

Summary of Side Event

Uncovering gender disparities in higher education and STEM in Southern Africa: evidence from nine countries

4 May 2023, 1:15 – 2:30 p.m. (EST, New York time)

Background on the event

In recent years, enrolment in higher education institutions (HEIs) worldwide, including in Africa, has been growing at an unprecedented rate. HEIs have expanded in number and outreach and therefore played an increasingly influential role in national and world affairs. However, this expansion is also presenting governments with multiple challenges, particularly regarding the inclusion of women in HEIs and their full and sustainable participation in the tertiary education sector and in STEM. The event aims to discuss the preliminary results of a research project of UNESCO conducted across nine countries: Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The study assesses women's participation and representation in higher education and STEM in Southern Africa and identifies areas with gender imbalances.

Key Issues discussed

- Representation of women in decision-making and leadership bodies
- Female participation in teaching across different levels of seniority
- Women's conditions of employment
- Women's proportion in student enrolment at bachelor, postgraduate, doctoral, and postdoctoral levels
- Female enrolment in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) areas of study

Key recommendations for action

- Address obstacles to the vertical advancement of women in administrative and academic roles through gender-responsive training and mentorship
- Implement institutional policies to avoid biased recruitment
- Develop campaigns to enhance female participation in STEM careers deconstructing their biased connection to gender stereotypes and stimulating interest in STEM-related subjects
- Promote female students' enrolment in STEM at all levels by providing financial support, such as gender-based scholarships and grants
- Adopt specific measures to promote co-responsibility in childcare and paternity benefits

- Improve data collection on female participation in higher education, especially on research performance and research funding distribution