

Gender Equality in Science, Technology, and Innovation: Driving a Sustainable Future During Covid-19 and Beyond

The panel on Gender Equality in Science, Technology, and Innovation: Driving a Sustainable Future During Covid-19 and Beyond hosted by WIPO, UNESCO, ITU and the Bulgarian Mission to the UN on 7 October marked International Day of the Girl by reflecting on progress achieved in empowering girls and women through STI to fully contribute to the unfinished agenda, as well as the next steps required for more girls and women to be able to access, learn, and thrive through STEM, especially during and beyond the Covid-19 crisis.

There was wide consensus among the speakers from government, UN agencies, academia, civil society and businesses large and small on the actions needed to make sustained progress. Speakers highlighted the importance of encouraging girls to participate in STEM and ensuring girls' equal access to STEM education at an early age to build the pipeline. They underscored the importance of mentorship and visible role models and other support, including child care, peer support groups and even physical spaces, to create a more inclusive environment in STEM studies and workplaces. Youth representative Victoria Alonsoperez further emphasized this point as she credits her success with her start-up Chipsafer to constant familial support in pursuing a STEM career as well as strong role models. They spoke of the importance of a clear vision and action plan for sustainable progress. They also highlighted the need for sustained investment and prioritization to see results. The importance of disaggregated data and tracking results was also emphasized. Another dimension flagged was the need to overcome stereotypes and combat myths and outdated norms about associations between girls and women and STEM. Youth representative Gladys Mosomtai noted female stereotypes about women needing to choose between family life or a career need to be overcome, and that all women should have the ability to pursue a career and raise a family, equally. Engaging men and boys as partners and allies in these efforts was flagged as another key success factor.

There are some promising trends and initiatives around the world that are working to attract and retain more girls and women in STEM fields and speakers shared efforts that are bearing fruit. For example, WIPO's IP4youth online course, which includes tools that encourage children to think like inventors, addresses female youth engagement as it targets school children between the ages of four and 17. ITU mentioned initiatives such as the EQUALS Global Partnership for gender equality in the digital age, International Girls in ICT Day and regional initiatives such as African Girls Can Code. To encourage a sense of community among female engineering students, NYU Tandon has one floor in their residence hall that's dedicated to women. Over the last five years, to focus on increasing female visibility in STEM, the Australian government's Superstars of STEM program has equipped 150 women who are working in various STEM fields to improve their communication skills and then provide them opportunities to use those skills. As a result, this program creates a critical mass of women who are very visibly achieving great things in various STEM sectors and who can, in turn, be role models to those young women and girls who might be considering coming into those sectors. To address the under representation of women in STEM, UNESCO mentioned initiatives such as the L'Oréal-UNESCO For Women in Science Programme and the Cracking the Code symposium and report. Another example of efforts made to promote gender equality in scientific life is the Association of Hungarian Women in Science, a national network of researchers professors and engineers supporting the advancement of women, increasing

their participation in the scientific field and shaping public opinion in a positive way. Lebanon is also making great strides in female visibility in STEM as last year, a Lebanese scientist was for the second year in a row, one of the five laureates of the 22nd International Awards for Women in Science. In addition, having diverse teams that comprise women and men in intensively knowledge-based industries (e.g. ICTs) not only increase female visibility in these fields, but both performance and innovation as well. To demonstrate Bulgaria's commitment to this vision, women in Bulgaria's science sector represent 52% of the total number of scientists and engineers. Looking forward, we must acknowledge that achieving gender equality is a common obligation and understand that women's contribution to the world's scientific progress is essential in dealing with the complexity of global challenges.