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DIVERSITY AS A GROWING PRIORITY IN THE EUROPEAN SPACE SECTOR: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Abstract

Based on the most recent analyses, this paper reviews the different factors explaining why women are still significantly less likely to choose natural sciences, engineering, and ICT studies in Europe, thus contributing to women's systematic under-representation in STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) jobs, senior leadership positions, and academic careers. The study reports on the latest findings of the research on the different boys' and girls' gender-related career expectations which, in developed countries, appear to be strongly influenced by deep-rooted stereotypes and biases passed on children by families, the education system, and the social environment as a whole. If the STEM fields are still a "boys' club", the share of girls studying those subjects in Europe is however slowly increasing. Although space is recognised to be one of the most ST inspirational sectors in Europe, girls' interest in ESA careers is uneven across Member States, requiring dedicated attention to ensure a balanced representation. Developing a diverse and gender-balanced workforce in the space sector represents a key and decisive challenge. In fact, the confluence of the innovation, demographic and policy factors would require new thinking to attract and preserve talented and diverse human capital and anticipate the set of skills and competences that will be needed in the future. Overcoming those challenges will be critical to ensure the sustainability of the whole space sector and its future competitiveness on the global arena.