

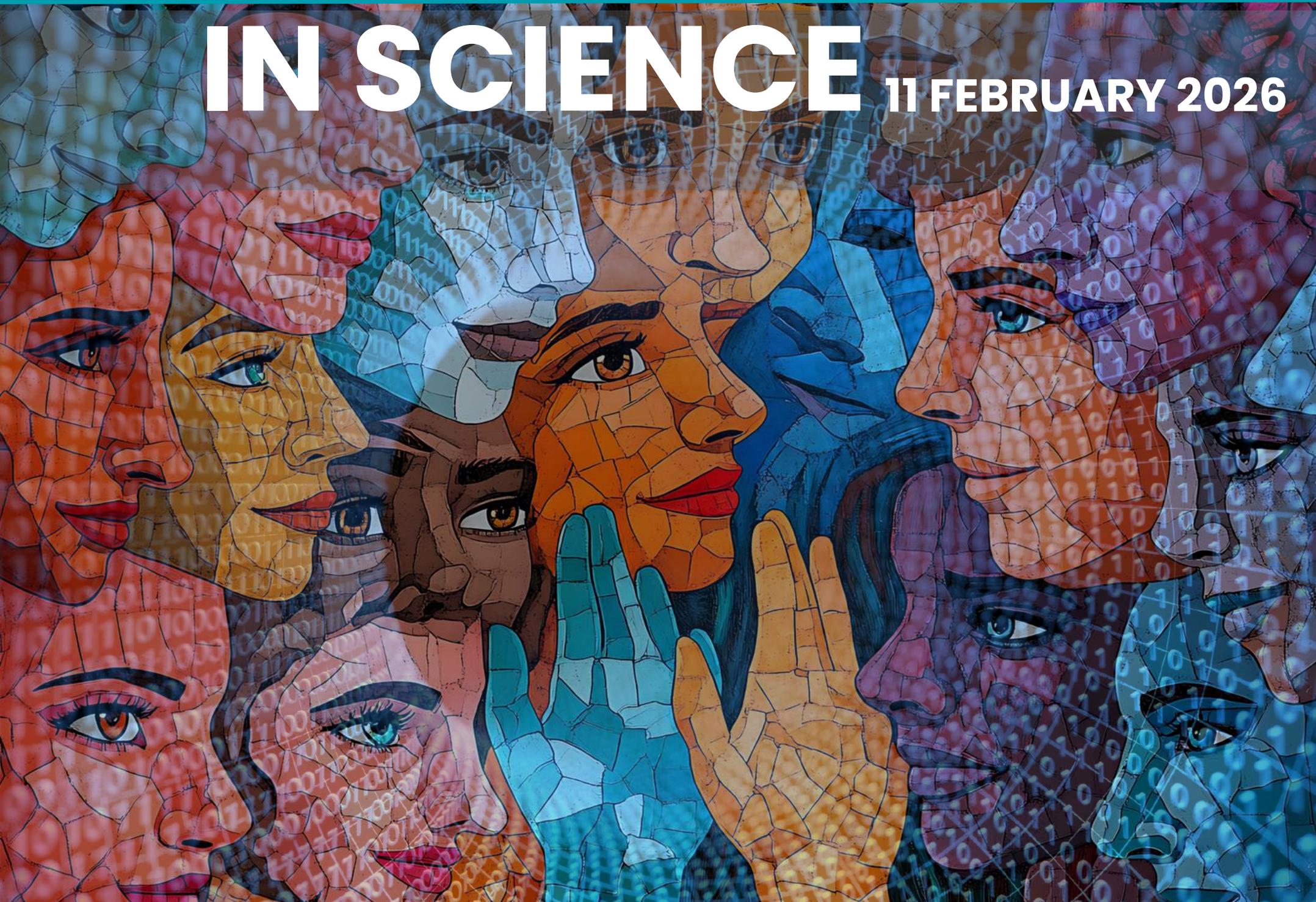


Graduate Women International (GWI)

# INTERNATIONAL DAY OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

# IN SCIENCE

11 FEBRUARY 2026



[www.graduatwomen.org](http://www.graduatwomen.org)



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## 2026 Theme

The 2026 United Nations theme for the International Day of Women and Girls in Science is **Synergizing AI, Social Science, STEM and Finance: Building Inclusive Futures for Women and Girls.**

This theme marks a shift from describing disparities to addressing the structural mechanisms that produce them. It recognizes that decades of reporting and advocacy have established where inequality exists. The current challenge is to understand how scientific systems constrain participation and progression, and how these constraints translate into measurable losses in scientific capacity and impact.

By focusing on impact, the 2026 theme reframes gender equality in STEM as a systems design issue. It places emphasis on evaluation structures, incentive mechanisms, and institutional pathways that determine whether talent is retained, advanced, and translated into scientific and societal outcomes.

