



WOMEN & GIRLS IN **STEM** FORUM 2021

Policy Brief

Introduction

The first **Women and Girls in STEM Forum** (28 October 2021), organised by the EU-funded Girls Go Circular project in collaboration with the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture of the European Commission, gathered policymakers, industry leaders, and students from across Europe to discuss the importance of closing the gender gap in STEM.

At present, social and cultural barriers still prevent talented girls and young women from pursuing STEM studies and careers. More than ever, we need innovative solutions to tackle global challenges, for which women's contribution to STEM, ICT, and entrepreneurship is essential.

This policy brief synthesises the main findings from the Women and Girls in STEM Forum and highlights important European policies and initiatives to promote gender equality in STEM.



Key messages

Women play a crucial role in the digital and green transitions

Gender equality is critical to realising Europe's innovation potential. STEM and ICT disciplines are essential to tackling climate change and driving the twin green and digital transitions. Yet, skills shortages in these fields are an obstacle to economic growth and innovation in Europe. Therefore, diversity in the labour market should be increased, including women and under-represented minorities.

More support for female entrepreneurs is needed

The findings of the **WEbarometer 2021** show that a large majority of female entrepreneurs in Europe have the ambition to increase revenues, expand to new markets, and broaden their range of products and services. The majority also expects to see an increase in the demand for their products. However, female entrepreneurs still receive less funding than male entrepreneurs. For instance, across Europe, only 2% of venture capital goes to all-female founding teams, pointing to systemic failures that should be urgently addressed. In addition, women rely more often than men on their families and friends to start their businesses and have limited access to networks that can support them with their entrepreneurial activities. Therefore, peer-to-peer learning communities are essential to provide inspiration and resources for women.

When it comes to fighting stereotypes in STEM, no detail is too small

Many girls and women still consider STEM a domain for men. Deconstructing stereotypes transmitted through language and imagery can make these areas more attractive for women. Businesses should gender-proof job descriptions and advertisements to be more inclusive, which will, in turn, ensure that company cultures evolve to embrace new values. Diverse teams contribute to more innovation and creativity, increasing revenues and success. Setting clear targets and regularly monitoring progress is essential.

The gender gap should be tackled through a lifelong learning perspective

The gender gap is best addressed from an early age and throughout higher and professional education. It is essential to present STEM disciplines inclusively early on, as this deconstructs gender stereotypes and builds confidence in young girls. The link between technical and transversal skills for tackling societal challenges and promoting the green transition should be emphasised when it comes to higher and professional education.

Role models and success stories are key

It is essential to connect female researchers, innovators, educators, and entrepreneurs with young students during their formative years. Inspirational stories challenge mainstream gender stereotypes, and role models pave the way for more girls and young women to follow.

Gender equality is everyone's business

More gender equality means more equality for everyone. For instance, when it comes to childcare and its implications for the job market, flexibility for both women and men should be fostered. This will facilitate women's access to the labour market and allow men to take a more active role in parenting, contributing to less prescriptive social roles.

STEAM should be fostered to spur innovation

STEAM approaches remove barriers between the arts, social sciences and humanities, and STEM disciplines, underlining the importance of creative processes in STEM through inquiry and problem-based learning methodologies. STEAM challenges the idea that different subjects must develop separately and adds a layer of creativity to problem-solving in STEM, resulting in new ways of thinking that are engaging, multifaceted, and inclusive.

Progress is ongoing, but we need to accelerate it

As reported in the **Gender Equality Index**, progress is slow, and if it continues at the current pace, it will take nearly three generations to achieve gender equality in Europe. **She Figures 2021** data shows some positive trends: the share of women among Doctoral graduates in the EU almost reached gender parity in 2018. Nonetheless, when it comes to traditional STEM fields, women continue to be under-represented amongst Doctoral graduates, and they are generally under-represented amongst researchers at the European level. Moreover, women formed less than one-quarter of the self-employed population of professionals in science and engineering, and ICT in 2018 in Europe. Urgent action is needed to accelerate progress.



Key initiatives at European level

Below are some key initiatives which contribute to advancing gender equality in Europe:



Creating more inclusion in STEM is a key priority of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) and its Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs). EIT and the KICs have launched the **Girls Go Circular** project to deliver on the gender equality goals of the **Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027**.

- ➔ The **Entrepreneurship Competence Framework** promotes entrepreneurship skills, reaching out to groups under-represented as entrepreneurs.
- ➔ **Women@EIT** is a community aiming to empower women to become the next generation of leaders in innovation, business, entrepreneurship, and technology. Its members are affiliated with all EIT communities, receiving opportunities to network, learn from, and exchange with like-minded people.
- ➔ The **EU STEM Coalition** is a European network of national and regional platforms related to STEM or STEAM. These platforms are based on a triple helix approach: the cooperation between governments (national or regional), companies and businesses, and educational institutions. The Coalition multiplies the reach of regional and local players and promotes their activities.
- ➔ The **Gender4STEM** platform, financed through the Erasmus+ Programme, offers teachers gender-sensitive and gender-fair methods and teaching materials to raise young girls' interest in STEM subjects.



The **EU Code Week** gathers numerous stakeholders working together to bring coding and digital literacy to everyone, addressing children from an early age. In 2020, 3.4 million students participated in the EU Code Week, and 2021 registered a record number of activities.



WEgate is a European online platform to create opportunities for women to do business, expand their network and move forward with their entrepreneurial ambition. One crucial dimension is providing peer support and role models for women. WEgate offers women the possibility of connecting with networks and business organisations and facilitates access to online marketplaces or financial literacy training.



The **EU Prize for Women Innovators** celebrates talented women entrepreneurs from across the EU and countries associated with Horizon Europe, who have founded a successful company and brought innovation to the market.



The **Women TechEU** initiative offers grants and mentoring to female entrepreneurs.



The **Enterprise Europe Network** functions at local and regional levels, offering several opportunities for female entrepreneurs.

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