CONNECTING WOMEN IN DIGITAL

Intersectionality in Practice: A Resource for Organizations

Organization Briefing Toolkit

Organization Briefing Toolkit

- The Organization Briefing Toolkit is a practical tool designed to serve as a roadmap for your organization to increase digital literacy and create an inclusive work environment.
- The toolkit covers the entire ecosystem, from pre-school education to senior management, ensuring that female talent is supported at every stage of their career.
- This strategy is designed as a flexible and modular toolkit, so it is not necessary to read it page by page. The document is divided into separate thematic sections so that each organization can quickly find the information that is relevant to it and apply it to its specific context.

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Organization Briefing Toolkit

- This toolkit is specifically designed to help organisations, including employers, educational institutions and policymakers, implement cross-sectoral gender mainstreaming in the digital workforce.
- Its main objective is to provide organisations with effective frameworks to identify, analyse and address the cross-cutting barriers faced by different groups of girls and women at different stages of their digital careers.
- We hope that these slides will help you apply the EU's strategic objectives in your daily work, enabling a diverse talent base and thus effectively reducing systemic barriers to inequality.

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How to adapt this material in your organization ?

In order to empower the organization and its people, the material is divided into four stages:

1. Identified Problems:

This identifies not only common challenges, but also specific barriers related to age, gender, ethnicity, social status or other factors that prevent employees from reaching their potential. Understanding that problems are not homogeneous is the first step towards true equality.



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How to adapt this material in your organization ?

2. Existing solutions and good practices:

Within each group, you will find a section that will provide proven solutions and successful working methods that you can use in your organizations' plans to create an inclusive environment.



EXISTING SOLUTIONS
and good practices

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3. Recommendations (Strategic Level):

Based on the principles of cross-sectoral adaptation, recommendations are provided on how to address the identified challenges.

These are not universal recipes - they are tools that help organizations recognize diverse needs and create an environment in which different experiences are seen as an organizational strength, not a barrier.



RECOMMENDATIONS
(Strategic Level)

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4. Action Plan (Practical Application):

The final stage offers concrete steps that organizations can adopt in their daily lives.

Here you will find actions that help promote inclusion from internal communication campaigns to process reviews - ensuring that changes are not declarative, but contribute to faster, more convenient and more innovative work.



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How to adapt this material in your organization ?

- How to use this tool?

1. Review the identified problems, get acquainted with the recommendations and adapt the action plan according to the culture and maturity of your organization so that intersectionality becomes a natural part of your daily life.

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How to adapt this material in your organization ?

2. Adapt this content to your company's culture, size and specifics.

3. Educate your team: use this material for presentations to employees to explain why digital competences are beneficial for them.

4. Plan company activities: choose relevant topics that you can integrate into internal training or strategy meetings.

5. Adapt diversity: get ideas on how to involve different groups (by gender, age, background or experience) for the real added value that different perspectives create.

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Methodology and Workflow

- The Organization Briefing Toolkit is developed using a data - driven methodology that combines analytical work and expert experience.
- The methodology combines data collection and qualitative input from Women in Digital members and experts in sharing good practices.
- The guidelines are based on research and empirical data collected and presented by specialized thematic working groups TWG4 (Women in Digital Thematic Working Groups).

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The goal is to master technology, share knowledge, and learn from each other.

Everyone will feel empowered to contribute, regardless of their professional experience or personal identity.

Small steps towards technological literacy and openness to diversity will help you, as a company, become more resilient, faster, and most importantly, more successful.

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Supporting the Digital Journey Across Life Stages

The intersectional framework of this toolkit is structured around four sequential pillars:

- STEM
- ICT
- Early- and Mid-Career Digital Roles
- Leadership & C-Suite Positions

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Supporting the Digital Journey Across Life Stages

- **STEM**

Encouraging and motivating girls and young women to be interested in science, technology, engineering and mathematics from an early age, effectively breaking down stereotypes established in society.

- **ICT**

Support for girls who have chosen information and communication technology studies or vocational training, ensuring smooth acquisition of theoretical knowledge, integration and practical preparation for the market.

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Supporting the Digital Journey Across Life Stages

- **Early- and mid-career digital roles**

Targeted support and mentoring for women already working in digital roles. This helps them successfully establish themselves in the job market, improve their qualifications and avoid early retirement from the technology field.

- **Leadership positions**

Strategic initiatives focused on integrating women into influential management, decision-making, and top-level leadership positions, thereby ensuring gender balance in technology business and politics.

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Supporting the Digital Journey Across Life Stages

- According to the principle of intersectionality within the EU gender equality strategy, progress in the digital sector is not pursued through a one-size-fits-all approach, but rather by addressing the specific, intersecting barriers faced by diverse groups of women and girls. These include considerations of **age and early childhood education, race, ethnicity and migration background, socioeconomic status, geographical location, maternity and parental status, disability and accessibility, as well as sexual orientation and gender identity.**

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Once these unique systemic barriers are identified, actionable, expert based solutions and organizational recommendations are presented in the subsequent sections of this document.



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I. STEM

Strategic context and purpose

- ***Early STEM*** (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) ***Education*** is the first stage of the Digital Pipeline.
- ***The purpose*** is to present the main factors influencing the engagement of girls and various groups in STEM from an early age, identify emerging barriers and provide good practices and solutions for organizational activities.

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Age and early childhood education

Identified problems:

1. STEM concepts are considered „too complex“ in preschool.
2. Girls lose interest in STEM very early (between the ages of 10 and 16) due to ingrained stereotypes and a lack of visible female leaders in the sector.
3. Technology is more often associated with boys from an early age, and girls are less encouraged to be interested in games or technical sciences.
4. Lack of role models in textbooks and children's books (there is still a lack of female role models in IT, science or mathematics - visual material is dominated by men. Artificial intelligence (AI) tools, when asked to generate images, usually depict men, not women.
5. Lack of motivating role models in the family environment.

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Age and early childhood education

Existing solutions and good practices:

1. Early STEM programs in schools through games and practical learning (EIT Girls Go Circular / GirlsGoSTEM).
2. Adapting university study programs for girls and mentoring between students and schoolchildren.

