

# Gender Balance in Research

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## Gender balance furthers excellence in research and innovation

The Committee for gender balance in research is appointed by the Ministry of Education and Research in Norway. We welcome this opportunity to comment on the Green Paper *From Challenges to Opportunities: Towards a Common Strategic Framework for EU Research and Innovation funding*. We wish to draw particular attention to questions number 7 and 24 in the Green paper. Gender balance is already admitted to be of great importance for the EU Commission, and hence is an issue that needs to be tackled if the EU is to meet the challenges for further development of the research and innovation sector in Europe.<sup>1</sup>

### General remarks

The quality of research and innovation depends on the research community's ability to recruit the best people, to be creative and to be responsive to social needs generally. In order to meet our common future challenges we have to define innovation in a broad sense that includes for instance innovation for improving the welfare state, such as its health systems, intercultural communication and education. Secondly, processes of innovation have to include and to be sensitive to the complexity of our societies. This implies an interdisciplinary approach covering subjects from both the humanities and the social sciences. It is of utmost importance that this is explicated in the new framework. Innovation is not a goal in itself but a means to develop sustainable communities. Hence there is a need to expand the objective of the Innovation Union beyond the focus on economic growth.

Innovative capacity depends among other things on the scientific community's ability to compose gender-diverse research teams. Such teams tend to be more successful than teams consisting of only women or men. Varied backgrounds and experiences increase the creativity which is a criterion for success in the innovation process. Hence, gender issues should be integrated in many of the questions in the green paper, especially 21 and 22. We

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<sup>1</sup> Our arguments are mainly based on the following documents: *Europe 2020: A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth* COM (2010), *Europe 2020 Flagship Initiative Innovation Union, Interim evaluation of the Seven Framework Program, Monitoring progress towards Gender Equality in the Sixth Framework Program, synthesis report (EU-Commission May 2009)* and *Recommendation for Action on the Gender Dimension in Science* a report from the genSET project financed by the FP7.

urge the Commission to take the opportunity which a new Framework offers, to take decisive steps to close the gap between female and male researchers. This however demands that the Commission establishes structures and measures that are much more systematically integrated than today.

Besides impact on the quality of research and innovation, gender equality has also to do with democracy and the social relevance of the research community. These are important elements in the EU commitment to modernize the academic institutions, which we fully support.

***In order to modernize the academic institutions in Europe and to reach the main goals in the EU's research and innovation strategies, the gender dimension must be fully integrated in all aspects of the next framework. The gender dimension should not be reduced to a "special case" or just supplementary or corrective action. Instead it is of paramount importance that the Commission increases the visibility and takes measures to enhance the gender balance in research and innovation.***

#### **WHAT SHOULD BE THE MEASURES OF SUCCESS FOR EU RESEARCH AND INNOVATION FUNDING? WHICH PERFORMANCE INDICATORS COULD BE USED? (QUESTION NR 7)**

The application procedures include important instruments that ensure the quality of the applications and that they are in accordance with the overall guidelines for funding. SHE figures 2009 show that app. 50 % of the student and research fellows are women. If the Commission does not succeed in increasing the gender balance among researchers who get EU-funding, this must be taken as a clear indication of lack of quality in the procedures that are supposed to ensure quality of research. There is no reason to believe that female researchers deliver less qualified research. In our view the Commission has a responsibility to make sure that the procedures are formulated in a way that makes use of the potential among the researchers we have. Interdisciplinary research, i.e. involving the humanities and social sciences in the SET and vice versa, is one way of including more women.

One explanation for the unsatisfactory gender balance in FP7 is that the Commission has not developed measures that are gender sensitive enough. In FP6 each application had to include a gender action plan at the beginning of the application process. The monitoring report of the FP6 states that this had an impact on the gender balance. Despite positive results these measures were scrapped in FP7 without any replacements. As an inspiration to establish new measures for success we would like to mention the criteria regarding gender developed by the Research Council of Norway as part of the process of evaluation. The first will consider to what extent a project may strengthen the recruitment of women in SET. Secondly, since the Research Council is dedicated to promote better gender balance in research, they state that each project could contribute by aspiring to gender balance in the project group. The third point insists on including a gender perspective wherever relevant. This is to make sure that the research questions and hypotheses are sensitive to gender issues. Inclusion of these criteria is supposed to increase the quality and credibility of research and is not in conflict with the overall need of simplification in the procedures.

***Conclusion: We strongly recommend that the Commission implements gender in the evaluation criteria for research funding, and make gender balance an indicator of success.***

#### **WHAT ACTIONS SHOULD BE TAKEN AT EU LEVEL TO FURTHER STRENGTHEN THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN SCIENCE AND INNOVATION? (QUESTION 24)**

Evaluations of previous and ongoing programs show the necessity of increasing emphasis on the gender dimension and of mainstreaming the issue in the main procedures, instruments etc. We propose that the Commission establishes a new program on Gender and Innovation whose main intention will be to implement Structural Change (modernizing of academic institutions) in order to fulfill the Innovation Union objectives and to ensure that the

European Research Area uses the potential of both male and female researchers. The program could have as its main tasks:

- Mainstreaming and monitoring of gender issues in research and innovation funded by the EU.
- Sex disaggregated data collection, analysis and dissemination.
- Creation and Support of National Focal points on Gender and Innovation (this will make the field more efficient and prevent duplication of work).
- Coordination and support of national and regional policy measures and positive actions and exchange of good practice examples.

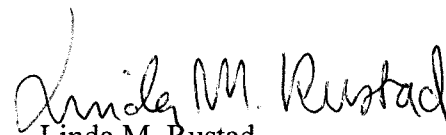
This idea is in line with the conclusion from the last meeting in the Helsinki Group (an advisory group in DG Research that consists of delegates from each member state and associated members in women and science issues).

Furthermore, gender in academia is an under-prioritized field of knowledge. There is a lack of systematic knowledge about the different academic cultures and structures in Europe and how these, in different ways, affect the gender balance. In order to speed up the modernization of academic institutions there is a need for more research-based knowledge. Comparative analyses of the situation in different European countries as well as other parts of the world would increase our knowledge base and contribute to the gathering of best practices on how to enhance gender balance. We therefore recommend that this field of knowledge gets priority in the new framework.

***Conclusion: We strongly recommend that the Commission establishes a new program for Gender and Innovation. In connection with this program we suggest that the Commission prioritizes funding of research on the gender dimension in academia.***

Yours sincerely

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