



The European Platform of Women Scientists EPWS

The voice of women scientists in EU research policy

By Claudine Hermann, Maren A. Jochimsen, Brigitte Mühlenbruch, EPWS

This article will give a brief introduction to the goals and activities of the European Platform of Women Scientists EPWS, an umbrella organisation of associations, networks, and institutions committed to the promotion of equal opportunities in science and research. By way of example, the most recent joint initiative of the Platform on the integration of the gender dimension in science and research will be presented in more detail.

EPWS goals and activities in a nutshell¹

The European Platform of Women Scientists EPWS (www.epws.org) is an international non-profit organisation under Belgian law (AISBL). Its members are national and international associations with legal status (48 full members), networks (21 associate members) as well as individual women scientists (106 individual members) and a number of supporting organisations. All together EPWS is representing over 12,000 women scientists working for gender equality and the integration of the gender dimension in science and research all over Europe. The Platform was created in 2005 as a Coordinated Support Action under the Sixth EU Framework Programme on Research and Technological Development. The intention was to give networks and associations of women scientists working for equal opportunities in science and research a representative voice in European research policy to complement existing EU top-down activities for the promotion of women scientists by a structure expressing the wishes and concerns of the scientific community. Until 2009 EPWS was funded by the EU Commission, since then, the association has continued its activities on a voluntary basis of its members, celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2015.²

MISSION: The Platform's mission is to represent the concerns, needs, ideas, aspirations and interests of European women scientists in all disciplines and at all stages of their career paths and to coordinate support activities for women scientists to facilitate their active role in the European Research Area as researchers as well as active participants in the European research policy debate. The mission is filled with life by a set of activities in the areas of networking and membership, research policy, public relations and information including an electronic platform, and private partnerships/fundraising, the most prominent of which will be outlined in more detail below.

NETWORKING: One of the main activities of the Platform is to foster networking. This includes promoting the mutual learning among EPWS member organisations as well as support for the creation of new networks and associations in scientific areas or geographical regions not (yet) covered so far. EPWS is particularly active in facilitating mutual exchange of good practice among existing associations

and those about to be created to encourage women scientists from European countries with fewer networks to enhance their impact by joining forces within formal and representative structures. Experience shows that fruitful cooperation and exchange of ideas among EPWS members also enables associations to design new activities at national level and to find partners for common EU projects.

Every year the Platform is organising its General Assembly in connection with a conference in different European countries, thus offering members a regular forum of exchange. At the invitation of and in collaboration with national member organisations, EPWS had meetings in Paris (2014) (see picture) organised by a group of French members, in the context of EU Presidency Conferences in Vilnius (2013) and Budapest (2011) as well as in Essen (2013) and Brussels (2010 and 2012). Topics of the annual conferences included "New Perspectives for Women Scientists Careers in Europe" (2014) and "Institutionalizing Gender and Diversity in University Structures" (2013). On the occasion of the Platform's 10th anniversary in 2015, EPWS members met in Berlin at the conference "Ready for Dialogue", funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research in Germany, discussing the gender dimension in science and research (see below). In 2016, the EPWS General Assembly will take place in Paris during the 9th European Conference on Gender Equality in Higher Education (and Research).

Since 2014, EPWS members in France are getting together in Paris for a yearly brainstorming to propose new actions such as the creation of the section "Association of the Month" on the EPWS website, which since 2015 is highlighting the goals and activities of an EPWS member association each month, or a cycle of semestrial lecture seminars to foster the connection of French women scientists' associations.

RESEARCH POLICY: The second prominent realm of activity is intended towards EPWS research policy interventions. To express women scientists' opinions in the debate, EPWS is using a set of different instruments:

- Position Papers addressing the European Commission, the European Parliament and other European institutions and initiatives such as the elaboration of the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme,
- Providing comments and suggestions at different stages of implementation of the Framework Programme,
- Answers to public consultations of the Directorate General Research and Innovation of the European Commission,

¹ This section is based on Claudine Hermann (2015): EPWS: an example of an umbrella network and of cooperation between women scientists across Europe, in: *Uniwersyteckie Czasopismo Socjologiczne* nr 11, 10-17.

² More information on the structure and the history of EPWS can be found on <http://home.epws.org/filter/About/History-of-EPWS>



EPWS Lunch Debate at the European Parliament in Brussels on 31 January 2012.

