

PB17 – Gender-balance in decision-making: Where to start?

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For those countries identified as having no measures and below EU average levels of implementation.¹

This policy brief provides evidence-based, concrete recommendations for national level policy makers on how to encourage gender balance in decision-making positions and boards in research performing organisations (RPOs) and research funding organisations (RFOs).²

Why is this important?

Women's representation in academia decreases the higher up the academic ladder culminating in the very small percentage of women in decision-making posts, on boards and in committees. For example at grade C the difference with men is 10 percentage points – widening to an incredible 58 percentage points at grade A (full professors).³

In 2005 the European Council set a goal for women to be in 25% of leading public research positions. The findings of the 2014 ERA survey however show that – on average only 18% of surveyed RPOs were headed by women, although there is great variation between member states.⁴ This represents a considerable loss and waste of talent for research in Europe. It also detrimentally impacts on optimal institutional decision-making as women have fewer opportunities to shape and influence the research agenda.⁵

In 1999 the European Commission set and recently reinforced a target of 40% for the under-represented sex in groups, panels and committees. This is applied to the European Commission's main funding programme Horizon 2020 which also raises the target for advisory groups to 50% and stipulates the inclusion of at least one gender expert.⁶ According to She Figures, 2015, only 28% of scientific and administrative board members are women, this drops to 22% of board leaders within the EU-28.⁷ The results of the ERA survey 2014 – show, that only 35.8% of research evaluation panels in research funding organisations include at least the 40% target of the under-represented sex in their composition.⁸ This is of great significance as allocating research funding does not only impact on the scientific community but has much wider societal implications. What gets funded and what does not has real implications for societal development as well as a differential impact on specific groups of people. The diversity of society including gender must therefore be reflected in the allocation of research funds.⁹

What is the extent of the problem?

This policy brief addresses specifically those countries that have no national measures to improve gender balance in senior positions, quotas, targets and or awards. In addition less than 18% (EU average)¹⁰ of their countries' RPOs are headed by women. In concrete terms this "How to Start" brief targets: Latvia. In Latvia funding support for the implementation of gender balance in RFOs is only occasionally supported in no research funding organisation and is only frequently supported in 7.1%.¹¹

What are the options?

The European Commission's Communication on a renewed European research area invites member states to ensure at least 40% of the underrepresented sex to participate in committees involved in recruitment/career progression and in establishing and evaluating research programmes.¹²

There are various ways that national level policy makers can improve the gender balance in senior positions in public research institutions and on boards and committees. Legislation can be developed as well as 'soft measures' which can take the form of quotas, targets and/ or awards.¹³

In 1990, the US national Committee on Women in Science, Engineering and Medicine (CWSEM) was established in the National Academy of Science. One of its programmes deals with leadership whereby the under-representation of women in leadership positions and its causes are examined, and combined with encouraging women leaders to mentor and sponsor.¹⁴

In Slovenia, the national Research Agency has brought in rules governing the composition of both temporary and permanent evaluation committees. Every committee must include at least a third of each gender – an exception however is made for the technical sciences committee, -which must have a fifth of representation.¹⁵

In Poland, the Act on Higher Education stipulates that nominations for the Ministry of Science and Higher Education's advisory body (main Council of Science and Higher Education) should consider gender balance. It also stipulates that the Minister of Science and Higher Education must ensure that at least 30% of the committee members of the Polish accreditation Committee are women.¹⁶

Recommendations

- Include gender balance as a criterion for funding in performance agreements with RPOs and RFOs when institutional funding is allocated by public administrations. For example, this could take the form of 40% of the under-represented sex on decision-making boards or in committees.¹⁷
- Include explicit targets to improve gender balance and action plans of how to get there within the overarching gender equality strategy of scientific institutions. Progress should be monitored and be publicly available.¹⁸
- Collect and report sex-disaggregated statistics in leadership and decision-making positions annually as part of the national standard statistical reporting on research and innovation.¹⁹
- Ensure familiarity with relevant overarching European Commission gender equality policy^{20, 21} and relevant information at the European level.²²

Further Reading

Further, in-depth reading on gender-balance in decision-making is available through the report *Gender Equality Policies in Public Research*²³ published by the European Commission and Gender-Net report on *National Plans and initiatives promoting gender equality and structural change* (see footnote 14).