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Age and early childhood education

Suggestions and recommendations:

1. STEM education must begin in kindergarten, before elementary school, when gender stereotypes are not yet fully formed.
2. Find creative, interesting and easy-to-understand ways (according to age) to convey the essence without giving up technological content or solutions.
3. Use games that help spark children's imaginations and purposefully explain what STEM is.
4. Integrate diverse female role models into school curricula and train teachers to recognize and reduce unconscious gender bias.
5. Use books and other materials in educational processes that tell about women's achievements in the STEM, ICT and cybersecurity sectors, thus breaking down gender stereotypes.
6. To develop flexible, modular learning pathways for adults working in early childhood education settings.

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The importance of intersectionality

STEM inclusion is a complex issue. Dependence on one or more social factors combined can significantly reduce interest or opportunities to establish oneself in STEM fields.

Effective problem solving requires a holistic, intersectional approach – seeing the whole person, not just one aspect of their identity. Therefore, after discussing the Age and Early Education (early experiences and stereotyping) phase, the next section will discuss Race, Ethnicity and Migration Background aspects.

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Race, Ethnicity and Migration Background

Identified problems:

1. Systemic bias, cultural stereotypes and the underrepresentation of black and other ethnic minority women among STEM teachers and speakers create a sense of isolation.
2. Migrant families are often unfamiliar with local education systems, face language barriers and their qualifications acquired abroad are undervalued, so language difficulties are often misinterpreted as a lack of skills.

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Race, Ethnicity and Migration Background

Existing solutions and good practices:

1. Multilingual materials for families, cultural mediation and inclusive curricula.
2. Awareness-raising campaigns and role model programmes (e.g. Austria) featuring success stories of women of diverse racial and migrant backgrounds.
3. Intercultural coaching and specific mentoring programmes for African-American/Afro-majority professionals.

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Race, Ethnicity and Migration Background

Suggestions and recommendations:

1. Create bridging programs that connect language support with STEM terminology.
2. Encourage schools to actively invite speakers from diverse backgrounds and create community-based STEM centers at the local level.
3. Integrate targeted mentoring programs specifically for girls from migrant families, helping them build resilience and successfully adapt to the new education system.
4. Encourage children to share different ways of logical thinking and solving mathematical problems brought from education systems in other countries, thus broadening the horizons of the entire class.
5. Create and integrate mentoring programs specifically for girls from migrant backgrounds, helping them adapt, build resilience, and find inspiration in STEM.

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Socioeconomic context - the foundation of inequality

In addition to the aspects of ethnic or migration experience already discussed, there is another very important aspect of intersectionality - ***socioeconomic status***.

This is the foundation on which digital divides and social barriers are often formed, so it is important to understand how family economic status creates unequal starting positions in the STEM field.

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Socioeconomic status

Identified problems:

1. Socioeconomic status is one of the strongest factors that acts as a foundation for other problems (e.g., digital divide, social barriers indicating belonging to a certain social class).
2. Children from poor families suffer from digital poverty – a lack of devices, internet connectivity and opportunities to explore technology at home.
3. In less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds, there is often a lack of support to pursue longer or more complex STEM studies, as priority is given to quick money or short-term professional programs.

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Socioeconomic status

Existing solutions and good practices:

1. Teen Turn (Ireland) – mentoring, STEM clubs and paid work placements for girls from communities of lower economic status.
2. Municipal funds for equipment and free non-formal education STEM activities.
3. MINT-Siegel quality mark for schools offering innovative and practical STEM education.

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Socioeconomic status

Suggestions and recommendations:

1. Ensure free access to digital equipment for all students.
2. Implement clear guidelines on the use of devices in schools (e.g., BYOD – Bring Your Own Device systems) to guarantee equality.
3. One-to-One Device Policy. In order to avoid discrimination due to the high cost of personal technology, educational institutions should apply a rule that the municipality or school provides the same digital devices to all children, prohibiting the use of personal devices in the classroom.
4. Teachers and assistants need clear written guidelines and good practices on how to deal with children of different ethnic or socioeconomic backgrounds in the classroom, so that students are not grouped solely by ethnicity or socioeconomic status and are not isolated.

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I. STEM
The impact of regional deprivation on stem education

Socioeconomic status is inextricably linked to where a child grows up.

Geographic location is often a determining factor in the quality of education and career prospects a student will receive. Therefore, the following presents how regional deprivation affects opportunities in the STEM field - from teacher shortages to the lack of opportunities to get acquainted with the technology industry in regional schools.

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Geographical location

Identified problems:

1. Rural and peripheral regions lack STEM infrastructure (laboratories, specialized teachers) and opportunities to meet industry representatives.
2. In some small regional schools, physics, chemistry or computer science subjects are sometimes not offered at all in the upper grades.

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Geographical location

Existing solutions and good practices:

1. Distance and hybrid learning platforms, virtual labs.
2. Cloud-based learning groups and future classrooms equipped with AR/VR technologies.

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Geographical location

Suggestions and recommendations:

1. Create mobile labs that travel to remote areas and regional STEM hubs.
2. Fund transportation and participation costs for girls from rural areas to attend high-level STEM programs in cities.

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I. STEM
STEM accessibility for all: from physical infrastructure to neuro-inclusive pedagogy

Inclusion is not just about accessibility. It is also about the ability to adapt the environment to everyone.

In this section, we examine why educational tools, and STEM labs often fail to meet basic accessibility standards and what systemic gaps arise from the lack of educators' competencies in working with neurodiverse students.

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Identified problems:

1. STEM labs, digital tools, and learning platforms are often not designed to meet accessibility standards for people with disabilities.
2. Educators lack training in STEM-adapted methodologies, and neurodiverse talent is often overlooked.

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Existing solutions and good practices:

1. Application of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles and assistive technologies.
2. Initiatives of the European Agency for Development in Special Needs and Inclusive Education.

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Suggestions and recommendations:

1. Make accessibility requirements mandatory when designing any STEM programs or curricula.
2. Implement specialized programs focused on developing STEM talents of neurodiverse individuals.

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Safety and recognition: the role of gender identity in educational success

To achieve full inclusion, we must also address the crucial social dimension of ***sexual orientation*** and ***gender identity***.

In a STEM environment where stereotypes still abound, transgender and non-binary students often face social isolation and administrative barriers.

In this section, we examine how these challenges affect student motivation and what support the education system lacks.

