



INNOVATION COUNCIL

## **Publication Preview:**

### **Policy Approaches to Close the Intellectual Property Gender Gap: Practices to Support Access to the Intellectual Property System for Female Innovators, Creators and Entrepreneurs**

The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) has commissioned a study, which is to be released shortly, for the purpose of identifying policies that enhance access to the intellectual property (IP) system by women inventors, creators, and entrepreneurs. According to the study, though it is not yet possible to identify a list of “best practices” in this area—due simply to a low level of research on the subject to date—it has been possible for the authors to pinpoint a number of promising programs for the advancement of women in the IP system, and to distill both a short list of barriers to women’s success in this arena and a lineup of possible next steps towards surmounting each of them.

The impetus for the study was the presence of a significant gender gap with regard to access to the IP system. Not only has research shown that women are neither participating in the IP system at the same rates as men nor receiving the same benefits, but that the relative deficit in access to intellectual property rights (IPRs) by women is present across all forms of IPRs. Solving this problem has the potential to greatly benefit both individual women and businesses, and societies at large. On the individual level, increasing women’s access to IP can have such benefits as increased pay, preferential treatment, better professional opportunities, and increased public visibility; on the societal level, one study has estimated that merely closing the gender gap with regard to patents could increase a nation’s GDP by 2.7 per cent.

The WIPO secretariat has been actively engaged in pursuing solutions to this problem, and has produced relevant indicators, capacity-building projects, communications strategies, and studies on the topic. However, understanding of the IP gender gap—

and potential remedies for it—is still at an early stage. At the present moment, what is certain is that a gap exists between the rates at which men and women receive patents and other IPRs, and the rates at which they participate in the most lucrative inventive and creative activities. The accumulation of such barriers over time has resulted in women lagging behind men across important indicators ranging from financing to business ownership to patenting.

The forthcoming report identifies five challenges contributing to the IP gender gap, and proposes solutions and policies targeted at each of them. The five challenges identified are:

1. A lack of data needed to understand the scope and nature of the gender gap
2. The fact that women are less likely to be encouraged and trained to enter STEM fields, as well as less likely to receive the resources they need to succeed in business
3. The fact that women are less likely to enter careers in IP law and administration
4. A general lack of understanding of the value of IP rights and of how the IP system works
5. The fact that women are less likely to receive mentoring and opportunities for advancement in IP-sensitive fields

Among the corresponding solutions proposed are, respectively:

1. Determining with greater certainty what data is being collected, as well as what challenges stand in the way of data collection
2. Promoting programs for girls, adult women, and educators that encourage female engagement with IP, as well as STEM grants and scholarships, internships and mentoring, academic research funding, investment capital for female entrepreneurs, and fundamental capacity building
3. Increasing the number of female IP law and administration professionals indirectly by focusing on increasing the number of female STEM professionals, as well as creating targeted programs for the training of women for IP law and administration careers
4. Promoting awareness-raising and targeted capacity-building programs
5. Providing networking and mentoring opportunities, supporting women's ability to both succeed and remain in IP-intensive careers, and encouraging women to commercialize their inventions