

UNESCO details the STEM gender gap and efforts to close it

Using two decades of data, a recent UNESCO report enumerates disparities between women and men in STEM in the G20 countries, considers the reasons for those disparities, and recommends measures to address them. Titled *Changing the Equation: Securing STEM Futures for Women*, it was published last November.

Women are underrepresented in STEM education and employment in all G20 countries, with no statistically discernible progress in the past decade, according to the report. In 2023, women in those countries made up about 35% of college graduates in STEM fields and 22% of the STEM workforce. South Africa and India had the highest proportion of women graduates in STEM, with 47% and 45%, respectively.

Factors that play into the persistent gender gap are shown in the accompa-

nying figure. They include stereotypes, societal pressures, and cultural biases. Some 34% of women and 12% of men reported sexism, harassment, or gender-based violence as being a top challenge. The report data come from multiple sources, including a biennial survey targeted at students and professionals. The surveys provide a longitudinal view of themes and challenges that influence whether a student pursues a career in STEM.

Gender inequity continues in the STEM workforce. For the 10 countries for which earnings data were available, women in STEM fields were paid at most 88% as much as men; in the US, that number was 69% in 2023. At the faculty level, women's salaries in US STEM departments were 83% those of men. Furthermore, according to the report, women were less likely to receive re-

search grants than men, and when they did, they received smaller amounts.

The report also details efforts around the world to bridge the gender gap. Suggested actions include ensuring equitable access to resources, creating mentorship and industry-partnered programs for girls and women, improving career guidance, ensuring fair and equal pay, and implementing policies for gender equality.

Since 2007, UNESCO has sought to reduce gender inequalities in STEM through its global Priority Gender Equality mandate. The organization argues that "achieving gender parity in STEM careers is not only a matter of social justice but also an economic imperative." More information on trends and UNESCO's work can be found in the report at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000391384>.

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(Figure adapted from T. Straza, *Changing the Equation: Securing STEM Futures for Women*, UNESCO, 2024.)