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Gender equity in setting the scientific agenda

4. Gender equity in setting the scientific agenda

Decision-making

The scarcity of women in senior positions in science inevitably means that their individual and collective opinions are less likely to be voiced in policy and decision-making processes. This in turn means disempowerment in terms of the general planning of research agendas and in the allocation of public funding for projects and managing resources. It also means that women are contributing less than men to shaping the big scientific questions of the moment, many of which impact directly on the lives of women across Europe.

In this Chapter, the sex composition of applicants and beneficiaries of research funds and of scientific boards are examined. The data presented are usually drawn from administrative data from national bodies (see Annex 5 for a precise list for each country) and must be interpreted within the different national contexts. Because this situation is monitored through *ad hoc* indicators, it should also be recalled that the data may not be complete for some countries, but in the calculation of the indicators, the coverage of the numerator always matches the coverage of the denominator.

Research funding

The Statistical Correspondents of the Helsinki Group have therefore reported sex-disaggregated data on the applicants for and beneficiaries of research funds and the composition of scientific boards. The research funding success rate presented here measures the percentage of women applicants who successfully receive funding as a result of their applications.

Despite the apparent similarities in the results for men and women, the differences between the success rates of men and women are significant[1] in the United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden, Austria and Hungary.

Although it is not possible to ascertain here what amounts of funding women are obtaining, it is clear that they are marginally less successful as a rule, but that their success rates are dependent upon the culture of awarding funds, which varies enormously between countries. For example, in Slovakia nearly all applicants receive funding, whereas the likelihood is far lower in Finland and the United Kingdom. The volume of applicants can also be regarded as an indicator of the levels of activity of researchers in each country.

[1] *The Chi Square statistic (χ^2) was higher than 8.15 for these countries and is significant at 99.5% (1-tailed sig.). However, the numbers of observed cases are higher in Germany, Sweden and the UK, which has the effect of amplifying their results.*

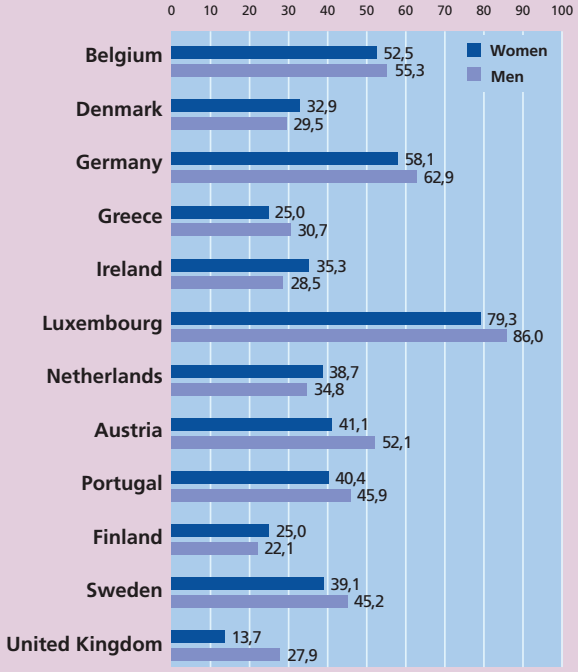
Boards

The sex composition of scientific boards is intended to yield a measure of the representation of women in scientific decision-making at national level. When it comes to appointing highly skilled professionals to decision-making bodies in national research and academic institutions, women are already at a disadvantage because of their smaller numbers. However, the figures here suggest that the practices of networking and 'old school tie' systems are preventing them from participating more equitably in the highest echelons of science. The impression that we obtain from the results is therefore of male domination over scientific institutions.

Since we know that many aspects of the organisation of science, especially peer review are affected by gender bias (Osborn et al., 2000), it is of utmost importance to the science-society dialogue that the compositions of boards are gender-balanced. The improvement of appointment procedures and recruitment strategies for national boards is therefore a crucial starting point to redressing this balance.

