

2019 GNet Forum Report
(2019 글로벌 한인 여성 과학기술단체 네트워크 포럼)



2019 GNet Forum was organized by the Korea Federation of Women's Science & Technology Associations (KOFWST, 한국여성과학기술단체총연합회) in Seoul, Korea on November 14, 2019. The topic of this year's GNet Forum was "How to Build a Career in Science & Technology as a Minority Group." Korean Women leaders representing various STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Math) organizations across the globe gathered to present data from each country as well as discuss potential solutions to the problem. This report is provided by Dr. Hey-Kyoung Lee (이혜경), the KWISE president, who represented KWISE at this forum.

The GNet Forum was opened by a welcome remark by Dr. Myeong-Hee Yu (유명희), the President of KOFWST. This was followed by a brief summary of the participation of KOFWST in foreign Korean led conferences by Dr. MiHye Kim (김미혜, Professor, 충북대학). Attorney Junhwan Chang (Chang Law Group) gave a presentation on case studies of Korean scientists that are working in USA as interns on J-1 visa. He emphasized the importance of providing interns with a white paper outlining where to get legal help as needed, and introduced the concept of using an "electronic purse" system to aid them when situations arise.

The main session started with a presentation from Dr. Hyong Sil Cho (조형실, Director of SiLnD, Netherlands/Belgium) from European-Korean Women in Science and Engineering Association (EKWSEA). She briefly outlined the main events organized by EKWSEA as

an introduction, and gave a presentation on gender gap and female leadership in Korea. She pointed out that Korea has large gender gap index, which is largely driven by culture of leadership that emphasizes authority and lack of general inclusiveness. Dr. Cho pointed out many benefits of having female leaders, one of which is that it helps promote innovation and competitiveness in business.

Dr. Sunny Cho (조선희, Professor, University of Alberta), who is the director of Women in Science and Engineering (WiSE) at the Association of Korean-Canadian Scientists and Engineers (AKCSE), then followed with her presentation. She started by outlining the status of immigration in STEM areas in Canada, which showed a clear increase in immigration from Asian countries in recent years. She stated the “visible minorities,” defined as non-white and non-indigenous population, makes up about a third of Canada’s workforce in STEM areas. However, there is a clear gender pay gap for visible minorities, which is larger for females. She suggested that women in particular face gender-specific stereotypes, which hinder employment and integration into the workforce. Having a strong language skill was considered necessary for success, as well as integrating cross-cultural awareness and skill building into workplace practices.

Next speaker was Dr. Hey-Kyoung Lee (이혜경, Professor, Johns Hopkins University), the president of Korean-American Women in Science and Engineering (KWiSE). She briefly provided an overview of KWiSE organization and its missions. She first provided demographics of Asian American in the USA, where they constitute about 5% of the population and of them about 9% are Korean or Korean decent. She then introduced the concept of the “model minority,” which is a term used to describe the successes of Asian Americans. However, she provided statistics showing that while Asian Americans are highly educated and tend to have higher socioeconomic status, they are negatively impacted at the level of leadership positions in the STEM related jobs across academia, government and industry. In particular, Asian-American women show the lowest percentage in leadership roles compared to other races. Building a support network and breaking stereotype were pointed out as necessary to promote success of Korean-American women in STEM, which would be accelerated by mentoring and advocacy provided by organizations, such as KWiSE.

Dr. Mira Park (박미라, Professor, University of Tasmania), the president of Korean Women Scientists and Engineers in Asia Pacific (KOWSEAP), followed as the last speaker of the session. She gave the demographics of people in STEM fields in Australia, where Asian women constitute about 7% of the workforce, which is higher than Asian men (4%). Despite this there is a large pay gap where women receive less salary. She pointed out bias/stereotype, lack of flexible work arrangements, and lack of female role model as potential cause. She provided a list of government actions that are geared to enhance women participation in STEM related jobs in Australia: the main one being the SAGE (Science in Australia Gender Equity) Program. In addition, funds are allocated for scholarships, internships and mentoring program for women in STEM. Dr. Park ended her talk by introducing the White Ribbon action, which is to raise awareness and support for enhancing inclusiveness in society.