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Sexual orientation & gender identity

Identified problems:

1. Transgender and gender non-binary students experience exclusion, bullying, and administrative barriers (e.g., the use of incorrect names or pronouns in school systems).
2. Negatively impacts their attendance and engagement in STEM environments.
3. There is a lack of clear guidance for schools and teacher training on issues of sexual orientation and gender identity.

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Sexual orientation & gender identity

Existing solutions and good practices:

1. Development of safe school policies, use of inclusive language and resources provided by Belong To (Ireland) for schools.
2. Implementation of the EU LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy guidelines in educational institutions.

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Sexual orientation & gender identity

Suggestions and recommendations:

1. Require all educational institutions receiving public (including EU) funding to implement inclusive administrative systems (name/pronoun recognition) and ensure access to gender-neutral facilities.
2. Normalize the use of gender-neutral language at official events or presentations.

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Recommended action plan for organizations

1. Audit and data collection:

Regularly collect disaggregated data by gender, race, socioeconomic status, region and according to other aspects presented, in order to identify the real causes of exclusion.

2. Training for staff and educators:

Implement mandatory training on combating unconscious bias and intercultural competence for all staff.

3. Partnerships:

Develop long-term relationships between industry, schools and local community organizations to ensure mentoring and internships reach the most vulnerable groups.

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From school to professional identity: a continuing divide

Problem continuation:

Stereotypes and systemic barriers (social, economic, geographical) formed at an early stage are transferred to higher levels of study.

Problem transformation:

If at school we fought for access to basic education, in higher education the challenges become more focused on career paths, networking and self-realization.

Transition goal:

In order to ensure talent retention in the technology sector, we need to move from „promoting engagement“ to „ensuring sustainable support and inclusion“ during studies and early careers.

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Higher education and business partnership: building systemic inclusion in students' career paths

School is just the first step in developing tech talent. Further studies - universities and colleges are the critical stage in shaping future digital professionals.

In this section, we examine the strategic role of higher education and the systemic barriers that we need to overcome together: both academia and employers, who directly shape tomorrow's job market through internships, hackathons or guest lectures.

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II. ICT Higher education and vocational training

Strategic context and purpose

- ***Higher education*** (universities and colleges) is a crucial link in shaping the future talents of the digital and technology sector.
- ***The purpose*** is to identify systemic barriers faced by students and young professionals and propose structural solutions for organizations and academic institutions.

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Intersectionality in ICT sector

Professional identity in higher education and the ICT sector is shaped by the same systemic barriers that were relevant in school, but they are taking on new forms.

Student success is not determined by a single factor. Only by seeing how various aspects of identity overlap can we create real structural solutions.

Therefore, the following factors are also analyzed below: age (study time, career start), socioeconomic status (financial dependence, ability to combine work and studies), geographic location (accessibility of studies, exclusion of remote regions), disability and neurodiversity (adaptation of the study environment), sexual identity and orientation (safety and recognition in higher education).

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Identified problems:

1. Digital education systems are often oriented towards a linear, youth-oriented academic path.
2. Older people lack flexible integration options, and adults are wrongly expected to already have basic ICT skills.
3. „Clash of Clocks”, when intensive studies or retraining camps coincide with the peak of a woman’s fertility and family formation.
4. Young women in digital roles face higher standards and pressure to prove their worth, often lacking a professional network and access to visible, strategically important projects. They are unfairly confined to „junior“ positions.

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Existing solutions and good practices:

1. Global university courses, micro-credentials, modular training and market-related programs (bootcamps).
2. On-demand support services, peer learning.
3. Various national projects (e. g., Digitálni seniori, free training for 55+ and 65+ age groups, Slovakia).

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Existing solutions and good practices:

4. Structured graduate, mentoring and returner programs:

Workday: „Future Females in Tech“ (FFIT).

Technology Ireland Digital Skillnet: „Women ReBOOT“.

Deloitte Ireland ir HubSpot Dublin grįžimo į darbą programos.

Girls in STEAM Academy: READY programme.

5. Adult retraining, flexible training formats in the evenings/weekends, part-time roles and parental leave balance for both partners.

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Suggestions and recommendations:

1. Make lifelong learning a structural pillar of the digital economy with tax incentives for companies.
2. Promote intergenerational learning in the workplace and create accelerated leadership and digital skills programs for women aged 30 to 45.
3. Redefine career models by valuing non-traditional and transferable experience.

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II. ICT
Ethnic justice in technology education: from exclusion to full inclusion

When examining systemic barriers in higher education, we must consider the role of race and ethnicity. This is not just a cultural aspect - it is a factor that often shapes students' sense of belonging, access to mentoring networks, and their esteem within the academic and technology community.

In this section, we analyze why these groups often experience „invisibility" in the ICT sector and what structural barriers hinder this.

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Identified problems:

1. Teachers and lecturers are often not prepared to work with students from different cultures, which can reinforce racial and ethnic stereotypes.
2. Racial biases influence expectations – young people of colour are sometimes discouraged from pursuing ICT studies.
3. Cultural differences can lead to less family support for girls choosing a technology career.

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Existing solutions and good practices:

1. Diverse mentoring programs, community partnerships, cross-cultural coaching, and diversity strategies in recruitment.
2. CODE2040 initiative in the US.
3. Austria's LetsEmpowerAustria campaign (promoting diverse women leaders).
4. Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) and structured, bias-reducing hiring processes.

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Suggestions and recommendations:

1. Introduce mandatory anti-discrimination training for education staff.
2. Require transparency and require tech companies across the EU to record and publish diversity data in promotion and leadership chains.
3. Ensure role rotation and zero tolerance for abuse or discrimination.

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II. ICT
Barriers to integration: recognition of qualifications and access to information in migrant communities

When considering inclusion, we must also consider the aspect of ***migration background***, which creates unique challenges in higher education and vocational training.

From bureaucratic obstacles and recognition of qualifications to a lack of information about digital career opportunities, young people with a migrant background often face „invisible“ barriers that prevent them from successfully integrating into the ICT sector.

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Migration background

Identified problems:

1. Newly arrived young people do not understand the principles of the local education system, face language barriers, bureaucracy and are at high risk of choosing the wrong specialization due to lack of guidance.
2. Non-recognition of foreign diplomas and qualifications is one of the biggest obstacles, which is why migrants sometimes even tend to hide their education during interviews to avoid negative pre-existing reactions.
3. Cybersecurity or digital career opportunities are often poorly known in migrant communities.

