***Bridging the Digital Gender Divide***

***INTRODUCTION***

In September 2016, the Mayor of Milan set up the office of Councillor for Digital Transformation and Citizen Services, calling Mrs. Roberta Cocco for the role. Since then, the work of this office developed along four different pillars: Infrastructure, Services, Digital Education and Digital Competences. These last two fields has been and still are the very core of our work to increase girls and women participation to all the different STEM careers and training, giving them all the information and chances to pursue a scientific / technological career, furthermore enhancing the existing competences.

This intent took shape in the first edition of #STEMintheCity (the new edition is being prepared for the spring of 2018), an event that took place on April 27th-28th-29th , 2017, with the aim of spreading the technical-scientific culture between the new generations, creating new training and professional opportunities, breaking gender stereotypes that divert girls from the "STEM paths”. The events were divided into three main areas – Technical & Coding, Soft Skills & Personal Branding and Digital Marketing – and consisted of technical, digital and soft skills trainings, hackathons, sessions for inspiring girls with tech role models, conferences and many other activities.

***QUESTIONS***

***1.***                 ***What approaches and examples of good practices are available to increase Internet access and digital literacy of women and girls, including in decision-making processes on Internet public policy?***

The problems that women encounter in their approach to technology can be summarized as follows:

Availability:  limitations by status, school degree, accessing to a good connection or even to public places;

Affordability: limitations by reduced financial resources;

Sociocultural barriers: limitations by gender roles, norms and stereotypes that reduce available time and mobility;

Legislation, policies or practices: limitations by  discriminatory policies that bar access to certain services to women;

Education, capacity and skills development: limitations by illiteracy and a lack of digital skills (or in many cases just confidence);

Privacy, security, trust and safety risks: limitation by being a target of harassing behaviors, such as online harassment and violence against women;

Relevant content, applications and services: limitation by not creating contents/instruments specifically crafted for women, or blocking/censoring  gender-related content;

ICT development, policy and governance: limitation by not having many women in technology-related careers, especially in leadership positions and in Internet governance decision-making structures.

So, a simple solution: we should support every kind of initiative that helps girls and women approaching technology and increasing their knowledge and confidence.

***2.***                  ***What approaches and examples of good practices are available to promote the access and use of ICTs by small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in developing and least-developed countries, particularly those owned/managed by women, in order to achieve greater participation in the digital economy?***

The basis of this process could only be a good campaign of digital education, putting in the right highlight the costs/benefits relationship:
- digital helps lightening the workload, decreasing clients’ pressure and stress, reducing the possibility of human errors;

- even most trivial tasks become less alienating: a lot of work may be done online, in many cases directly by the client;

- there is time to interact with colleagues to share skills and experiences and find together useful solutions to solve special cases;

- less alienating tasks mean increased satisfaction, efficiency, loyalty and job motivation.

***3.***                  ***Which are the available sources and mechanisms for measuring women's participation in the digital economy with focus on SMEs and micro-enterprises?***

It could be useful to aggregate gender-related data, especially in areas in which a lot of small enterprises and start-ups are present, including medium/long term entrepreneurial success data, to fine tune women’s participation in business, apart from all false perspectives and “bubble perception effects”, for designing suitable and efficient policies for entrepreneur women.

***4.***                  ***What measures/policies could be envisioned in order to foster the role of women as entrepreneurs and managers of SMEs, specifically in developing and least-developed countries?***

Promoting case studies of females which succeeded in their lives/professions as a measure and an example of women’s achievements.

***5.***                  ***What are the gaps in addressing these challenges?***

The importance of favoring women’s careers as entrepreneurs as an important economic flywheel could not ever be stressed enough.

***6.***                  ***How can they be addressed and what is the role of governments?***

Again, supporting initiatives to overcome differences, prejudices and obstacles for women to approach technology and related careers.

***SUMMARY***

In September 2016, the Mayor of Milan set up the office of Councillor for Digital Transformation and Citizen Services. Since then, the very core of our work is to increase girls and women participation to all the different STEM careers and training, giving them all the information and chances to pursue a scientific / technological career, furthermore enhancing the existing competences.

For this very purpose #STEMintheCity was born, consisting of technical, digital and soft skills trainings, hackathons, sessions for inspiring girls with tech role models, conferences and many other activities.

This is our way of bridging the digital gender divide: supporting every kind of initiatives that help girls and women to approach technology and increase their knowledge and confidence and overcome differences, prejudices and obstacls, promoting ICT as a way to lighten workload and reduce errors, monitoring women’s participation in the digital economy and promoting case studies about successful females.