



Outcome document

Webinar on the International Day of Women and Girls in Science, Online, 11/02/2025

On the occasion of the **10th International Day of Women and Girls in Science**, the **Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)** organized a webinar. It was co-hosted by the **Higher Education and Research** Division alongside the **Social and Civil Affairs** Division to highlight the achievements, challenges, and opportunities for women in STEM across the Mediterranean region. The event brought together policymakers, researchers, and young professionals to discuss strategies for enhancing gender equality in scientific fields. This document summarizes the main outcomes of the discussions.

Coming from different backgrounds and professions, the panelists tackled the matter from diverse perspectives. Some issues were highlighted as common challenges such as the systemic barriers for young women in STEM, including deep-rooted gender norms and the lack of role models. Most of them recognized AI-driven education as a tool for promoting equity, urging universities to adopt digital learning and mentorship platforms to bridge the gender gap in STEM education.

Discussions also covered the policy aspect of the gender divide and stressed the need for stronger collaboration between policymakers, educators, and the tech industry. Without proper policy frameworks, women's full participation in STEM research and decision-making might be difficult and slow. Moreover, the webinar flagged the economic potential of women-led STEM initiatives. While 57% of STEM graduates in the Mediterranean are women,¹ only 34% of startups are female-led,² indicating a gap in leadership and entrepreneurship. According to one of the panelists, this gap in women-led businesses is a significant lost opportunity for GDP growth.

The webinar reflected on the need to establish a framework for regional cooperation, fostering cross-border initiatives that leverage science diplomacy to promote gender equity. Participants recognized the significance of creating a Mediterranean-wide network dedicated to supporting

¹ UNESCO, 2024. *Global education monitoring report 2024: Gender report*.

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000391998>

² UN Tourism, 2024. <https://www.unwto.org/women-in-tech-startup-competition-middle-east-2nd-edition-2024>



women in STEM through knowledge-sharing, mentorship programs, and professional development opportunities. Strengthening institutional mechanisms for gender-responsive research policies was also underscored as a key step toward ensuring long-term, sustainable impact.

The panelists highlighted several best practices and key recommendations, including:

- Implementing inclusive recruitment, eliminate biased evaluations and ensure fair tenure and promotion which strengthen accountability structures especially among senior leadership. Organizations can provide training for managers and employees on unconscious bias and inclusive workplace practices.
- Establishing scholarship and grant programs specifically for women pursuing science and tech to help alleviate financial barriers and encourage more women to enter and stay in STEM fields.
- Developing mentorship programs that connect young women with successful female scientists and engineers to provide academic and career guidance. Ideally, mentorship programs should pair individuals four years apart, ensuring young girls have relatable role models who help them visualize their future.
- Strengthening collaboration between universities and industry through internships, apprenticeships, and joint research programs, providing women with practical experience and networking opportunities to bridge the gap between graduates and the job market.
- Addressing societal and family expectations from childhood, by raising children with different mindsets and let girls decide what they like to do from a young age.
- Engaging and encouraging parents in supporting their daughters' interest in STEM by involving them in educational activities and workshops.
- Providing training for teachers to support and encourage girls in STEM, addressing unconscious biases and creating inclusive classroom environments.
- Increasing the visibility of women experts in media and science communication by actively seeking out female experts for interviews, panel discussions, and news articles. However, it is important to be aware of the potential cost of visibility for women and help mitigate its negative consequences.
- Supporting networks for women in science and create safe spaces for women to discuss challenges and share experiences.



- Advocating for systemic and top-down changes alongside bottom-up initiatives, such as quotas and policy reforms to create opportunities for women in STEM.
- Recognizing and address cultural differences and regional contexts in promoting women in science, tailoring programs and initiatives to the specific needs and challenges faced by women in different regions.
- Encouraging organizations to make a public commitment to gender equality by signing pledges, setting specific, measurable goals for increasing the number of women in leadership and technical roles.
- Implementing flexible work arrangements, such as remote work and flexible hours, to support work-life balance for women in tech, helping retain women in the workforce, especially mothers during and after pregnancy.
- Greater efforts are required to engage public and private stakeholders in creating an enabling environment where women and girls can thrive in STEM disciplines.

The webinar concluded by recognizing the need for continuous dialogue, research collaboration, and capacity-building programs that can empower women and girls in STEM across the Mediterranean region.

Suggested links by our the speakers:

- <https://theobstaclerace.creaf.cat/>
- <https://sciencemediacentre.es/en/women-scientists-contribute-less-male-researchers-expert-media-sources-barriers-include-lack-time>
- <https://www.unicef.org/innovation/gender-equality/game-changers-coalition>
- <https://projects.research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/en/knowledge-publications-tools-and-data/interactive-reports/she-figures-2024>