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Existing solutions and good practices:

1. Integration classes, combining language courses and ICT skills, personal coaching.
2. Programmes specifically designed for migrants seeking to integrate faster into technology professions and apply their knowledge in the local context (e.g., Swedish programme Fast Track (Snabbspår).
3. Multilingual information sessions and cultural mediators.

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II. ICT
Migration background

Suggestions and recommendations:

1. Create specific support and mentoring programs for international students and staff to help them understand key skills and the local context, without presuming that they already know everything.
2. Activate targeted programs (internships, shadowing, industry projects) that would help successfully graduated female STEM students directly transition into the labor market and reduce the risk of them dropping out immediately after graduation.
3. At a strategic level, consider talent attraction not as a one-time action, but as a long-term support process, monitoring where talent is lost after graduation.
4. Simplify and accelerate the recognition (accreditation) of foreign qualifications and diplomas at EU level.
5. Create EU-wide talent integration platforms focused on digital roles. Develop targeted marketing and involve successful migrant role models (ambassadors).

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II. ICT
Inclusion standards: from physical accessibility to embracing neurodiversity in the ICT sector

When considering inclusion, we must acknowledge that physical and cognitive disabilities and neurodiversity are still among the biggest barriers in the ICT sector.

The following presents how insufficient environmental adaptability, entrenched myths about productivity, and inadequate selection processes separate talented people from technology careers.

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Identified problems:

1. Insufficient adaptation of physical and digital environments (inaccessible learning or UX platforms, poor pedagogical adaptations).
2. Negative preconceptions and fears about lower productivity of disabled people.
3. Long hours spent in front of a computer during studies can lead to arthritis, carpal tunnel syndrome, or neck stiffness - risk factors that are particularly sensitive and relevant for people with disabilities.
4. Neuro-differentiated individuals (e.g. on the autism spectrum) experience difficulties in standard interview processes.

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Existing solutions and good practices:

1. Accessibility consultations, assistive technology, flexible remote working options and adapted ergonomic equipment.
2. Programs for students and academics with disabilities to integrate into the job market (e.g., myAbility Talent® Program (Austria).
3. Workday and AsIAm guidelines for neuro-inclusive recruitment (e.g., asking questions before the interview).
4. Medical support, dedicated adaptation budgets.

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Suggestions and recommendations:

1. Implement the mandatory principle of „Accessibility by Design” in digital platforms for education and work.
2. Require regular accessibility audits.
3. Create special scholarship and university programs for women with disabilities.

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II. ICT
Economic exclusion as a barrier: from digital poverty to freedom of professional choice

When examining barriers in the ICT sector, we must assess socioeconomic status as a foundation that often determines inequality of opportunity even before starting a professional path.

Very often, the financial situation of the family, the lack of digital tools and the pressure to choose faster but less promising professional paths limit the opportunities of talented people to establish themselves in the technology market.

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Socioeconomic status

Identified problems:

1. Children from families with lower socio-economic status start from a worse starting position - they lack computers, good internet connection and early digital education.
2. Family pressure to earn money as quickly as possible forces girls to choose short, simple vocational training paths rather than longer and more promising ICT studies in higher education institutions.
3. Financial barriers (expensive certificates, unpaid internships) close the door to gifted talent.

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Existing solutions and good practices:

1. Computer lending programs in schools, free ICT workshops, scholarships and paid internship models. Scholarship programs for girls in technology (e.g., Komm, mach-MINT, the German scholarship portal).
2. Initiatives such as she-codes and pink programming, which provide free digital training.
3. Certification paths funded directly by employers (e.g., AWS, Azure, UX).

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Suggestions and recommendations:

1. Digital education resources must become public infrastructure, ensuring equal access for all.
2. Eliminate the requirement for a formal university degree in job advertisements where it is not necessary, focusing only on real skills (skills-based hiring).
3. Implement early introduction of digital careers in schools in all regions.
4. Activate targeted programs (internships, shadowing, industry projects) that would help successfully graduated STEM students directly transition into the labor market and reduce the risk of them dropping out immediately after graduation.

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II. ICT
Regional inequality: lack of infrastructure, logistical burdens, and stereotypes of remote work in the ICT sector

Geographical location should not be a factor in determining professional opportunities, but we still observe a pronounced regional divide in the ICT sector.

The concentration of ecosystems in major cities, the logistical burden, and the still persistent stereotypes about the effectiveness of remote work create additional barriers for talents from the periphery.

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Geographical location

Identified problems:

1. In regions outside of major cities, there is a significant lack of digital education, innovation ecosystems and job concentration.
2. It is difficult for young people from the regions to meet mentors in person or visit technology companies.
3. The logistical burden (long commutes or expensive housing in the city) becomes a double challenge for women who also perform family care functions.
4. Remote work 100% of the time sometimes creates the illusion of „lower employee efficiency“ in the eyes of managers.

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Existing solutions and good practices:

1. Digital schools, distance learning and hybrid working platforms, regional technology hubs.
2. European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIH) and regional initiatives such as EmpoWomen.
3. Companies creating „secondary offices“ or regional technology hubs in peripheral areas.

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Suggestions and recommendations:

1. Empower governments and municipalities to create and fund local women's digital hubs.
2. Strengthen the European network of regional innovation hubs and ensure that remote workers have full equal opportunities to advance in their careers.

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II. ICT
Cultural and administrative barriers: ensuring psychological safety and inclusion in the ICT sector

When considering inclusion in the ICT sector, we must also discuss gender identity and sexual orientation, aspects that still face significant resistance in the technology culture.

The lack of competences of educators, the dominance of patriarchal norms and administrative barriers create an environment in which LGBTQ+ community representatives are forced to choose self - censorship over professional disclosure

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Sexual orientation & gender identity

Identified problems:

1. In educational institutions, teachers are often not prepared to work with LGBTQ+ students, and there is a lack of digital literacy programs tailored to these groups.
2. In the male and patriarchal ICT culture, exclusion, stereotyping („girls are not good at tech”) and lack of psychological safety persist.
3. Informal „no ask-no tell” policies often operate in workplaces, forcing people to self-censor.
4. Transgender and gender non-binary people face administrative barriers in systems, rejection in customer service or public roles, and lack of knowledge from managers.