- The organisation of colloquia, such as the lunch debate “Towards a Gender Balanced Science Culture to Foster Innovation” in the European Parliament in January 2012 (see picture) or the fringe session on “Bridging the gender gap and accelerating innovative, sustainable growth” at the European Commission Innovation Convention in March 2014,
- Protest letters, for example against the video “Science, it’s a girl thing!” in June 2012 or about the small number of women receiving the European Patents Office Awards in June 2014,
- Lobbying for the inclusion of the gender perspective in the final resolutions of EU presidency conferences in Vilnius (SAPGERIC 2013) and Rome (Science, Innovation and Society: achieving Responsible Research and Innovation 2014).
- Several members of the EPWS Board of Administration were/are participants or experts in gender-related EU projects such as GenPORT, Gender Time, GENDER-NET ERA-NET, Genis Lab⁵, SAPGERIC⁶, SHERA⁷.
- Every year EPWS is producing a benchmarking report for the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research. Topics include “National Measures for the Attractiveness of Science for Girls in Different Member States of the European Union and Beyond” (2014)⁸; “Study on Improving European Projects Content (in Horizon 2020 Framework Programme) by Integration of the Gender Dimension – Hints and Tools” (2013)⁹.
- EPWS members are taking part in national evaluation and advisory committees in various countries.
- EPWS is solicited by different European institutions, such as the European Economic and Social Council, when gender equality is at stake.
- The President from Germany, the Vice-president from France and EPWS Board of Administration members from Lithuania and the United Kingdom have been awarded important national distinctions in recognition of their commitment for equal opportunities in science and research in their countries as well as at European level.

In a recent paper³, the efficiency of EPWS as a lobbying structure at EU level was analysed by comparing EPWS position papers and later European Commission and European Parliament policy documents on Women in Science. The analysis revealed that the voice and arguments of the Platform with respect to the promotion of gender equality and the integration of the gender dimension in science and research are considered among the convincing elements in European research policy.

The expertise which EPWS and its members accumulated in the research policy realm over the years is solicited by numerous national and European activities. Examples include:

- The EPWS President is a member of the management committee of genderSTE, a policy-driven targeted network on gender, technology and environment⁴ funded by COST - European Cooperation in Science and Technology.

PUBLIC RELATIONS AND INFORMATION: With this third set of activities EPWS aims to profile the Platform as key strategic actor in the research policy debate, to enhance the visibility of the Platform and its members in particular through its Newsletters and to use its website as an attractive dissemination tool of updated news on women scientists from all over Europe and latest developments in research policy.

3 Antonucci M.C. (2014): Promotional or public interest group? The advocacy or lobbying activity for gender equality in science and research by the European Platform of Women Scientists, in *Portrait of a Lady – Women in Science: Participation Issues and Perspectives in a Globalized Research System*, Avveduto S. and Pisacane L. editors, Roma, Gangemieditore spa.

4 www.genderste.eu

5 <http://www.genislab-fp7.eu/>

6 <http://www.sapgeric.eu2013.vu.lt/>

7 <http://shemera.eu/>

8 <http://epws.org/epws-2014-report-to-the-french-ministry-of-higher-education-2/>

9 <http://epws.org/epws-2013-report-to-the-french-ministry-of-higher-education-2/>

The Platform also disseminates information on its goals and activities in personal encounters with the community. Every year EPWS Board members give around fifty presentations in various EU Member States and beyond. Additionally, EPWS running information stands at international events related to women scientists' issues, such as at the International Union for Pure and Applied Physics (IUPAP) Women in Physics conferences (Waterloo, Canada; Johannesburg, etc.) or the EU Gender Summits (Brussels, Berlin). At other events, EPWS Board members also explain their fellow citizens how EU initiatives in the last almost twenty years have been essential to give an impetus to the women in science issue in the Member States. This is done in numerous talks and in events open to the general public like the Mercury transit, organised by Citoyennes pour l'Europe ("Women Citizens for Europe" association) (Paris, May 9, 2016).

Snapshot on the gender dimension in science and research¹⁰

For many years EPWS has been monitoring that remarkable success has been achieved at European and national level regarding equal opportunities in science and research, even though the levels of equality are not always the same or even satisfactory in all Member States. In the past, but with special impetus at present, the Platform has been stressing that excellent science, research, innovation and teaching do not only require measures to achieve gender equality but also the inclusion of the gender dimension, i.e. the systematic integration of the analysis of biological differences and similarities (sex) and of the social roles of men and women (gender) and their relations into scientific analysis in order to make the results of research equally meaningful to both genders.

