Czech Republic

Structural Focus - Caregiving

Identified Issue:	The disproportionate burden of unpaid care work leads to "time poverty" , longer career interruptions for women, and limits opportunities for digital upskilling and career advancement.

Policy Recommendations

1. Substantial public investment in accessible care infrastructure

Prioritising significant and sustained public investment to expand the availability, affordability, and quality of formal care, including childcare for children under three and elder/dependent care services across all regions, is a critical recommendation. This intervention directly addresses the fundamental issue of "time poverty," a barrier that disproportionately affects caregivers (traditionally women) by reducing their caring responsibilities. By alleviating this burden, the provision of accessible care infrastructure becomes an essential prerequisite for enabling equal participation of caregivers in the digital economy, thereby fostering broader economic equity. The efficacy of this approach is well-supported; research from the OECD, such as the *"Dare to Share: Germany's Experience Promoting Equal Partnership in Families"* report, demonstrates a strong correlation between care infrastructure investment and improved female labour market participation. This position is further reinforced by the strategic context of the EU Care Strategy.

2. Promote and incentivise flexible work arrangements in the digital economy

Legislative and fiscal incentives should be employed to encourage the widespread adoption of genuinely flexible work arrangements primarily within the ICT and R&D sectors, such as results-oriented work organisation, remote work options, predictable flexible hours, and compressed work weeks. The goal of this policy is to help balance demanding technical careers and caregiving responsibilities, thereby enhancing work-life integration. To ensure adoption, incentives could include tax credits for companies implementing certified flexible work policies or preferential treatment in public contracts. Crucially, monitoring must be established to ensure these flexible arrangements do not result in career penalties. This approach can be complemented by integrating direct support systems into upskilling programs. For instance, initiatives funded by the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), such as projects "Supporting Single Parents on a Digital Pathway to Employment," demonstrate a successful model that removes participation barriers by linking digital skills training directly to the specific needs of those with significant caregiving duties. Adopting similar strategies in Czech initiatives would not only promote flexibility but also provide the necessary structural support for caregivers to succeed.

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Hypatia

Czech Republic

Acces Layer of the Digital Gender Gap

Identified Issue:	Despite high overall internet penetration, the Czech Republic exhibits the EU's largest gender gap in internet affordability. This structural barrier is compounded by a significant gender pay gap within the ICT sector (estimated at 15-20%), which curtails women's economic capacity for digital participation.

Policy Recommendations

1.Implement a targeted digital access subsidy program

A national program that provides means-tested financial support, such as vouchers or direct subsidies, aimed at demographic groups significantly impacted by affordability barriers. This financial assistance should cover a substantial portion of the costs associated with basic broadband subscriptions and essential digital devices, including entry-level smartphones or tablets. Such an intervention would specifically target the affordability gap identified as disproportionately affecting Czech women. To enhance the efficiency and precision of resource allocation, it is suggested leveraging existing income verification systems used by social welfare agencies and labour offices (Úřad práce). Furthermore, partnerships with telecommunication providers could facilitate a seamless process for the redemption and activation of these services, thereby improving access to essential digital resources.

2.Mandate and monitor social tariffs for internet services

Regulatory requirements should be established for major Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to offer discounted "social tariffs" for low-income households. These tariffs must provide adequate speed and data allowances for essential online activities. Such an approach would create a sustainable solution that complements direct subsidies and aligns with universal service obligations in the context of digital equity. Examples include the UK's Ofcom, which promotes social tariffs, and Spain's Bono Social Térmico, supporting those in need. Research from BEREC highlights the effectiveness of social tariffs, reinforcing the need for these regulatory measures. It is recommended that regulatory requirements be established for major Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to offer discounted "social tariffs" specifically designed for demonstrably low-income households. These tariffs should be structured to ensure that they provide adequate speed and data allowances necessary for essential online activities.

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Hypatia
Digital Gender Gap, Digital Violence, Housemaking. An education and awareness programme

Czech Republic

Usage Layer of the Digital Gender Gap

Structural Focus - Caregiving

Identified Issue:	Czech women engaged in housemaking demonstrate high daily internet usage (98.1%), yet their digital activities are predominantly passive (e.g., social media, basic communication) rather than oriented towards economic empowerment or civic engagement.

Policy Recommendations

1.Fund national digital empowerment program for caregivers

It is recommended that a publicly funded program be launched to provide free, modular workshops specifically designed for homemakers and caregivers who are outside the formal labour market. These workshops should prioritise the development of practical skills that facilitate economic participation, such as online banking and e-commerce, civic engagement through e-government services, and awareness of digital safety. This initiative aims to address the identified gap between high digital usage and low empowering usage among this demographic. Tailoring the content to meet the specific needs of these women is essential for increasing relevance and engagement, as they are often overlooked in existing digital policies. Supporting this recommendation, research on digital inclusion for marginalised groups consistently emphasises the necessity of context-specific training that directly links skills to tangible benefits, as demonstrated by studies from the Good Things Foundation and various academic inquiries into technology adoption among non-traditional users.