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Sexual orientation & gender identity

Existing solutions and good practices:

1. Development of codes of conduct for institutions, transparent gender equality policies and support networks.
2. NGO initiatives to help companies implement LGBTQ+ friendly policies and conduct monitoring (Diversity Net@Work, Arcigay organization in Italy, SAPLINQ, Slovakia, etc.).
3. Digital Navigator (LGBT Technology Partnership) program guidelines for workplaces (Transgender Equality Network - TENI, USA, Ireland)

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Suggestions and recommendations:

1. Incorporate human rights, diversity, and anti-discrimination topics into faculty and student training programs.
2. Ensure respectful use of chosen names and pronouns in internal systems.
3. Create dedicated safe spaces for LGBTQ+ women and transgender individuals who have chosen the digital path.

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Recommended action plan for organizations

1. Organizational culture and policy formation

- **Inclusion audit:** regularly assess not only admission rates, but also student/staff experiences (e.g., anonymous surveys on psychological safety).
- **Zero tolerance policy:** clearly define the consequences of discrimination and bullying, including administrative barriers (e.g. use of pronouns, ensuring accessibility).
- **Training for managers and teachers:** mandatory seminars on neurodiversity, implicit bias and LGBTQ+ inclusion.

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Recommended action plan for organizations

2. Financial and material support mechanisms

- **Targeted scholarships: c**reate support funds for students from socially vulnerable groups that would cover not only the cost of studies, but also living expenses and technical equipment (laptops, internet access).
- **Accessibility Funds:** collaboration between companies and universities to fund expensive certifications (e.g., Cisco, AWS, Google Cloud) that often become a barrier to low-income talent.

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Recommended action plan for organizations

3. Partnerships and Practical Inclusion

- **Inclusive Internships and Hackathons: c**ompanies that offer internships must ensure that the selection process is accessible to neurodiverse individuals (e.g., homework assignments instead of stressful in-person interviews).
- **Regional Mentoring:** create hybrid mentoring programs where technology professionals interact remotely with students from regional schools or colleges, reducing geographic isolation.
- **Paid Internships:** eliminate unpaid internships that automatically discriminate against financially disadvantaged students.

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Recommended action plan for organizations

4. Infrastructure Adaptation

- **Universal Design:** ensure that all virtual learning platforms and UX labs meet the highest standards for digital accessibility (WCAG).

- **Ergonomics standards:** foster a healthy work culture – introduce ergonomics training that helps to avoid health risks specific to ICT professions.

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Recommended action plan for organizations

5. Continuous monitoring and correction

- **Intersectional data:** collect data not only on gender, but also on other factors (geographical origin, socioeconomic status). The goal is to see which groups are „dropping out“ of the system.
- **Feedback loops:** include students from minority groups in study program development committees so that decisions are made with them, not for them.

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From talent development to career growth

The journey into the technology sector does not end after graduation - it is just beginning.

As we move from academic education to the real world of work, we face a new phase of challenges. In this section, we examine ***early and mid-career.***

We identify systemic barriers that women face in their professional journeys, and we provide tools for managers and HR professionals to create an inclusive and equitable work culture

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III. Early and mid-career digital roles

Strategic context and purpose

The toolkit aims to present the key systemic, organisational and technological challenges faced by women in early and mid-career digital roles.

The purpose of the document is to help managers and human resources (HR) professionals identify intersectional barriers and implement best practices to ensure equality in the digital sector.

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III. Early and mid-career digital roles
The age spectrum in ICT careers: challenges of stereotypes, competency assessment and professional continuity

When examining early and mid-career, we must acknowledge that age is not simply a number. It is a factor that interacts with gender and creates unique barriers.

How stereotypes about being „too young“ or „too old“ professionals, combined with the pressure to balance career and family, create a „leaky pipeline“ effect in which talented women leave the technology sector.

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III. Early and mid-career digital roles

Age

Identified problems:

1. **Early and mid-career barriers:** younger women face disproportionately high demands to prove their worth and are often relegated to "junior" positions, even if they have the skills. They also often don't get visible, strategically important projects.
2. **Ageism and stereotypes:** older women (or those changing careers between 30 and 45) face assumptions that their technological knowledge is outdated or that they are too old for new opportunities.
3. **Family and career balance:** early and mid-career often coincides with starting a family. Women face discrimination due to assumptions that at a certain age they will have young children and be less productive. Returning from maternity leave in the tech sector is particularly challenging due to the rapid pace of technological change. Lack of systematic organizational support for women returning to work after a longer break, leading many to decide to leave the tech sector altogether (leaky pipeline).

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Existing solutions and good practices:

Mentoring and flexible programs:

- Structured mentoring, sponsorship, and reverse mentoring programs.
- Initiatives: Workday's Future Females in Tech (FFIT), Technology Ireland Digital Skillnet's Women ReBOOT, and Deloitte Ireland and HubSpot Dublin's Returners programs.

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Age

Suggestions and recommendations:

- **Structured and objective assessment systems**

Remove subjectivity from promotion decisions. Implement clear, measurable KPIs (key performance indicators) and blind competency reviews to reduce unconscious bias.

- **Targeted mentoring and sponsorship programs**

Assign women mentors and executive-level sponsors who actively help them navigate organizational politics, open doors to important projects, and increase their visibility in the eyes of management.

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Suggestions and recommendations:

- **Returnship programs:**

Create special adaptation programs for women returning from maternity or career breaks. This includes technical knowledge refresher courses, adoption of AI tools, and flexible integration periods.

- **AI literacy and upskilling initiatives:**

Ensure that female employees in junior specialist positions receive priority training to work with AI tools, thereby transforming their roles, not eliminating them.

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III. Early and mid-career digital roles

Addressing systemic barriers to ethnic minorities in ICT career paths

When examining career barriers, we must consider how race and ethnicity interact with other factors to shape the hierarchies of the technology sector.

Systemic underrepresentation and the glass ceiling are important.

Why ethnic minority women often remain at the operational level, never reaching strategic leadership positions ?

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Race & Ethnicity

Identified problems:

- **Lack of representation:** systemic lack of racialized and ethnic minority women in digital and leadership roles.
- **Bias in selection:** unconscious bias in hiring and promotion processes.
- **Cultural isolation:** separation from informal company networks and cultural stereotypes. Ethnic minority representatives are sometimes targeted only for operational roles, not strategic ones.

