

Joint message from
Ms Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO,
and Ms Sima Bahous, Executive Director of UN Women,
on the occasion of the
International Day of Women and Girls in Science
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Promoting Women in Science to Reach Our Full Potential

The major challenges the world faces today, from COVID-19 to climate change, need our brightest scientific minds to solve them. However, only one in three scientists is a woman. This glaring disparity does not just hamstring our ability to find solutions to our common challenges, it keeps us from building the societies we need. And the disparity is systemic.

Women also remain underrepresented among senior scientists in academia. According to the [2021 UNESCO Science Report](#), they are awarded less research funding than men, and are less likely to be promoted. In the private sector too, women are less present in company leadership and in technical roles in tech industries. The lack of equal opportunities in the workplace is driving women out of research professions.

We must put the principle of equality into action so that science works for women, because it works against them all too often – for example, when algorithms perpetuate the biases of their programmers. Despite a labour shortage in this field, studies have shown that women account for just 22% of professionals working in artificial intelligence and 28% of engineering graduates. And when they found their own start-ups, women receive less than 3% of total venture capital compared to men.

However, more generally speaking, we need to provide more opportunities in science and innovation to women. That is why UNESCO and UN Women strive to get girls into science education, and to ensure their rightful place in these professions and industries.

Last year, the [Generation Equality Forum](#) launched the [Action Coalition on Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality](#). Its aim is to double the proportion of women working in technology and innovation by 2026 and ensure that women and girls participate fully in finding solutions to the large, complex and interdisciplinary problems we face. Doing that requires positive remedies for increased representation, as well a constant vigilance to uproot long-standing discrimination and unconscious bias.

We are already seeing how working together across the public and private sectors and across generations can bring about positive change, such as by eliminating gender stereotypes in education and putting policies in place to attract and support women scientists in the workforce.

Science derives from the universal curiosity that makes us human, asking the questions that are common to us all. We urgently need it to build more inclusive, transformative and accountable science and technology ecosystems that are free of biases and discrimination. In so doing, we will be able to accelerate the Sustainable Development Goals, and address the challenges that impact us all.