Excellent work is being done by projects such as *Gendered Innovations*¹¹ and in expert groups, such as in the *Horizon 2020 Advisory Group on Gender*, and in many others. Yet until now, implementation and achievements in this area can hardly be described as being satisfactory. EPWS has frequently noted that many statements, decisions and recommendations, and even reports of European Parliament committees, at first step are prone to ignore the demand to take into consideration the gender dimension in science and research. Here, the most recent example has been the widely recognised "Report on Women's Careers in Science and Universities, and Glass Ceilings Encountered" by the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) of the European Parliament. The initial draft referred solely to gender equality. Subsequent improvements were only achieved through massive amendments (104 altogether) which enabled to push through the gender dimension in a satisfactory way. Accordingly, there still is a visible gap between "knowledge" and "action", between awareness and cross-cutting implementation of the gender dimension at national as well as European level. Despite various research policy measures and efforts of different institutional groups, progress on the integration of the gender dimension is not appropriate in pace or disciplinary width to the dimension's technological and economic as well as social innovation potential. This refers to its cross-cutting implementation as well as to accessible funding opportunities. Valuable scientific insights and research results remain unearthed with their innovative potential untapped. The integral contribution of the gender dimension to excellence and innovation is still insufficiently valued.

At global as well as at European level, there is an increasing interest in integrating the gender dimension in science and research content. The just published *Horizon 2020 Monitoring Report 2014*¹², for example, takes the gender dimension into account. However, sufficient information regarding this indicator is not yet available; preliminary results show that the gender dimension was explicitly mentioned in 63 topics

to inform potential applicants about the importance of the gender perspective as quality feature of scientific excellence in their proposals.

For the first time also the *She Figures 2015*¹³, investigating the level of progress made towards gender equality in research and innovation in Europe, consider new areas such as patent applications and scientific publications, exploring, for example, to what extent the gender dimension in research content is considered in scientific articles. The figures for the EU-28 as well as worldwide generally show an increase in the propensity to include a gender dimension in the subject matter of research. The findings, however, indicate that there is still much room for improvement. In 2010 to 2013, "the propensity to integrate a gender dimension in research content measured in scientific articles in the EU-28 ranged from virtually zero in agricultural sciences, engineering and technology, and natural sciences to over 6 % in the social sciences. [...] Although the proportion of publications with a gender dimension is highest in the social sciences, between 2002 and 2013 the growth rate was lowest in this field. Conversely, engineering and technology had one of the lowest proportions of publications with a gender dimension (0.1 % in 2010-2013), but the highest growth rate between 2002 and 2013 (14 %)." (She Figures 2015: 6)

The *She Figures 2015* also stipulate considerable country variation regarding the extent to which the gender dimension is addressed in national research outputs with the Nordic countries and the United Kingdom slightly above and other large players such as Germany, France and Italy below the EU-28 average. (She Figures 2015: 176) The figures also show that "although worldwide and for the EU-28 no declining trend is apparent in any field, the propensity to include a gender dimension in the subject matter of research is decreasing markedly in some countries in specific fields. This is particularly the case in Bulgaria, Latvia, Romania and Slovakia (with the exception of the natural sciences field, where considerable growth is visible for Romania)." (She Figures 2015: 178)

Furthermore, Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI), the key action in Horizon 2020 with respect to "Science with and for Society", calls for a more distinct consideration of the gender dimension. The transition from the traditional paradigm of scientific discovery (Mode 1) stipulating a distinction between scientific and societal actors to a new paradigm of knowledge production (Mode 2)¹⁵, presupposing the reciprocal interchange of science and society and the necessity of a dialogue between the two, also requires more convincing action and responding to urgent issues with regard to the integration of the gender perspective in science and research.

On 5 November 2015, 120 representatives of national and European associations, research institutions and research funding organisations supporting the integration of the gender dimension in science and research, gathered together in Berlin to take part in the international conference "Ready for Dialogue", which was initiated by the Essen College of Gender Research at the University of Duisburg-Essen and the European Platform of Women Scientists EPWS as European partner organisation. The aim was to discuss the proposed initiation of a new strategic dialogue of institutional key stakeholders of the research system in order to integrate the gender dimension into science and research content in a more binding way. The conference intended to contribute to an improved use of the knowledge and innovation potential of the gender dimension for scientific impulses with respect to further social changes in this manner.