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Race & Ethnicity

Existing solutions and good practices:

1. Structured hiring: diverse selection panels and transparent, bias-reducing processes.

2. Initiatives: CODE2040 initiative in the US, DCU Race Equality Framework and Action Plan 2025–2028.

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Race & Ethnicity

Suggestions and recommendations:

- Require companies to track and publish diversity data in promotion and executive selection chains.
- Use neutral AI digital avatars for initial candidate assessment.

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From Race & Ethnicity to Migration background

Having discussed how race and ethnicity shape a person's experiences and opportunities, through the prism of intersectionality, we understand that identity is not made up of isolated parts. It is like a complex, multi-layered fabric.

When including migration background, it is important to emphasize that these two factors often do not operate separately but rather reinforce each other.

For a person belonging to a certain ethnic group, migration status in the labor market can become an additional „filter" that changes how they are perceived and valued.

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Migration background

Identified problems:

1. **Recognition of qualifications:** non-recognition of diplomas and experience acquired abroad, which is why migrants sometimes even hide their education during interviews to avoid negative reactions.
2. **Integration barriers:** lack of understanding of the subtleties of the local labor market, language barriers and lack of professional contacts.

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Migration background

Existing solutions and good practices:

1. Integration and language programs: combining digital skills training with language support and targeted onboarding.
2. Implementation of various programs for migrants to integrate into the technology sector (e.g., Fast Track (Snabbspår), Sweden).

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Migration background

Suggestions and recommendations:

- Simplify the recognition of foreign qualifications at EU level and create EU - wide talent integration platforms.

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III. Early and mid-career digital roles

Disability as a systemic filter in career growth

When examining intersectionality in women's early and mid-career, we must include another crucial component - ***disability***. It acts as an additional systemic filter that, when intertwined with other aspects of identity, shapes a unique experience.

Here not only are we confronted with glass ceilings, but also with physical and digital barriers that often become invisible brakes on career growth.

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Disability

Identified problems:

1. Unadapted environment: unadopted physical workplaces and inaccessible digital tools.
2. Productivity attitudes: disability is still wrongly perceived as a direct source of additional costs or a barrier to productivity. Companies tend to hire only those with „mild disabilities” to formally fill quotas.
3. Health issues in the tech sector: specific issues, such as carpal tunnel syndrome or arthritis, are particularly relevant for women in tech.

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Disability

Existing solutions and good practices:

1. Accessibility and technology: remote working options, ergonomic workplaces and assistive technologies.
2. Initiatives: EU initiative InclusiVR@Work (using VR for workplace adaptation), myAbility Talent® program in the DACH region, Eva in Rosso (support for menstrual/reproductive health disorders), AsIAm and Workday neuro-inclusive hiring guidelines (e.g. providing interview questions in advance).

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Disability

Suggestions and recommendations:

- Make accessibility a baseline requirement and include people with disabilities in the design of systems and processes.

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III. Early and mid-career digital roles

The impact of financial and social barriers on careers

If disability often becomes an „invisible“ barrier, then ***socioeconomic status*** acts as an „initial barrier“ that determines access to professional growth opportunities.

At this stage, financial resources and social capital often become decisive factors that separate those who can advance from those who remain trapped by systemic inequality

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Socioeconomic status

Identified problems:

1. Financial barriers: expensive digital training, certifications, and unpaid internships limit access for less affluent individuals.
2. Lack of capital and networks: inaccessibility of influential networks (especially in countries with a strong „personal culture“) and lack of finance to start one’s own business.

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Socioeconomic status

Existing solutions and good practices:

- Free training and funding: free digital literacy programs and direct employer funding for certificates.
- Initiatives: she-codes and pink programming initiatives, corporate scholarships for STEM students (e.g., Uisce Éireann).

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Socioeconomic status

Suggestions and recommendations:

- Remove formal university degree requirements from digital job descriptions where they are not necessary and focus on real skills (skills-based hiring).

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III. Early and mid-career digital roles

Regional divide: between „office culture“ and career opportunities

When examining the factors that shape women’s career trajectories, we must also consider ***geographic location***.

It acts as another systemic filter, as even in the digital age, professional opportunities are still concentrated in major centers. When career opportunities remain „tied“ to major cities or offices, women face a double burden: logistical challenges and still persistent „office presence“ standards that unfairly value location over actual productivity.

This creates structural inequalities that particularly affect women living in the regions, limiting their opportunities to pursue careers without additional logistical or personal burdens.

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Geographical location

Identified problems:

1. Concentration of opportunities: concentration of talent and large companies in big cities; limited innovation and career opportunities in the regions.
2. Logistical burden: long commutes or expensive relocations, which become a double burden for women with family care responsibilities.
3. A stagnant attitude towards flexibility: organizations still have a perception that an employee who works overtime in the office is more „loyal“ and more deserving of a promotion than someone who works a flexible schedule or from home.

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Geographical location

Existing solutions and good practices:

- Remote work and regional hubs: development of remote/hybrid work practices and local digital hubs.
- Initiatives: EmpoWomen programme, European Digital Innovation Hubs, etc.

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Geographical location

Suggestions and recommendations:

- Ensure that employees who work remotely are not discriminated against in terms of promotions or visibility.

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III. Early and mid-career digital roles

Barriers to equality and inclusion in the workplace

The authenticity of each employee is an organizational strength, but today's culture still creates circumstances in which some colleagues feel forced to hide their identity.

The existing fear of negative evaluation and the specific barriers that transgender and non-binary people face become an obstacle to building a real, trust-based team. Therefore, it is necessary to address them so that no employee experiences exclusion.

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III. Early and mid-career digital roles

Sexual orientation & gender identity

Identified problems:

1. Discrimination and psychological safety: risk of rejection, self-censorship and informal „no ask-no tell“ policies in the workplace.
2. Barriers for transgender people: transgender and gender non-binary people face a hostile culture, administrative barriers (in documents) and obstacles in roles that directly contact customers.

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Sexual orientation & gender identity

Existing solutions and good practices:

1. Inclusive policies and networks: LGBTQ+ employee resource groups, inclusive HR guidelines and management training.
2. Initiatives: Arcigay's Diversity Net@Work in Italy, LGBT Technology Partnership's Digital Navigator, TENI (Transgender Equality Network, Ireland) guidelines for workplaces.

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Sexual orientation & gender identity

Suggestions and recommendations:

- Implement respectful use of names and pronouns, review HR systems to remove structural barriers for transgender individuals.

