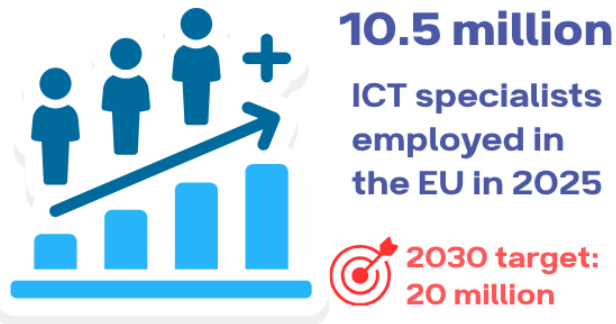


Europe's digital talent shortage has a leadership gap inside

— Closing it means seeing where women's ICT careers actually stall.

Why this matters...



Based on current progress, the EU is on track to reach just around 12 million by 2030: a **shortfall of 7-8 million people that the digital economy needs, yet does not have.**



< 1 in 5
of ICT
experts are
women

Share has barely
moved in 10 years

Women match or outperform men on several digital education indicators – so the **shortage cannot simply be explained by a lack of qualified women.**



39%

higher
likelihood to
outperform
financially

Related to companies with more gender-diverse leadership teams. This makes the leadership gap an **economic issue**, rather than only a fairness one.



Europe is short of digital talent, and is not making use of the qualified women it already has – and the cost of that is measurable, not just symbolic.

Why fewer women reach the top in ICT specifically

4 mechanisms backed by research



1. Evaluation Bias

When criteria like “leadership potential” are loosely defined, evaluators tend to credit a man’s success to his own ability and a woman’s success to her team or circumstances. This quietly tilts who appears “ready” for promotion.

2. Unequal access to visible projects

The high-profile assignments that build a case for promotion are often handed out informally by managers, not through open competition – and that allocation skews towards men.



3. Weaker sponsorship

A sponsor is a senior person, who actively advocates for someone’s promotion, unlike a mentor that mainly gives advice. Sponsors tend to back people similar to themselves – and most senior technical leaders today are men.

4. A narrow idea of ‘looking like a leader’

In engineering-heavy environments, traits that read as ‘leadership-ready’ – such as technical assertiveness and comfort with risk – are often culturally coded as masculine, regardless of whether or not they affect actual leadership skill.

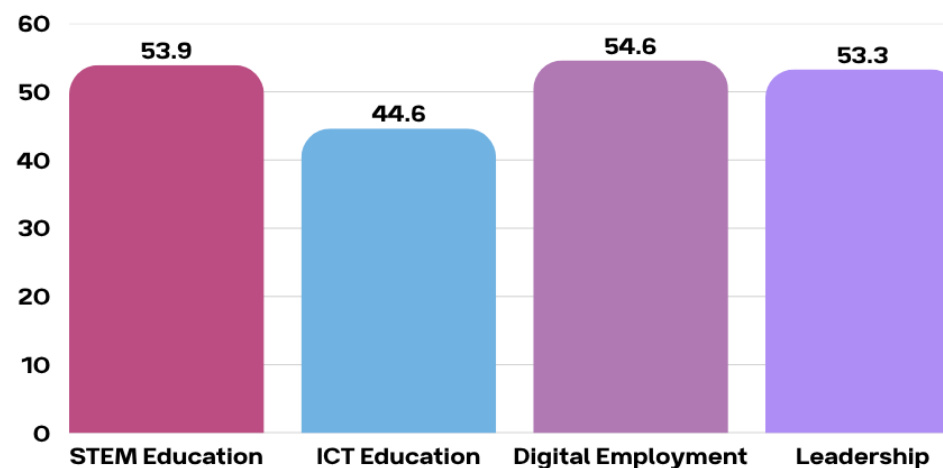


None of these four mechanisms is disputed in research literature. What is missing here is EU data on how strongly each one operates specifically in ICT – and at which career stage.

Where the gap actually opens

HOW TO READ THIS:

The Women in Digital Index assesses gender equality across four phases of the digital-talent pipeline. Each phase combines several indicators into a normalised score from 0 to 100. A lower score indicates weaker performance on the gender-equality indicators included in that phase.



Source: Women in Digital Index, Connecting Women in Digital, 2025.

WHAT THIS MEANS...

ICT education records the lowest EU-average score. Leadership scores similarly to STEM education and digital employment. The results therefore confirm that gender inequalities persist across the pipeline, including at leadership level, but they do not identify where women's progression stalls or which mechanisms prevent promotion. That is the evidence gap this Brief seeks to address.



The data gap in plain terms



What EU and national statistics already track well

Enrolment and graduation rates in STEM / ICT education



Entry-level employment in ICT



Overall participation of women in digital jobs



What current monitoring does not capture

who gets promoted into a first ICT management role, & how that differs by gender



how long that promotion takes, by gender



which of the four barriers above matters most, and what career stage



In economic terms: we measure the inputs (education, entry-level jobs) reasonably well, but not the one output – promotion – where the barriers above would be expected to show up most clearly.