¹³ https://ec.europa.eu/research/swafs/index.cfm?pg=library&lib=gender_equality

¹⁴ The She Figures 2015 note that because of the very low values to start with, "any growth rate will have to be sufficiently large and sustained to constitute a significant advancement in the future presence of a gender dimension in research content". (She Figures 2015: 178)

¹⁵ Gibbons, Michael, Camille Limoges, Helga Nowotny, Simon Schwartzman, Peter Scott and Martin Trow (1994): *The new production of knowledge: the dynamics of science and research in contemporary societies*. Los Angeles et al.: Sage; Nowotny, Helga, Peter Scott and Michael Gibbons (2001), *Re-Thinking Science. Knowledge and the Public in an Age of Uncertainty*. Oxford; Polity Press; Etzkowitz, Henry (2008): *The Triple Helix: University-industry-government Innovation in Action*. London: Routledge.

¹⁰ This section is based on Brigitte Mühlenbruch's and Maren A. Jochimsen's contributions in the Ready for Dialogue Conference Documentation, available at www.ready-for-dialogue.de/EN.

¹¹ http://ec.europa.eu/research/swafs/gendered-innovations/index_en.cfm

¹² <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/news/horizon-2020-monitoring-report-2014>



EPWS Annual Conference and General Assembly in Paris on 11 June 2014.

Central point of discussion was the proposed initiation of a more intensive strategic exchange between the knowledge and action levels, implementing, strengthening and developing existing knowledge- and action-oriented approaches in both areas in a more sustainable way and to link both levels to existing synergies. In such a strategic alliance, the knowledge and findings of European gender researchers as well as their respective associations should be unified with the expertise obtained at the level of implementation. The goal is to bring institutions and organisations that are responsible for integrating the gender dimension, for example, within research funding organisations, research programmes and assessment bodies in the public, private, as well as in the not-for-profit sectors into a dialogue with the level of knowledge.

Considering the development of science policy at national and European level and given the currently dominant discourses in science studies, however, both, the knowledge level as well as the level of implementation are subject to constantly changing conditions. EPWS will further develop and focus the concern of the project "Ready for Dialogue"¹⁶ in order to achieve the intended results, and continue the strategic discussion with all levels.

A written documentation of the key arguments and ideas presented has been published in March 2016 and may be downloaded as PDF-file on the conference website www.ready-for-dialogue.de/EN. The conference documentation comprises the opening words of the project manager and the welcome addresses of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF)¹⁶ and the European Platform of Women Scientists EPWS as well as the substantive plenary presentations in slightly abridged form, including the speakers' profiles. Also available on the website are the Power Point Presentations of the speakers as well as the Book of Abstracts and the posters of the poster exhibition released for publication.

¹⁶ The project was funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research from 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016 under grant number 01FP1456.

If you are interested to know more about the European Platform of Women Scientists EPWS, catch-up with actual news and events on gender and research policy in Europe, sign-up for the EPWS newsletter or wish to become a member of the Platform, please visit the EPWS website at www.epws.org.



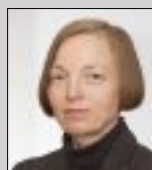
Dr. Brigitte Mühlenbruch

PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN PLATFORM OF WOMEN SCIENTISTS EPWS, BRUSSELS
FOUNDER AND FORMER MANAGING DIRECTOR OF THE CENTER OF EXCELLENCE WOMEN AND SCIENCE CEWS, BONN
MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S NETWORK OF WOMEN IN DECISION MAKING IN POLITICS AND THE ECONOMY, BRUSSELS
BOARD MEMBER OF THE CHRISTIANE NÜSSELEIN-VOLHARD-FOUNDATION, GERMANY
brigitte.muehlenbruch@epws.org



Prof. Claudine Hermann

VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN PLATFORM OF WOMEN SCIENTISTS EPWS, BRUSSELS
HONORARY PROFESSOR OF PHYSICS AT ECOLE POLYTECHNIQUE, FRANCE
PRESIDENT OF HONOR OF THE FRENCH ASSOCIATION FEMMES & SCIENCES
claudine.hermann@polytechnique.edu



Dr. Maren A. Jochimsen

TREASURER OF THE EUROPEAN PLATFORM OF WOMEN SCIENTISTS EPWS, BRUSSELS
MANAGING DIRECTOR OF THE ESSEN COLLEGE OF GENDER RESEARCH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF DUISBURG-ESSEN, GERMANY
FORMER SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE EUROPEAN PLATFORM OF WOMEN SCIENTISTS EPWS, BRUSSELS
MEMBER OF NETWORK CARING ECONOMY, GERMANY