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## Critical Observation

Across most scientific disciplines, women do not exit science at entry points. They exit when evaluation shifts from objective, output-based metrics to discretionary assessment, informal networks, and legacy validation.

This transition occurs at postdoctoral selection, grant leadership, and senior authorship attribution. At these stages, performance remains comparable, yet advancement diverges. The result is not a loss of talent, but a systematic contraction of effective scientific capacity precisely where research direction, funding allocation, and knowledge translation are determined.

Source

<https://www.nature.com/articles/387341a0>

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## Conceptual Insight

Scientific systems are often described as meritocratic and self-correcting. In practice, outcomes depend heavily on how evaluation is designed and when discretion replaces measurement.

As assessment shifts from observable output to informal validation, science selects not only individuals but trajectories. Certain questions advance, others disappear. Over time, this narrows the range of inquiry that defines progress.

The result is subtle but structural. Science continues to produce results, yet underperforms relative to its potential. The loss lies not in visible failure, but in unrealized alternatives and constrained solution spaces.

Source

<https://www.nature.com/articles/533452a>

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## Actionable Insights

### Redesign Evaluation, Not Entry

The primary failure in scientific systems does not occur at entry. It occurs at evaluation thresholds where advancement shifts from output-based assessment to discretionary judgment.

These thresholds include grant leadership, senior authorship, lab succession, and institutional nominations. At these points, opaque criteria and network dependence override measurable performance, producing systematic attrition despite comparable results.

Effective advocacy therefore targets evaluation architecture.

**This requires:**

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- Auditable, output-based criteria at career inflection points
- Funding continuity linked to reproducibility and translational relevance
- Transparency in authorship attribution, funding allocation, and leadership selection

The objective is female capacity retention. A system that loses trained professionals at peak productivity is structurally inefficient.

Source

<https://www.eurekalert.org/news-releases/987790>

<https://www.oecd.org/en/blogs/2025/03/unlocking-the-potential-of-women-in-science-and-research.html>



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## Emerging Trends

### How the Trends Were Selected

Five structural trends based on relevance rather than visibility or advocacy appeal were identified.

Each trend reflects a measurable shift in how scientific capacity is evaluated, retained, or translated into impact. The focus is on mechanisms that shape career progression and research performance, particularly at stages where attrition is highest.

The number of trends is deliberately limited to preserve causal clarity. Together, they describe a transition away from credential-driven systems toward models that prioritize output, relevance, and continuity.



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## Trend 1

### Output-Based Evaluation in Applied Science

Applied STEM fields are shifting from credential-based assessment toward verifiable output, including reproducibility, deployment, and measurable impact.

This reduces reliance on legacy networks and discretionary judgment at key career stages. The result is higher retention of productive scientists and closer alignment between advancement and scientific value, particularly relevant for women at mid-career and leadership transition points.

Source

Nature <https://www.nature.com/articles/533452a>



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## Trend 2

### Funding Continuity and Career Retention

Research funding models are gradually shifting toward longer-horizon support linked to sustained team performance and continuity of output.

Short, fragmented funding cycles amplify attrition at mid-career stages, where interruptions translate into lost momentum, reduced productivity, and permanent exits. Models that reward continuity improve retention and stabilize advancement during transitions into senior and leadership roles.

Source

<https://arxiv.org/abs/2402.07235>



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## Trend 3

### Digital and Computational Fields Lower Structural Barriers

Digital and computational disciplines such as data science, AI, and computational biology rely increasingly on verifiable contributions, including code, datasets, models, and reproducible workflows.

In these fields, evaluation is less dependent on institutional pedigree and more closely tied to observable output and reuse. This reduces legacy gatekeeping and compresses discretionary bias at early and mid-career stages, strengthening retention and progression through demonstrable contribution.

Source

<https://www.nationalacademies.org/read/24886/chapter/6>



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## Trend 4

### Scientific Capacity Expands Beyond Traditional Centers

Scientific activity is increasingly distributed beyond legacy research centers in North America and Western Europe. Growth in research output, infrastructure, and applied innovation is accelerating across Asia, Latin America, and parts of Africa.

These emerging ecosystems often operate with less entrenched hierarchy and faster pathways from contribution to responsibility. The result is earlier access to leadership, applied research roles, and decision-making authority, driven by output and relevance rather than tenure.

Source

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377250>

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## Trend 5

### Science Translation and Knowledge Brokerage Gain Strategic Weight

Scientific value is increasingly determined by the ability to translate research into policy, operational systems, and real-world application.

Roles that connect evidence to decision-making, knowledge brokerage, boundary work, and science communication are gaining institutional relevance. These functions shape how research informs priorities, resource allocation, and implementation, extending influence beyond disciplinary specialization toward system-level impact.

Source

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-021-00756-3>



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