

UNESCO Topic 2: The Gender Gap in STEM

In recent years, the phrase “STEM” has come to mean a lot more than just part of a plant; STEM, or Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, is a term used in education and the workforce across the world. Women do not have as much exposure to these disciplines, stemming (no pun intended) from the fact that since their education in these fields is often lacking, their opportunities to work in these areas are negatively affected. Only 30% of the world’s scientific researchers are female; although historically speaking this is a high number, there still is a significant disparity between the number of men and women working in STEM fields.¹ One of the root (again, no pun intended) causes of this inequality is education; in both primary and secondary education, 60% of countries lack equal education for boys and girls.²

Women have a difficult time entering careers in STEM fields because of barriers in education, economic challenges, and generally sexist attitudes that still exist in many countries. As a result, women themselves are missing out on opportunities to have stable, rewarding jobs that would improve their qualities of life, and STEM fields are missing out on the points of view of half of the population, and on possibly talented scientists and workers. On the other hand, though, not all countries are equipped with the resources to provide women with STEM opportunities, perhaps due to practical or ideological limitations. One of our goals as a committee is to discuss ways to overcome these limitations.

Recently, UNESCO created STEM and Gender Advancement, or SAGA, which is a project that's goal is to reduce the gender gap in employment and education in STEM fields. To do this, SAGA’s plan is to collect and analyze data about the STEM gender gap, and research and develop information on how nations can improve the role of women in STEM.³ Oppositions to programs like these include individual countries’ negative attitudes towards the inclusion of women in STEM, perhaps because of general attitudes about women.

- What does STEM education and employment for women in your country like?
- If there is a significant gender gap, is your country doing anything about it? If so, what?
- What can be done on a global scale to close the STEM gender gap?
- Why is it important that the gender gap be closed?
- How can we encourage countries to participate in programs that close the gender gap?
- What factors are preventing women from entering STEM fields, globally and in your country?

Your research and position papers should not be limited to these questions; I encourage you to use these questions as guidance, not as a strict outline. I reiterate that when you write your position papers, you are writing about the position of the nation you are representing. If you have any questions, please reach out to me via email at fpaley@mail.yu.edu. I look forward to reading your papers.

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¹ <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002351/235155E.pdf>

² http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/gst_2010/UNESCO-BP.2-EGM-ST.pdf

³ http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/SC/pdf/SAGA_leaflet.pdf