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III. Early and mid-career digital roles

Recommended action plan for organizations

- Use blind CV review and diverse selection committees.
- Eliminate redundant university education requirements, focus on practical skills.
- Implement intergenerational and reverse mentoring (young people teaching older people about innovation and vice versa).
- Ensure remote work is available so that location or physical disability does not limit career growth.
- Track and audit data on promotions, salaries, and project allocations based on diversity indicators.
- It is recommended that the organization implement HR analytics tools that would allow monitoring the distribution of women at different career levels, the gender pay gap, and employee turnover rates in digital divisions.

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Leadership potential and organizational diversity

Moving from early or mid-level digital roles to strategic leadership positions is a crucial stage in an organization's growth. However, this path is not linear and the same for every employee.

Looking through the prism of intersectionality, it becomes clear that the opportunity to achieve ***leadership positions*** depends not only on individual competencies, but also on how age, race, ethnicity and migration background, socio-economic status, geography, maternity and paternity status, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity shape an employee's experience in the organization.

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The impact of stereotypes on leadership

Moving into leadership positions requires not only professional excellence, but also confidence, which is often distorted by ***age*** related prejudices.

The often-observed challenges experienced by different age groups show that the „leader image“ is still heavily influenced by stereotypes that hinder the development of talent and limit the diversity of the management team.

Younger professionals have to overcome doubts about their competence, and older colleagues have to fight unfounded stereotypes about their professional flexibility.

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Age

Identified problems:

1. Younger managers and professionals are often seen as inexperienced, held to higher standards, and their competence and authority are questioned.
2. When young people speak confidently, they are often mistakenly perceived as „arrogant“.
3. Older workers (30 - 45+ years old) face prejudice, have difficulty adapting to technology, and face a variety of discriminatory obligations.

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Existing solutions and good practices:

1. Global initiative to advance women's leadership in public ICT of the EU and its Member States, aimed at strengthening women's positions in the ICT sector.
2. Specialized programs aimed at developing self-confidence and leadership skills in young women at an early stage of their careers (HEC Paris „Women Leadership Program"), READY program (Girls in STEAM Academy), Women ReBOOT, Workday FFIT, myAbility Talent® Program).

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Age

Suggestions and recommendations:

1. Implement reverse mentoring, where a younger, more digitally savvy employee works with an older manager to bridge the skills and experience gap.
2. Anonymize age in selection processes and track exit reasons for women aged 35-50.

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IV. Leadership positions

The impact of race and ethnicity on leadership trajectories

To ensure an inclusive leadership culture, we must recognize that ***race and ethnicity*** shape career opportunities.

Organizations still have systemic barriers that prevent talented minorities from advancing in their careers and unduly limit their ability to reach the highest levels of leadership.

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Race & Ethnicity

Identified problems:

1. Representatives of racial and ethnic minorities experience „invisibility“ and slower career advancement.
2. In assessing candidates, the practice of „cultural fit“ is deeply rooted, which often becomes a subconscious means of discrimination (those who do not conform to dominant social norms, dress, or speech styles are rejected).
3. Women from ethnic minorities face structural neglect, cultural stereotypes and severe underrepresentation at the highest levels of management (executive and board level).

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Existing solutions and good practices:

1. Founderland, GTA Black Women in Tech, etc. platforms and communities offering support, networking, and investment attraction to minority groups in the digital sector.

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Race & Ethnicity

Suggestions and recommendations:

1. Apply name-blind screening and publicly announce clear and transparent promotion criteria before selections.
2. Introduce targeted sponsorship programs and cross-cultural training for managers.
3. Introduce evaluation criteria for the selection process itself, in order to eliminate their implicit bias.

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IV. Leadership positions

Migration background: systemic barriers to professional growth

To ensure an inclusive leadership culture, we must acknowledge the specific challenges faced by workers with a ***migrant background***.

While these professionals often bring unique experiences and competencies, various legal and administrative barriers often become a „glass ceiling“ that limits their ability to advance to strategic leadership levels.

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Migration background

Identified problems:

1. Temporary work permits (visas) cause legal insecurity, so companies avoid appointing such employees to stable management positions.
2. Non-recognition of qualifications acquired abroad, bureaucratic and language barriers, lack of professional networks in local markets.

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Migration background

Existing solutions and good practices:

1. EU-funded integration and training programmes to facilitate the integration of professionals into the local digital economy.
2. Effective use of the Blue Cards system to attract talent.

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Migration background

Suggestions and recommendations:

1. Accelerate the recognition of foreign diplomas and competencies within the organization, integrate digital training with linguistic support.
2. Provide linguistic support (e.g., business/technical language courses) and value multicultural experience as an advantage for company innovation.

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IV. Leadership positions

Disability and accessibility: barriers to leadership and the work environment

To create an organization where leadership opportunities are accessible to all, it is necessary to remove the physical, digital, and psychological barriers that employees with disabilities face.

The current environmental and attitudinal deficiencies not only complicate daily work, but also unduly limit the opportunities for talented individuals to occupy leadership positions.

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Disability

Identified problems:

1. Digital tools, dashboards, and work environments are often not accessible to people with disabilities.
2. Technological work can also cause specific physical problems (e.g., carpal tunnel syndrome, arthritis), which affect women more.
3. There is a prejudice that people with disabilities cannot be productive leaders.

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Existing solutions and good practices:

1. Disability Leadership Programmes which specifically prepare disabled people for leadership roles.
2. Publicising success stories.
3. Specialised institutes for disabled people.
4. Initiatives: myAbility Talent® Program (in the DACH region), disability leadership programmes (e.g., the Austrian Verein Right Now).

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Suggestions and recommendations:

1. Ensure that leadership positions held by people with disabilities have real scope, not just a title.
2. Conduct mandatory inclusion seminars for all employees.
3. Provide dedicated budgets for workplace adaptation and ergonomics.

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IV. Leadership positions

Socioeconomic status: barriers to „elitism“ in leadership

To ensure an inclusive leadership culture, we must acknowledge that ***socioeconomic status*** is often one of the main barriers to who can move up the career ladder.

In the digital sector, these barriers often manifest as systemic „elitism“ that unduly limits the opportunities for talented women from lower-income backgrounds to occupy strategic leadership roles.