[The GenPORT Gender Balance in Decision-Making in Research Organisations Online Discussion](#)

- [1] Please see 'Gender and Science Policy Briefs: From "Where to start" to "How to innovate": An Introduction', for a description of the methodology used. Available at: http://www.genderportal.eu/sites/default/files/resource_pool/pb_introduction_.pdf
- [2] Gender balance in decision-making has the potential to effect change in both RPOs and RFOs. These briefs have grouped countries according to levels of implementation (share of women who are heads of RPOs) and the presence or not of measures to improve gender balance in the decision-making process based on the results of the survey conducted with RPOs. These briefs however do include findings of the survey carried out with RFOs- which looks at whether funders provide support to the implementation of gender balance. This approach attempts to provide a more holistic picture of the situation in each country group.
- [3] European Commission, (2016). She Figures, 2015: Gender in Research and Innovation, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, p5.
- [4] European Commission, (2015a). ERA Facts and Figures 2014, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, p31. Strong variations among countries ranging from 5% in EL to 50% in LU. However, it is important to note that the more recent 2015 She Figures record LU as having no women as heads of its two universities.
- [5] GenSET, (2011). Workshop Briefing Materials: Advancing Excellence in Science through Gender Equality, p 8.
- [6] European Commission, (2015a). ERA Facts and Figures 2014, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, p32.
- [7] European Commission, (2016). She Figures, 2015: Gender in Research and Innovation, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, p6.
- [8] European Commission, (2015a). ERA Facts and Figures 2014, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, p32. It should be recalled that these figures concern funders who answered the ERA survey in 2014, which represent 34% of total EU GBOARD.
- [9] GenSET, (2011). Workshop Briefing Materials: Advancing Excellence in Science through Gender Equality, p17.
- [10] It should be noted that these figures concern RPOs which answered the ERA survey in 2014, which employ 515 000 researchers (around 20% of total EU researchers).
- [11] European Commission, (2015a). ERA Facts and Figures 2014, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, p84.
- [12] European Commission, (2012a). A Reinforced European Research Area: Partnership for Excellence and Growth, COM (2012) 392, pp12-13.
- [13] European Commission, (2015a). ERA Facts and Figures 2014, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, p31. At the level of decision-making in public research institutions, the Commission identified national initiatives to improve gender balance in senior positions (AT, BE, DE, DK, HR, NL) quotas (AT, BE, EL, ES, FR, LU), targets (AT, DE, DK, EL, ES, FR, HR, IT, SE, SI) and/ or awards (AT, BG, CZ, DE, DK, FR, HR, HU; IE, IT, NL; PL, PT, RO, SE, SI).
- [14] Gender-Net, (2015b). Analysis Report: National plans and initiatives promoting gender equality and structural change, p16.
- [15] European Commission, (2013b). Recommendations on the Implementation of the ERA Communication: Report of the Expert Group 2013, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, p47.
- [16] Ibid.
- [17] European Commission, (2013b). Recommendations on the Implementation of the ERA Communication: Report of the Expert Group 2013, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, p48.
- [18] Recommendation 12 of the GenSET, (2010). Consensus Report, Recommendations for Action on the Gender Dimension in Science', p24.
- [19] European Commission, (2013b). Recommendations on the Implementation of the ERA Communication: Report of the Expert Group 2013, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, p45.
- [20] European Commission, (2011). European 2010-2015 Strategy for Equality between women and Men, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/documents/strategy_equality_women_men_en.pdf
- [21] European Commission, (2015). Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/sites/antitrafficking/files/strategic_engagement_for_gender_equality_en.pdf
- [22] European Commission, (2016). She Figures 2015, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union. Available at https://ec.europa.eu/research/swafs/pdf/pub_gender_equality/she_figures_2015-final.pdf
- [23] European Commission, (2014a). Gender Equality Policies in Public Research, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: <http://bit.ly/1FiBMmu>