

Youth Forum (UNESCO-YOUTH)

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Topic A. Measures to empower young people in order to eradicate gender gaps

I. Introduction

Gender gaps are known as the disparity that arises in society between genders. It consists of the social, political, intellectual, cultural, scientific and economic differences that are present in daily life to both men and women. Despite this, it is often not taken into account as a discriminative way of life.

The aforementioned inequality has created an enormous contrast betwixt genders. This is due to men being given more laboural and educational opportunities, as well as a higher salary in most occupations and industries. It is a problematic that has not been solved at all, despite efforts from a variety of governmental and non-governmental organizations such as UN Women, AWID, Womankind Worldwide, Equality Now, Gender at Work, among many others.¹

Having said this, youth participation in the topic is seen as one of the main solutions. According to the UN Women, there are over 1.8 billion young people aged 10-24 years, thus representing the largest youth population in history. Furthermore, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has been mostly developed for the youth, meaning that they will be responsible for freeing society from the gender gap.²

¹ Magazine. 25 Organizations Fighting for Gender Equality. Herman Rights Carters, Sarajevo, no update date. On: <https://www.humanrightscareers.com/magazine/organizations-gender-equality/> (01/06/2021).

² UN WOMEN. Youth LEAP into gender equality. United Nations, New York, 2017. On: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/5/youth-leap-into-gender-equality> (01/06/2021).

II. Concepts and definitions

- Equality of opportunities: situation in which the same number of possibilities is given to every sector of society.
- Gap: big difference (mostly undesirable) and contrast between two or more situations in society.
- Gender: the behavioral, cultural or psychological traits with which a person feels identified to (most of the times related to a person's sex).
- Gender gaps pay: difference in remuneration between working people of different genders.
- Human rights: basic rights or entitlements human beings possess for the fact of simply existing. The United Nations established them. All persons have them, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, sexual orientation, or any other status or characteristic.

III. Current situation

Globally, women's participation and progress in science, from higher education to university, remains minimal relative to their male colleagues. Gender disparities also persist in salaries, promotion rates, access and funding to certain areas of expertise and research, as well as in key leadership positions.

According to statistics from the US Census Bureau, women in STEM fields made up 7 percent of the workforce in 1970, a figure that increased to 23 percent by 1990. However, this growth stopped there. Two decades later, by 2011, women made up 26 percent of the scientific workforce.³

When analyzing the reason why this percentage has not had a significant increase over the years, it is possible to affirm that women express their interest in science from their childhood, but they run into multiple cultural obstacles.

³ The importance of women into science. National Geographic. Marguerite Del Giudice. No date. On: <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/11/141107-gender-studies-women-scientific-research-feminist/> (06/01/21).

Studies have shown that it is during high school that girls may become more disinterested in STEM areas, as they do not believe they fit the typical characteristics of a science student. Girls' childhood is influenced by gender stereotypes. Furthermore, it is a fact that universities are not an excellent support for women, since they tend to change professions or drop out, which causes women scientists to continue to be a minority. The most recent scientific report from UNESCO shows that only 30 percent of the world's researchers in science, technology, mathematics and engineering are women.⁴ In the same way, the work environment privileges men in hiring and in the salary issue. Studies also revealed that female job applicants are routinely deprived of such essential things as space, funding or salary.

For their part, women also lag behind men in terms of international recognition. Statistics presented by the Nobel Foundation show that since Marie Curie (the first woman to win a Nobel Prize), 45 other women have been awarded a Nobel Prize since 1911, but only 13 percent of these awards correspond to women dedicated to STEM areas.

In this sense, a large-scale study, called "Project Access", investigated and examined possible reasons for gender disparity in science. This project found that women published less than men, even if their work had had a greater impact or if other leading scientists had recognized it. Likewise, they found that there is no evidence that women practice science fundamentally differently from men.

It is a fact that social circumstances influence the development of science, technology, mathematics and engineering. In this cultural context, the masculine gender has priority over the feminine. As long as women remain discriminated against, undervalued, with less access to education and with a lower salary, no real equity can be achieved in the areas of STEM.

⁴ Women in science: equality is impossible unless society shifts. The conversation. No author. Without an update. On: <https://theconversation.com/women-in-science-equality-is-impossible-unless-society-shifts-55876> (06/01/21).

Other aspect worth considering is the one addressing the wage gap. The pay gap is a statistical indicator used as an index of the status of women's earnings relative to men's. It is expressed as a percentage and is calculated by dividing the average annual earnings of women by the average annual earnings of men.

Since the Equal Pay Act was signed in 1963, the pay gap has been slowly closing. In 1963, women who worked full-time year-round earned 59 cents (on average) for every dollar earned by men. However, in 2010, women acquired 77 cents for every male dollar. In this sense, the Research Institute on Women's Policies estimated, in 2015, that women would not receive equal pay until 2059.⁵

Thus, the wage gap affects women of all origins, of all ages and at all levels of education, although their salaries vary according to their individual situation. This inequality in average wages between men and women persists because women's work is generally undervalued; although the work itself may require equal or more effort, it is less paid. Also, for women of color, immigrants, and/or mothers, the gap widens; the so-called "maternity penalty" shores women into informal economies, casual work and part-time work.

