

## Diversity Statement

Maria Apostolaki, ETH Zurich

Being a woman in a scientific environment dominated by men, I have first-hand experience of the systemic barriers and stereotypes associated with this path. Thus, I have the privilege and responsibility to create a more inclusive, diverse, empowering, and supportive academic environment around me.

My personal efforts towards this direction revolve around four key goals: (i) raise awareness of the diversity issues and their impact; (ii) mentor and support underrepresented groups; (iii) make scientific topics more accessible; and (iv) promote inclusiveness at the department-level decision making.

Towards these goals, I have so-far, (i) co-organized panels and talks by researchers focusing on diversity and inclusion; (ii) mentored multiple students belonging to underrepresented groups heavily using my personal experiences when relevant; (iii) given scientific talks at Grace Hopper Celebration to stimulate the interest of underrepresented groups in science and technology; and (iv) taken part in a faculty selection committee aiming at promoting diversity & inclusion.

In the future, I look forward to contributing towards a more equitable, diverse, inclusive, and nurturing learning environment.

**Raise awareness by bringing evidence.** I believe that we need to not only raise awareness about the effects of unconscious bias on the affected individuals but also learn about the productivity advantage that more diverse teams have. With this in mind, I, together with other graduate students in my department, have invited researchers focusing on diversity & inclusion to give talks, seminars, or participate in panel discussions. I find such events extremely effective, as academics are more likely to be persuaded by evidence-based science. These activities are part of the [Diversity & Inclusion \(D&I\) group](#) we founded two years ago. As a faculty member, I intend to teach by example, by creating a successful group of people from diverse backgrounds. To help my students reach their full potential, I intend to mentor them considering how systemic barriers have formed their skill-set.

**Mentoring & Support.** One of the critical handicaps for my personal growth was the scarcity of female role models and mentors since my high-school years. This scarcity had also discouraged me from studying Computer Science, doing a PhD, and even pursuing a career in academia. To deal with the scarcity of mentors for underrepresented students, I have started a mentoring program at ETH, as part of the D&I group, where students can find a mentor based on their interests and needs (Figure 1). I have also frequently supported younger graduate students at ETH and Princeton University struggling with constant



Do you have questions about...

- ◆ Career planning
- ◆ Research directions
- ◆ Industry vs academia
- ◆ Diversity issues
- ◆ Maternity-paternity
- ◆ You name it 😊



Figure 1: Our mentoring program helps individuals find a mentor.

self-doubt and anxiety. As a faculty member, I intend to give particular care in mentoring my students and helping them maintain their mental health in addition to achieving their goals.

**Attracting underrepresented groups to pursue an academic career.** Underrepresented groups are often less exposed to scientific fields as they are expected to pursue different careers. In effect, such individuals (myself included) often unconsciously feel such fields are too difficult for them before even trying. I have used the Grace Hopper Celebration (GHC) as an opportunity to expose underrepresented individuals to scientific topics, effectively enabling them to make more informed and conscious career decisions. Particularly, I have given a scientific talk in [Hopperx1 London](#) and presented two scientific posters about my research on Internet Routing <sup>1</sup> and Blockchain Security<sup>2</sup> in GHC18 and GHC20, respectively. As a faculty member, I intend to reach out to students at an early stage (e.g., high-school) by organizing open scientific seminars targeting underrepresented groups, similar to [AI4ALL](#).

**Creating a more inclusive environment.** I believe that to eliminate barriers between underrepresented groups and the rest of the scientific community, we need to encourage more informal communication and interactions. For example, at ETH Zurich, non-German speaking researchers have reportedly been less included in various activities. To address this, I have introduced and organized together with the D&I Group a Food Bazaar (Figure 2). In this event, researchers could prepare and share a dish from their country with their peers. The event was a huge success that brought many researchers together to talk and exchange ideas, creating a more inclusive and welcoming environment. As a faculty member, I intend to promote a more inclusive environment at the classroom and department level by fostering collaboration and organizing events that celebrate diversity.

**Plan for a more diverse future.** Each university takes many decisions that affect how inclusive, diverse, and welcoming the university will be to underrepresented groups. Participation from more “diverse” individuals in all committees will naturally lead to more inclusive decisions. To contribute to this process, I took part as a student representative in my department’s faculty selection committee. In doing so, I had the chance to ask candidates about their mentoring style and their particular experience mentoring students from underrepresented groups. I thereafter shared my thoughts with the committee. As a faculty member, I intend to share my insights and experience with my peers to contribute to the inclusiveness of my department.

<sup>1</sup> [RouteScout: Performance-Driven Routing](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Routing Attacks on Cryptocurrencies’ Anonymity](#)



Figure 2: Our food bazaar allowed graduate students and researchers from various backgrounds to socialize in a friendly and inclusive environment.