technology

15.40 - 15.50

**Saskia Van Uffelen**, CEO at Bull and CSB Consulting, Digital

Champion for Belgium

15.50 - 16.00

**Monique Morrow**, CTO Asia Pacific & Distinguished Consulting

Engineer, CISCO

***16.00 - 16.20 Q & A by Members***

**Panel 2**

**Nourishing the pipeline: ICT skills for ICT jobs**

16.20 - 16.30

**Kicki Stridh**, Board Member, The European Association for Women in

Science, Engineering and Technology (SET), Sweden

16.30 - 16.40

**Ruthe Farmer,** Director of Strategic Initiatives, National Centre for

Women and IT

16.40 - 16.50

**Donna Metzlar,** Community advocate, The Genderchangers

16.50 - 17.00

**Nidhi Tandon,** Principal consultant and trainer, Networked Intelligence

for Development and Gender consultant, ITU

17.00 - 17.10

**Sheryl Sandberg,** COO Facebook (videoconference)

***17.10 - 17.20***

***Q & A by Members***

17.20 - 17.30

Chair's closing remarks by Ms Amalia Sartori, Chair of the ITRE

Committee

*(And I want to add that this schedule was havocking from the start, as all speakers wanted more than their given ten minutes ...)*

1. <http://commentneelie.eu/speech.php?sp=SPEECH/13/366> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In a letter to contributors in the hearing, sent out afterwards [↑](#footnote-ref-2)