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Socioeconomic status

Identified problems:

1. „Elitism“ – leadership paths are often only open to those who have graduated from certain prestigious universities or have strong personal and financial connections.
2. Internships, expensive certification courses, and expensive networking events create barriers for lower-income talent.

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Existing solutions and good practices:

1. Targeted scholarships and joint public-private sector upskilling programs
2. She-codes, pink programming initiatives.

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Suggestions and recommendations:

1. Apply „school-blind screening“ - assessing only real digital skills and completed projects (blind portfolio reviews), and not the prestige of the higher education institution.
2. Completely abandon unpaid internships and transform them into fairly paid internships, so that they are accessible to everyone, regardless of the financial situation of their parents.

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IV. Leadership positions

Between career expectations and stereotypes

To create an inclusive leadership environment, we need to assess how ***motherhood and fatherhood*** affect career progression.

Unfortunately, outdated beliefs still prevail in the digital sector that mistakenly view ***motherhood*** as an obstacle, rather than a personal experience that enriches leadership skills.

These stereotypes often become invisible barriers that prevent women from aspiring to occupy strategic leadership roles.

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IV. Leadership positions

Maternity (parental) status

Identified problems:

1. „Motherhood penalty“: the assumption that women with children will be less committed to their work, unable to work “24/7”, which is often unofficially required in leadership.
2. Parental leave is seen as a „career end“ or a pause after which employees no longer receive high-visibility projects.
3. Friction arises between parents and employees without children, as the latter are unfairly expected to work constant overtime.

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Maternity (parental) status

Existing solutions and good practices:

1. „Familie und Beruf“ program (Austria) – helps companies implement family-friendly personnel policies.
2. „Nannies of the Neighbourhood“ program (Greece) – a state-supported neighborhood nannies system that helps working parents combine career and childcare (from 2 months to 2.5 years).

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Maternity (parental) status

Suggestions and recommendations:

1. Measure actual work outcomes and output, not hours worked; limit after-hours work requests.
2. Ensure flexible and hybrid working arrangements, inclusive parental leave for both parents and return-to-work programmes.
3. Protect progression after care breaks, both legally and culturally.

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IV. Leadership positions

The impact of distance on career trajectory

In a digital world where technology is supposed to eliminate physical distances, ***geographical location*** still remains one of the factors shaping unequal opportunities for leadership.

Centralized professional life often becomes an obstacle for talent working outside of metropolitan areas, creating a problem of „invisibility“ that negatively affects career progression.

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IV. Leadership positions
Geographical location

Identified problems:

1. Concentration of digital opportunities and leadership networks in major cities.
2. People living in the regions face poorer infrastructure.
3. Remote workers are sometimes treated as less efficient or invisible, and therefore less likely to be promoted.

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Geographical location

Existing solutions and good practices:

- EmpoWomen initiative, supporting female innovators and leaders from less developed regions of Europe.

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Geographical location

Suggestions and recommendations:

- Decentralize the digital economy - invest in regional infrastructure, create digital hubs in smaller towns.
- Ensure hybrid leadership models so that remote participants have equal voice and visibility in strategic meetings.

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IV. Leadership positions

The impact of stereotypes on leadership culture

To achieve true equality, it is necessary to review how the image of a „leader“ is formed in organizations.

Sexual orientation and gender identity often become criteria through which subconscious assessments are transmitted, shaping not only who is considered a „proper“ leader, but also who can reach the highest levels of decision-making.

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Sexual orientation & gender identity

Identified problems:

1. Fear of discrimination in conservative or male-dominated digital environments forces employees to hide their identities (psychological safety decreases).
2. Administrative HR barriers, misgendering in systems that are designed based solely on a binary model.
3. Transgender and non-binary individuals face systemic exclusion, misgendering, administrative barriers, and hostility, especially if the work involves customer service.

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Sexual orientation & gender identity

Existing solutions and good practices:

1. EU LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025, which obliges companies to strengthen inclusion policies.
2. EUGAIN (European Network For Gender Balance in Informatics) – a network dedicated to ensuring gender balance in the fields of informatics and digital technologies.
3. Initiatives: Arcigay Diversity Net@Work network, Open Doors Employer's Toolkit for LGBTQ+ Inclusion.

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IV. Leadership positions

Sexual orientation & gender identity

Suggestions and recommendations:

1. Conduct an audit of HR systems – adapt them to non-binary identities, provide training, ensure inclusive HR practices.
2. Officially support and encourage LGBTQ+ employee networks and conduct awareness campaigns within the company.
3. Support LGBTQ+ employee networks and ensure zero tolerance for harassment.
4. Develop an organizational culture that values diverse leadership styles. Train managers to recognize unconscious bias when assessing employee potential.
5. Ensure that the selection criteria for management positions are clear, measurable and accessible to all. It is recommended to use independent evaluation committees and ensure gender balance in candidate lists.

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Recommended action plan for organizations

1. Set measurable targets: diversity and intersectional inclusion indicators should be included in the annual targets of the board and management teams (measurable diversity targets).
2. Link results to rewards managers' performance evaluation and financial incentives (bonuses) should be directly linked to the achievement of inclusion indicators in their teams (link performance to inclusion outcomes).
3. Diversity in selection panels: ensure that the committees that select employees and award promotions are themselves diverse (diverse interview panels), thereby reducing the risk of subjectivity and unconscious bias.

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Recommended action plan for organizations

4. Annual transparency (Data analysis): publish internal anonymized diversity data annually, monitor age, race and gender trends in selection and retention. Seek to assess where career bottlenecks occur (publish diversity data annually).

5. Link results to accountability: directly link performance evaluation and bonuses for managers to the implementation of inclusion and psychological safety goals in teams.

6. Assess the organizational environment holistically, understanding that different groups of women (depending on their additional experiences or backgrounds) face different levels of barriers.

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Call to Action: Building Inclusive Digital Cultures Together

- Each organization is encouraged to adapt these slides to fit its unique needs, culture, and specific operations.
- We invite you to continuously enhance this framework with your own recommendations, share your best practices, and educate your team members on the action plans you implement.
- Let's strengthen the digital culture of organizations together.

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Proponents of the Toolkit

The Organization Briefing Toolkit was generated in the Connecting Women in Digital (WIDCON) project, during Thematic Working Group 4 (TWG4) at the expert leadership empowerment meetings dedicated to better intersectional inclusion in digital leadership.

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