

UN debate stresses need to break down barriers for girls in technology-related careers



ITU Secretary-General Hamadoun Touré addresses the Girls in ICT Day event in New York.
Photo: ITU

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At a United Nations-organized [event](#) in New York, education and technology experts from around the world today discussed the need to break down barriers and shift attitudes to encourage girls to go into technology-related fields.

During a high-level dialogue hosted by the UN International Telecommunication Union (ITU), leading figures in gender empowerment and technology debated and defined a roadmap for more

successful approaches to attract school-age girls to the technology field, and agreed to work together to change attitudes that make this area of study unpopular among young women.

Participants in the debate included the Deputy Executive Director of UN Women, Lakshmi Puri, the Vice President of the European Commission and Commissioner for the Digital Agenda, Neelie Kroes, and the Manager of Global Public Policy for Facebook, Sarah Wynn-Williams, among others.

“Over the coming decade, there are expected to be two million more information and communications technology (ICT) jobs than there are professionals to fill them. This is an extraordinary opportunity for girls and young women – in a world where there are over 70 million unemployed young people,” said the ITU Secretary-General, Hamadoun Touré.

Mr. Touré emphasized the need to cast aside outdated attitudes that are keeping young girls from considering technology as a career option.

“ICT careers are not ‘too hard’ for girls. ICT careers are not unfeminine. And ICT careers are certainly not boring,” he added. “Encouraging girls into the technology industry will create a positive feedback loop – in turn creating inspiring new role models for the next generation.”

The debate was one of many events organized in more than 70 countries around the world to mark Girls in ICT Day, which is celebrated every year on the fourth Thursday in April.

Many events extended invitations to teenage girls and university students to spend the day at the offices of ICT companies, government agencies or academic institutions and to meet with female role models working in the technology field, so they could obtain a better appreciation of what it is like to work in the ICT sector.

Participants at the high-level dialogue, which was held at New York’s Institute of International Education, also had the opportunity to hear the story of Joanne O’Riordan, who is one of only seven people in the world with Total Amelia, a congenital birth condition causing the absence of all four limbs.

Ms. O’Riordan, 16, told the audience how she had used technology from an early age to express herself.

“I use technology in all aspects of my life... I was just one year old when I first began to explore the use of technology with our old computer. I figured out how to use it by simply moving my ‘hand’ and chin at a faster speed,” she said. “Today I can type 36 words a minute and for someone with no limbs, I think that’s an incredible achievement.”

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