Figure 4.1.a

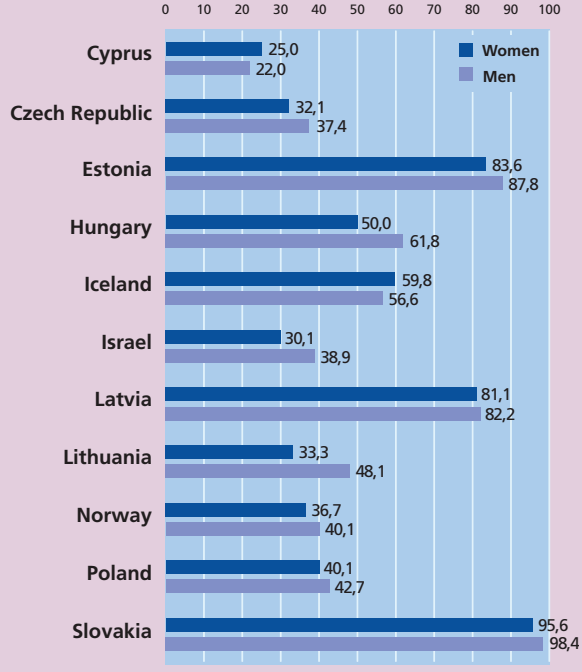
Research funding success rates in EU Member States, 2001[(1)]



Source: DG Research, WiS database
Notes: [(1)]Exceptions to the reference year: EL, IE: 2002; UK: 2000; AT, SE: 1999 ; BE: 1998
Data are not comparable between countries due to differences in coverage

Figure 4.1.b

Research funding success rates in Associated Countries, 2001[(1)]

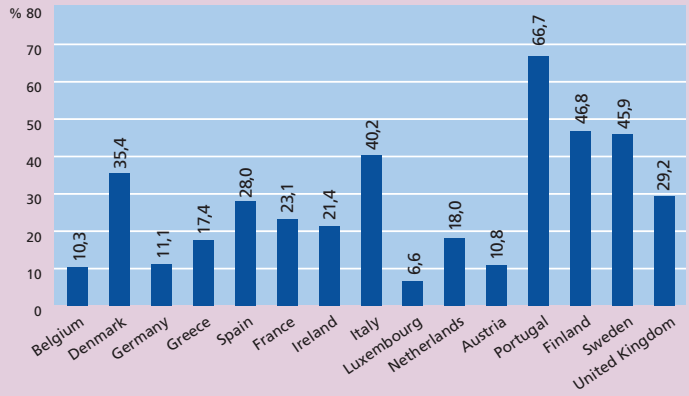


Source: DG Research, WiS database
Notes: [1)]Exceptions to the reference year: EE: 2002; IL, NO: 2000.
Data are not comparable between countries due to differences in coverage

Although the sex composition of working teams is taken into account in these calculations, the results are based upon the numbers of researchers involved but do not tell us anything about the amounts requested or received. In Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Finland, Cyprus and Iceland, women are more likely than men to submit successful research funding applications. In fact in the Netherlands, the advantage of women is significant at 90% (1-tailed sig.). These figures show that the diversity of grant allocation between countries is as strong, if not stronger, than the diversity between the sexes.

Figure 4.2.a

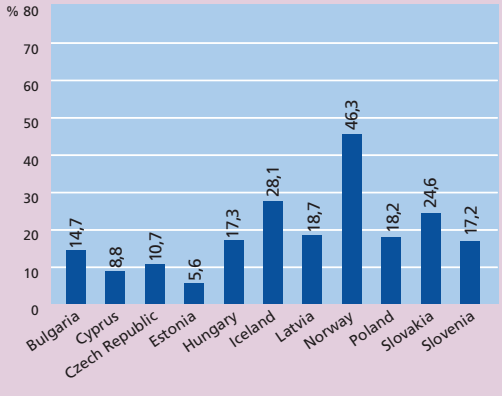
Percentage of women on scientific boards (academies and universities) in EU Member States, 2001[(1)]



Source: DG Research, WiS database
Notes: [(1)]Exceptions to the reference year: FR: 1999-2002; EL, IE: 2002; BE: 2000; ES, AT: 1999
Data are not comparable between countries due to differences in coverage

Figure 4.2.b

Percentage of women on scientific boards (academies and universities) in Associated Countries, 2001[(1)]



Source: DG Research, WiS database
Notes: [(1)]Exceptions to the reference year: BG, CY: 2000
Data are not comparable between countries due to differences in coverage

This indicator serves a double purpose in that it reflects not only the representation of women, but assuming that there is fair competition between men and women for these positions, their ability to break the glass ceiling. Alternatively, when aligned with background indicators such as the percentage of women researchers, women Professors or women HRSTC, it can be interpreted as a measure of the "breakability" of the glass ceiling.

In the Member States, women only make up more than half the members of scientific boards in Portugal, but this is based on just fifteen members. The composition is more or less balanced in Sweden and Finland. Norway is the only Associated Country where the gender balance is even – in fact much higher than the representation among academic staff, particularly grade A's – but again it only refers to a small number of people.