Consequently, the inequality sustained by the gender pay gap is relevant because it condemns millions of women and their families to deep-rooted poverty. It is a global systemic problem that requires attention and action, as it is directly related to various long-term impacts, such as creditworthiness, savings, social security benefits, and retirement income.

⁵ National Committee on Pay Equity. The wage gap over time. United States. September 2016. <https://www.pay-equity.org/info-time.html> (06/01/21).

IV. Initiatives taken by the international community.

Gender equality as a Human Right was adopted by the General Assembly in 1948, having as a principle that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”. This being said, it also establishes that sex would not be a factor that could do otherwise, thus being a point that must be adopted by all in order to end the gender gap.⁶

Furthermore, in 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), established what is popularly denominated as the International Bill of Rights for Women. Throughout its thirty articles, it promoted and incited actions by countries to guarantee rights such as the removal of disparities for educational purposes. Despite this being a precedent in the matter; as of 2014, still only 143 out of 195 countries guaranteed equality between women and men in their Constitutions.⁷

The International Labour Organization also established four objectives to achieve gender equality in the work industry. These consist of promoting standard principles at work, creating more opportunities for both men and women to secure decent employment and income, enhancing effectiveness of social protection for all, and strengthening tripartism and social dialogue. These objectives can be seen throughout its labour standards established in its Constitution.⁸

⁶ Global Issues. Gender Equality. United Nations, New York, 2021. On: [https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/gender-equality/#:~:text=Gender%20equality%2C%20besides%20being%20a,spurs%20productivity%20and%20economic%20growth.\(01/06/2021\).](https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/gender-equality/#:~:text=Gender%20equality%2C%20besides%20being%20a,spurs%20productivity%20and%20economic%20growth.(01/06/2021).)

⁷ Global Issues. Gender Equality. United Nations, New York, 2021. On: [https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/gender-equality/#:~:text=Gender%20equality%2C%20besides%20being%20a,spurs%20productivity%20and%20economic%20growth.\(01/06/2021\).](https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/gender-equality/#:~:text=Gender%20equality%2C%20besides%20being%20a,spurs%20productivity%20and%20economic%20growth.(01/06/2021).)

⁸ International Labour Organization. ILO and gender equality. United Nations, Switzerland, no update date. On: [https://www.ilo.org/gender/Aboutus/ILOandGenderEquality/lang-en/index.htm#:~:text=The%20ILO's%20goal%20is%20to,equity%2C%20security%20and%20human%20dignity.&text=Create%20greater%20opportunities%20for%20men%20and%20women%20to%20secure%20decent%20employment%20and%20income\(01/06/2021\).](https://www.ilo.org/gender/Aboutus/ILOandGenderEquality/lang-en/index.htm#:~:text=The%20ILO's%20goal%20is%20to,equity%2C%20security%20and%20human%20dignity.&text=Create%20greater%20opportunities%20for%20men%20and%20women%20to%20secure%20decent%20employment%20and%20income(01/06/2021).)

On the other hand, emphasizing in the juveniles, the 1995 World Program of Action for Youth (WPAY) provided a space in which action could be taken to improve the situation of young people. Likewise, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) contain within itself an objective (Number 5) in which gender equality constitutes the main subject. This being said, it also makes a point of achieving women empowerment as part of the solution.⁹

Last, but not least, in view of young women being one of the most marginalized sectors in society, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) developed the “Youth Strategy 2014-2017: Empowered Youth, Sustainable Future”. It had the aim to integrate gender equality and women empowerment in the work industry.¹⁰

Due to its impact in the youth, they launched the “Youth Global Programme for Sustainable Development and Peace 2016-2020”. It has the finality of recognizing the importance of young women and men in making progress on gender equality. Even though efforts have been made, there is a lot more to be done about the problematic.¹¹

⁹ Global Issues. Gender Equality. United Nations, New York, 2021. On: [https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/gender-equality/#:~:text=Gender%20equality%2C%20besides%20being%20a,spurs%20productivity%20and%20economic%20growth.\(01/06/2021\).](https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/gender-equality/#:~:text=Gender%20equality%2C%20besides%20being%20a,spurs%20productivity%20and%20economic%20growth.(01/06/2021).)

¹⁰ United Nations Development Programme. Fast Facts: Youth and Gender Equality. United Nations, New York, 03/13/2017. On: [https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/results/fast_facts/fast-facts--youth-and-gender-equality.html\(01/06/2021\).](https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/results/fast_facts/fast-facts--youth-and-gender-equality.html(01/06/2021).)

¹¹ United Nations Development Programme. Fast Facts: Youth and Gender Equality. United Nations, New York, 03/13/2017. On: [https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/results/fast_facts/fast-facts--youth-and-gender-equality.html\(01/06/2021\).](https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/results/fast_facts/fast-facts--youth-and-gender-equality.html(01/06/2021).)

V. Guiding questions

1. What is your personal standpoint regarding gender's gap pay?
2. How can this problematic be solved according to your position in the short, medium and long terms?
3. What is the difference between equality and equity?
4. What is society's most disadvantaged sector in the topic?
5. Is the youth of today involved in the problematic? If so, then how?
6. Why is the UNESCO-YOUTH Forum related to the topic? If it has, take into consideration its proposals.
7. Is gender inequality/the gender gap pay related only to men and women?

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