

Chapter 6

Assessing Gender Gaps on ICT Competences in Four European Countries

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ABSTRACT

ICT competences still represent a “stigma” attached to gender around the world. This chapter focuses an analysis on the gender gaps and ICT competences to the access workforce, by analyzing data collected in four European countries (Portugal, Poland, Lithuania and Cyprus) in the scope of a Project “EU Youth: From theory to action (ActYouth).” Within the purpose of answering the hypothesis in understanding, the youth employability, and gender division in the labor market in different regions in Europe, statistical methods were selected and tested. The 537 responses were acquired by questionnaires and interviews and analyzed concerning ICT competences. Data shows that students self-assessment and employer’s perspectives of important competences for entry in the labor market. Therefore, an importance performance analysis (IPA) was performed considering the four competences, comparing importance (employers) with performance (students) of competences, and then presented by gender for each analyzed country.

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INTRODUCTION

In this era of internet, digital media and information and communication technologies (ICT), digital literacy has become a fundamental ability in innovation and entrepreneurship for youth employability (ILO, 2016). Surpassing barriers and conducting society towards a new paradigm of communication and information, technologies are improving the capacity of people to create and develop a cross-culture and institutional structure improving the quality of life and wellbeing (Moeller, Ammu, Lau, & Carbo, 2011). Nevertheless, UNESCO (2005) pointed out the risks of digital literacy being used as a conditioning mean, dominating by “particular ideologies” and spreading out notions for many audiences as manipulated “propaganda” (UNESCO, 2005, p. 15). Nevertheless, the gender gaps in digital skills still affecting the employment acceptance of women in specialized positions (Luis Martínez-Cantos, 2017). Thus, in a common sense, digital literacy is currently associated to male professions likely programmers, scientists, professors in computer science, engineers in industries of high tech and scientific academia.

Indeed, the gender gap in the labour market has been embedding higher education institutions (HEI) strategies to reframe their curricula, overcoming obstacles and impediments and providing resources for women access in fields like engineering, computer science and gathering competences in ICT. In fact, reducing gender inequality (ILO, 2016) is one of the main aims for HEI. The low presence of women in technological degrees have been emphasizing that traditional higher education in those areas are not attractive for female students. As Jiménez-Cortés, Vico-Bosch, & Rebollo-Catalán, (2017) describe in their study about Spain, digital competences in female university students highlight a variety of learning strategies, regarding the requirement of attention into their sensibility to self-learning, influencing the process of inclusion and autonomy in technology field on labour market.

Similar insights can be found in Australia, where the interviewed sample on Michell, Szorenyi, Falkner, & Szabo, (2017) reveals a general understanding about computer science area being more suitable and attached to male (and culturally stereotyped) students.

“Employability Women Rights” cover partially the lack of legislation taking into consideration the women discrimination and their abilities for professional and high wage jobs as a way of uncovering several inequalities related with gender issues. Efforts to equalize the “human rights” in general have been addressed by several international organizations such as UNIFEM and UN-WOMEN, generating awareness about many difficulties widespread in workforce.

The need to develop generic competences in students intending to enter the labour market has been inscribed as a key priority in the agendas of policy makers and industry leaders for quite a while. This study was conducted based on the Erasmus+ Project “EU Youth: From theory to action (ActYouth)¹” (<https://www.actyouth.eu/en/>), a strategic partnership for higher education. The data collection was obtained by questionnaire and interview. The results evidence the abilities and needs in technological field female and male students, from four countries, could improve in their profile, also looking toward to equal rights in the labour market as well as in different instances in society.

The hypothesis tested in this study emerges from a debate in the literature, emphasizing the gender divisions in labour market (European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), 2017), with particular focus in ICT domains. The ICT competence could be examined considering the perception of employers and students concerning the gender classification. This study attempts to design a framework to understand how women insertion in technological labour market proceed in four European countries (Portugal, Poland, Cyprus and Lithuania).

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