

## Interface3

### Belgium - 1988- Ongoing

#### Promoting women's participation in ICT

##### Summary

Interface3 offers modules on awareness raising, initiation and training in information and communication technologies (ICT). It provides orientation modules that allow women to explore careers in different computing professions, and offers qualifying and certified training schemes that lead to employment in computing professions (such as systems and network administrator, web application designer, webmaster) or in professions that intensively use computing tools (such as administrative assistant).

Since the end of the 1980s, the rise in use of personal computers (PCs), ICTs and social networks launched a revolution in all sectors of economic activity, particularly affecting jobs in the service sectors. Less than 20 % of professionals working in new ICTs in Belgium are women. These are the jobs of the future and it is of the utmost importance to facilitate women's access to these professions.

The objective of Interface3 is to enhance women's employability in the ICT sector or in profession requiring ICT skills. The activities exclusively target women and, specifically, women with low education levels or women encountering other social disadvantages.

It targets women in order to combat under-representation of women in these professions and to offer training specifically adapted to women with low level qualifications. The goal is to contribute towards closing the gender gap in ICT.

Interface3 interacts with a number of enterprises in the public and private sectors in order to organise the training sessions and promote job insertion for the trainees.

It was established in the 1980s, and has worked well for more than 25 years. There have been significant positive achievements. Around 70% of trainees get a job in the 6 months following the training. Every year, following the training, 75 to 100 women have taken up ICT jobs.

Interface3 focuses on social inclusion through access to quality employment and pays attention to the accumulation of disadvantages for certain groups of women, due to the intersection of gender and other social inequalities.

The need to challenge stereotypes and to affirm women in their choice of considering a career in the ICT sector is a core concern of Interface3 action.

#### Combatting women's underrepresentation in the technological revolution, a European objective

Only 30% of the approximately 7 million people working in the ICT sector in the EU are women, according to the Europe 2020 flagship initiative "Digital Agenda for Europe". They are under-represented at all levels in the ICT sector, especially in decision-making positions. The ICT sector is growing rapidly, creating around 120,000 new jobs every year. Due to differences in demands and skills, and despite soaring unemployment, there could be a lack of 900,000 skilled ICT workers in 2020. A study<sup>1</sup> by the European Commission on women active in the ICT sector in October 2013, found that allowing more women to enter the digital jobs market could create an annual 9 billion EUR GDP boost in the EU area. Policy change is needed, particularly because of an alarming drop in ICT women graduates. Only 29 out of every 1000

<sup>1</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/news/bringing-more-women-eu-digital-sector-would-bring-€9-billion-annual-gdp-boost>

women graduates currently have a computing or related degree, and only 4 go on to work in ICT-related activities.

One way to reverse this trend is to encourage young people, and in particular women, to take up an ICT-related career.

The report "Women active in the ICT sector"<sup>2</sup>, published in 2013 by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology, outlines that, despite strong evidence regarding the importance of fully incorporating women into the ICT sector, a gender ICT gap still remains in Europe. European women do not take up ICT studies and they are under-represented in the ICT sector, particularly in technical and decision-making positions. Women's active participation in the ICT sector is essential for Europe's long-term growth and economic sustainability.

As outlined in the Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019: gender gaps remain in many areas, and in the labour market women are still over-represented in lower paid sectors and under-represented in decision-making positions. On the other hand, economic and business benefits can be gained from enhancing gender equality. In order to achieve the objectives of Europe 2020 for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, the potential and the talent pool of women need to be used more extensively and more efficiently.

In Belgium, the proportion of women in ICT jobs is less than 20%. The proportion of women amongst students of information technologies in tertiary education is lower than 10%, in all regions.

Jobs in the ICT sector are generally interesting, well paid and provide opportunities for making a career<sup>3</sup>.

The training in ICT provided by Interface3 reflects and responds to these European issues and goals. Interface3 believes that women can access job opportunities in ICT and can take part in the development of the sector. However, there are numerous barriers across the ICT field, one of them being the gendered stereotypes associated with ICT. The need to struggle against stereotypes and to convince women to consider jobs in the ICT sector is a core concern for Interface3 action.

## Attracting women to ICT

The training schemes run by Interface3 aim to facilitate women's access to qualified jobs in all sectors that use or produce ICT. They focus on the new professions in computing and are continuously adapted to respond to technological and economic change.

During the recruitment process, social criteria are taken into account. Absolute priority is given to non-qualified women (or women with obsolete qualifications), or to women encountering other social disadvantages. There is no age limit and no minimum diploma is requested.

