

**Message from Ms Audrey Azoulay,
Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of the International Day of Women and Girls in Science**

11 February 2023

Science is many things: a study of natural, physical and social phenomena; a process to test hypotheses and draw conclusions; a journey of discovery to understand the world's many mysteries. But what science should be is equitable, diverse and inclusive. It should be for all and open to all, especially women.

Today, just one in three researchers is a woman, according to the latest UNESCO Science Report. In higher education, women represent just over 35 per cent of graduates in STEM-related fields, according to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

If these gender inequalities are so significant, it is because they are deeply rooted in our societies. It is because of the persistence of gender stereotypes and prejudices, which sometimes persuade girls that scientific studies are not for them, despite their tremendous potential.

At UNESCO, where we work to build peace in the minds of men and women, addressing these stereotypes is a priority – because more women in science means better science. This conviction underpins all our work in this domain, and is enshrined in our Recommendation on Open Science, adopted by all our Member States in 2021.

This vigilance is all the more necessary at a time when equal access to education can never be taken for granted – as we saw recently, when women in Afghanistan were brutally deprived of their right to learn and teach, including in higher education. UNESCO condemns this violation of a fundamental right and calls for it to be restored without delay.

Today, all around the world, UNESCO is working to foster environments that encourage girls and women to study scientific topics – for example by supporting a scientific mentorship programme in East Africa. To date, it has reached 11 million students, especially girls.

UNESCO also seeks to break down stereotypes, by raising awareness of women scientists who are blazing new trails. Through our 25-year partnership with the L'Oréal Foundation, we have honoured over 120 exceptional women scientists from around the world, five of whom have also received the Nobel Prize. As role models, they are examples for young women to follow – underlining that they too can achieve excellence.

On this International Day of Women and Girls in Science, let's reiterate this fundamental message: women need science, and science needs women. Only by tapping into all sources of knowledge, all sources of talent, can we unlock the full potential of science, and rise to the challenges of our time.