The International Workshop with Invited Women Experts

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On 4 September 2020, the ENGIE project organised the online International Workshop with Invited Women Experts. The main objective of the workshop was to identify the motivators and barriers for empowering young women to become geoscientists and engineers. For this purpose, successful women in the field of geoscience and geo-engineering were invited to participate in the forum.

The project 'ENGIE – Encouraging Girls to Study Geosciences and Engineering' aims to turn the interest of 13-18 years old girls to study geosciences and related engineering disciplines. As career decisions are generally made in this period of life, the project aims to contribute to improving gender balance in the fields of geoscience and geo-engineering. The EU-funded project, which was launched in January 2020, is developing an awareness-raising strategy and creating a stakeholder network for the implementation of a set of outreach actions in more than twenty European countries.

Eighteen invited women from academia, and the public and private sectors participated in the joint learning experience. The participants represented a range of sectors of geosciences such as geothermal, marine sciences, mining, civil engineering and geophysics. All of them hold senior positions and can be considered as role models for the next generation of geoscientists.

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Participants were divided into four groups. Each of these groups was asked to discuss one of the framing issues devised to bring out motivators and barriers within the geoscience field: 1.) Mapping the representation of men and women; 2) Exploring the existence of gender biased; 3.) Identifying the barriers of empowering girls; 4.) Identifying the motivators for empowering girls. Participants shared their experiences and expertise in relation to the framing issues assigned.

All participants joined a final discussion to share their perspectives from the group work and propose solutions to improve the gender balance in the field of geoscience. A common thought was that more inclusive and diverse teams generally, combined with leadership excellence and inclusive cultures are more innovative and creative. Several women pointed out that it was necessary not only to attract young women in science, but also to retain them and to make sure they could make it to senior positions. Some of the identified solutions were to raise awareness among parents and teachers, to increase the visibility of women geoscientists so the profession is perceived as a career option for girls, and to update the narrative of geoscience to emphasise its crucial role in bringing about a sustainable future.

A great and enjoyable atmosphere was created during the workshop, and participants showed their commitment to the profession and to improving the gender balance in geoscience. The qualitative data gathered during the exercise will be analysed to develop strategies to promote gender equality in STEM.

The three-year-long project ENGIE is being implemented by twenty-six institutions. The partnership includes three universities (University of Miskolc, Luleå University of Technology and University of Zagreb), two research centres (La Palma Research Centre and National Research Council of Italy), and a European-level professional organisation (European Federation of Geologists), which has twenty-six national member geological associations. Twenty of the EFG's national associations are taking part in the project implementation as Linked Third Parties.

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