



Permanent Mission of the
Republic of Bulgaria to the
United Nations



On the occasion of the International Day of the Girl (11 October)

**Gender Equality in Science, Technology and Innovation:
Driving a Sustainable Future during COVID-19 and beyond**

Co-organized by the Permanent Mission of Bulgaria, ITU, UNESCO and WIPO

Oct 7, 2020, 10:00 am-11:15 am

Virtual event

On the occasion of the International Day of the Girl 2020, ITU, UNESCO and WIPO in collaboration with the Permanent Mission of Bulgaria, are organizing a virtual event in an effort to galvanize awareness and leverage action to empower girls through enhanced access to STI. The event will initiate a discussion on the implications and ways to sustain progress in achieving Gender Equality in STI during COVID 19 and beyond.

COVID-19 crisis exacerbated gender inequalities in all aspects of life and deepened existing fragilities of girls and women worldwide: whether in the sectors of the health or education, economy or social services, women and girls were the most negatively impacted by the global pandemic. Yet, 25 years after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, Gender Equality remains central to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals. Taking further the progress achieved in empowering girls and women would accelerate the pace for all the SDGs.

In the field of Science, Technology and Innovation (STI), underpinning most of the SDGs, before the pandemic women were heavily under-represented. Yet, expanding access for girls to science, technology, engineering and mathematics through quality STEM education would be key for preparing them for the world of work, enabling entry into in-demand STI careers of tomorrow. Moreover, if the international community is to succeed in its response and recovery to pandemics and global challenges like COVID 19, girls and women would need to be able to contribute effectively.

In **S**cience - the latest data of UNESCO's Institute for Statistics indicate that women account for less than 30% of the world researchers.¹ In **T**echnology and **I**nnovation – the gender gap in patenting remains. The 2019 WIPO World Intellectual Property Indicators Report reveals that in 2018 the share of women among listed inventors in international patent applications filed under the WIPO Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT)

¹ <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/fs55-women-in-science-2019-en.pdf>

is at 17.1% with men the remaining 82.9%, and 32.6% of PCT applications named at least one woman as inventor².

Intrinsic to the challenge and of crucial importance is the question of access to technologies. The ITU Facts and Figures for 2019³ reveal another facet of great concern, that is the growing digital gender gap particularly in the global south with LDCs most affected. It also indicated that the overall proportion of women using the internet globally is 48% compared to 58% for men.

Against this backdrop - the UN General Assembly adopted in December 2019 its biennial resolution on Science, Technology and Innovation for Sustainable Development (A/RES/74/229). The resolution, inter alia, reinforces the importance of the participation of women and girls in STI for sustainable development, and provides guidance on the need to address barriers to the equal access for women and girls to STI, encourages efforts to mentor, attract and retain women and girls in STEM education and research to leverage STI for entrepreneurship and economic empowerment.

On the Gender gap in STEM, it is not the result of innate ability but rather due to the socialization process including career development, entrepreneurship culture and stereotypes – as shown in the UNESCO Report Cracking the Code. Addressing under-representation of women in STI thus requires an accelerated holistic approach.

To achieve this and sustainably maintain an equitable digital society of tomorrow, the role of partnerships is pivotal. It is only the collective effort of multiple stakeholders that can effectively drive the positive change in today's society, the functioning of which is subject to constant change and complex power relations. Committed to tackling the challenges faced by girls and women in the progressively technology-saturated world, the EQUALS Global Partnership for Gender Equality in the Digital Age has been set up, uniting corporate leaders, governments, businesses, NGOs, academic institutions and civil society groups in a common mission to enable the equality in access to technology, digital skills developments and careers opportunities in the technology sector for women and men alike. The activity of EQUALS Partners paves the way as a truly global effort aimed at raising awareness, building political commitment and leveraging resources and knowledge in the pursuit of digital gender equality thus improving the livelihoods of millions around the world.

Objective

Held at the unprecedented COVID 19 pandemic, the event will explore the implications for gender equality in STI during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, notably how to tackle the disproportionate negative effect of the pandemic on girls and continued underinvestment in STEM for the most marginalised girls.

The event will look at the global trends and global efforts to address the gender gap and will discuss the different barriers that hold women from equal participation in STI. Panelists will bring an array of perspectives and insights on policies, practices and solutions that carry potential in triggering the transformative changes needed – including in educational content and orientation, fostering cultures in support of women empowerment, creating enabling workplace environments, among others. Participants, women and men alike, will be invited to share their experiences on what works and what

² https://www.wipo.int/edocs/pubdocs/en/wipo_pub_944_2019.pdf

³ <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/FactsFigures2019.pdf>

does not, but also their thoughts and recommendations on what it takes for achieving Gender Equality in STI for SDGs.

This event supports the work of the UN Inter-Agency Task Team Group on Gender and STI for SDGs. The Group is co-led by ITU - UNESCO and WIPO. Its members also include ECLAC, ESCWA, ICGEB, ITC, UNCTAD, UNICEF, UNOOSA and WFP.