2.Mandate and monitor social tariffs for internet services

A structured network should be established to facilitate mentorship among digitally proficient women and those who may lack confidence in their digital skills. This initiative should prioritize practical, goal-oriented tasks aimed at enhancing digital literacy. Research indicates that peer learning serves as an effective strategy for building confidence and mitigating digital anxiety, particularly among older women and individuals with low digital proficiency. The development of trust and the provision of personalised support are essential components of this mentorship approach. Evidence from successful models such as "SeniorNet" in the United States and similar initiatives worldwide highlights the effectiveness of peer-to-peer digital mentoring in promoting digital inclusion among older adults and specific target groups.

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Skills Layer of the Digital Gender Gap

Identified Issue:	A pronounced gender gap persists in advanced digital and core technical skills (e.g., programming), favoring men. While young women possess basic skills, a "confidence-competence gap" hinders engagement with complex technologies and STEM pathways.

Policy Recommendations

1.Mandate comprehensive and gender-responsive digital skills education

It is recommended that a comprehensive systemic reform of the national education curriculum (ISCED 1-3) be implemented to ensure mandatory, gender-sensitive instruction in advanced digital competencies, including computational thinking, coding, AI literacy, and critical media literacy. Additionally, substantial investment in teacher training that focuses on inclusive pedagogy and actively counters gender stereotypes is essential. The importance of teacher training is underscored by extensive documentation of gender bias in STEM education. Supporting this recommendation, the EU Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027) provides a relevant framework and strategic priorities for Member States aiming to enhance digital education, improve digital literacy, foster advanced skills, and address inequalities.

2.Gender-responsive pedagogy in STEM education

The advanced skills gap observed in adults stems directly from the "leaky pipeline" in early education. Research indicates that girls often opt out of STEM fields not due to a lack of ability, but because of cultural stereotypes and low self-confidence, which biased teaching practices can reinforce. Therefore, it is recommended that mandatory teacher training on gender-sensitive pedagogy be established for STEM subjects (ISCED levels 1-3). This training must move beyond simple encouragement to actively address the "confidence-competence gap" by reforming assessment methods, promoting collaborative project-based learning, and systematically integrating female role models into the curriculum. This policy recommendation is supported by high-level frameworks, such as the EU Digital Education Action Plan (2021–2027), and validated by extensive research, including Stanford University's "Gendered Innovations" project, which details exactly how gender bias manifests in education and provides a clear basis for curriculum reform.

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Employment Layer of the Digital Gender Gap

Identified Issue:	Czech Republic faces critical underrepresentation of women in the ICT sector, with their share of ICT specialists (10–12.4%) being among the lowest in the EU.

Policy Recommendations

1.Introduce gender diversity criteria in public procurement for ICT services

To drive substantive systemic change, the government should mandate periodic Gender Equality Audits for ICT enterprises with over 50 employees, shifting the focus from voluntary measures to institutionalised accountability. Modeled on the successful transparency frameworks enforced by the UK's Equality Act 2010 Regulations, which have measurably narrowed pay gaps through public disclosure. These audits should strictly utilise the existing 'Standard of Gender Audit' (Standard genderového auditu) established by the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic. This measure would simply scale the successful compliance models already operationalised by leading Czech research institutions, such as Masaryk University and Technical University of Ostrava, which successfully implemented these audits to meet Horizon Europe eligibility criteria. To ensure enforceability, a valid audit certificate and a subsequent Gender Equality Plan (GEP) must be established as a prerequisite for accessing national R&D grants and public technology subsidies.

2.Establish a national public-private partnership for "returnship" programs

It is recommended that a National Public-Private Partnership be established to develop "Returnship" Programs specifically designed for experienced women re-entering the ICT workforce following career breaks. This initiative would involve collaborative funding between governmental bodies and technology employers to provide structured, paid internships, commonly referred to as "returnships."

These programs should emphasise upskilling and mentorship to facilitate the reintegration of women into the workforce, directly addressing the obstacles this demographic faces after care-related absences. The efficacy of this 'returnship' model is well-documented by successful international initiatives, including Ireland's "Women ReBOOT" program and the work of organizations like Path Forward in the United States, which provide valuable data on workforce reintegration. To ensure these initiatives are sustainable within the Czech context, a joint financial commitment from both public and private sectors is recommended. This shared investment is anticipated to not only secure the program's longevity but also to foster a greater commitment from employers to hire returning professionals.

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Hypatia

Czech Republic

Innovation Layer of the Digital Gender Gap

Identified Issue:	Czechia exhibits the lowest female participation in the R&D workforce in the EU (28.7%). The entrepreneurial ecosystem shows extreme gender disparity, with only 7.7% of women founded Czech startups that received investment, which is low compared to the global average of 14-20% for all startups.

Policy Recommendations

1.Mandate gender quotas and gender budgeting in public R&D funding

The rationale for this intervention is rooted in the observed stagnation of gender equity within the research sector, which necessitates tangible mechanisms for accountability rather than voluntary measures. This approach is supported by extensive evidence; reports such as "She Figures 2024" consistently document these EU-wide disparities. Moreover, research funded by the European Commission's DG Research and Innovation investigates the impact of such gender balance policies, including those within the Horizon Europe framework.

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