Training is organised for women intending to enter or re-enter the labour market (unemployed women, re-entering women or women looking for a job) with a focus on their re-insertion into dynamic sectors. The emphasis is, therefore, on ICT training.

The strengths of Interface3 include the quality and the updating of the training modules, the inclusion of traineeships in a large number of enterprises, and the preparation of women for certified qualifications.

The objective of Interface3 is specifically to attract women to ICT trainings and to promote the participation of women in the ICT sector. In pursuing this objective there is a commitment to an approach that addresses the particular barriers women encounter in this field, through:

- using specific ways of communicating
- including no requirements of previous training or educational level

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<sup>2</sup> <http://bookshop.europa.eu/es/women-active-in-the-ict-sector-pbKK0113432/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://bookshop.europa.eu/es/women-active-in-the-ict-sector-pbKK0113432/>

- taking time to close the technology gap
- having women as ICT teachers, or at least gender parity amongst teachers
- developing orientation modules that enable women to experiment with different ICT professions
- preparing women for certified qualifications.

## Success and factors for success

Interface3 was created in the 1980s, and has worked well for more than 25 years. The positive effects are significant:

- Interface3 is increasing women's access to the ICT sector where gender segregation is high. Every year, more than 600 women come to Interface3 in order to be informed, oriented and trained. Among these women, 400 follow an orientation module, an initiation to ICT qualifying training or a preparatory course for a certified qualification.
- More than 160,000 training hours have been provided. Traineeships have been organised in more than 150 enterprises.
- For those women who complete the training, the employment rate after six months is 62% for women with low education levels, and 75% for those with at least a secondary diploma. Every year, after the training, 75 to 100 women take up ICT jobs.

Interface3 reduces gender inequalities and addresses women in poverty by enabling women with low qualifications to access jobs in a growing sector in which women are under-represented. This has positive impacts in terms of both gender desegregation in employment and the reduction of gender poverty gaps.

Interface3 has been successful in attracting women with heterogeneous profiles in terms of migrant background, education level and age:

- Women from 23 different nationalities took part in the programme in 2013: Belgian, Ivorian, Guatemalan, Moldavian, Somalian, Brazilian, Djiboutian, Guinean, Dutch, Ukrainian, Cameroonian, Spanish, Italian, Russian, Luxembourger, Colombian, French, Malachi, Rwandan, Congolese, Gabonese, Moroccan, and Senegalese.
- 33 % of the trainees are aged between 36-45 years, 26 % from 26 to 30 years, 21 % from 31 to 35 years, 11 % from 18 to 25 years and 9 % from 46 to 55 years.
- Among the trainees, 5 % have a university degree, 11 % have an upper secondary education; 21 % have a compulsory secondary level of education and 51 % have a low level of education.

The high level of involvement and collaboration of partners from the public and the private sectors, while challenging, is one of the factors enabling this success. These partners take an active part in sponsoring the work and in the training programmes. They play a crucial role in the recruitment of the trainees.

Interface3 has, since 1984, benefited from the support of numerous financial and educational partners who have helped to set up and develop the training provision and to raise necessary awareness of ICT careers.

The numerous collaborations built over time with training centres, employment agencies, foundations, and enterprises have allowed Interface3 to create new modules of training, update didactic tools, experiment with new educational methods, and find new niches of employment.

## **Transferability and learning potential**

Interface3 shows the value of specific training provision targeting women in a traditionally male dominated sector and the potential for training people with low educational levels for ICT jobs.

It could be replicated in other countries. The transferability of Interface3 is reinforced by its experience in working on European projects. These European partnerships have allowed the association to exchange good practices and information on training methods.

The learning potential in Interface3 is high, particularly in relation to the provision of women-only training; rendering the training attractive for women; and the acceptance of all candidates, particularly those encountering social disadvantage. These are what make Interface3 operate differently to traditional training. This learning potential is not only relevant for the ICT sector as the formula could also be applied to other sectors where women are under-represented.

Given the purpose is to train women, and only women, for ICT jobs, Interface3 is embedded in a wider gender mainstreaming strategy seeking to eliminate gender desegregation in the labour market, and to secure access to jobs for women with low education levels.

Interface3 enhances the gender dimension of antipoverty policies in enabling women with low qualifications to access jobs in a growing sector. It also reduces gender gaps by organising women-only training for employment in the ICT sector where women are under-represented.

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## **Further information**

[www.interface3.be](http://www.interface3.be)