

Global Tech Industry Recognizes Belgium Digital Skills Pioneer

March 1 2018, Brussels: On March 1 in Barcelona, the Digital Leadership Institute (DLI), a Brussels-based international NGO, received top industry honors for its work to increase leadership by girls and women in digital sectors. Cheryl Miller Van Dyck, founding director of DLI, was awarded a global mobile prize by a jury representing major ICT interests from around the world, as convened by the GSM Association

"It's like winning the Oscars," says Miller about the award she received at Mobile World Congress 2018, a global ICT industry event whose attendance this year exceeded one-hundred thousand visitors. "This is a challenging subject that we have been working on for long time, so it's thrilling to get this recognition," Miller says.

Miller, who has spent the past decade promoting digital skills, technology-driven startup, and ICT expertise among girls and women, was awarded a coveted Global Mobile award for having made what the jury called an "immeasurable impact" on increasing inclusion in the global tech industry. In 2017, with support from the Digital Belgium Skills Fund, DLI efforts in Belgium alone reached more than 1500 girls and women.

The OECD places Belgium behind the rest of Europe when it comes to participation of girls and women in critical STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) fields, where their absence from tech studies and careers is particularly acute. In Europe, the number of women ICT specialists has been steadily declining since 2005 according to Eurostat, a trend that Miller finds alarming. "The best indication of the future is the past," she says, "and in order to have all our citizens on board in the digital transformation, we need to target girls and women with digital skills, or risk them being excluded from our future society."

In all parts of the world, women have less access to the internet, fewer digital skills, and are underrepresented in digital startup and leadership. Miller estimates that only three percent of tech founders in Belgium are female, while that number for Europe is around ten percent. "Since every facet of our lives is becoming digitized, a lack of female creators and leaders means that their needs and interests are not being taken on board," she says. This has an impact on individual women, Miller adds, and represents a lost economic opportunity of €16 billion per year, according to a recent European Commission report.

"The risk of social exclusion to girls and women, and the missed opportunity for society is enormous," Miller says. But she remains optimistic. Buoyed by success at Mobile World Congress, Miller and the DLI team have set their sights on the rest of Europe, China, and North America in 2018. "In a global market where the demand for digital leaders is outstripping supply," says Miller, "activities like ours are needed everywhere."

Links & References:

- *Digital Leadership Institute:* <http://dlii.org>
- *GSMA:* <https://www.gsma.com/>
- *Mobile World Congress:* <http://www.mobileworldcongress.com>
- *Digital Belgium Skills Fund:* <http://digitalbelgium.be/en/>
- *2017 OECD Report:* www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/download/9617041ec040.pdf?expires=1520337902&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=1012251E775B13135EF597E98B1AC158
- *2017 Eurostat Article:* http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/ICT_specialists_in_employment
- *2018 European Commission Report:* <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/increase-gender-gap-digital-sector-study-women-digital-age>

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