
GENDER-NET Plus

Gender equality in research funding

A study of 11 European countries, Israel, and Canada

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Executive summary

The GENDER-NET Plus collaboration is an ERA-NET Co-Fund in Horizon 2020, consisting of 16 Research Funding Organisations (RFOs) from 13 countries: Austria, Belgium, Canada, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Norway, Spain, and Sweden.

The study examines the gender equality situation in European research funding, with the Canadian situation as a perspective. In-depth studies of the 13 GENDER-NET Plus countries are complemented by the analysis of aggregated data from the Gender Gap Index, and, for the European countries, data from Eurostat and She Figures. The European Commission report *The Gender Challenge in Research Funding* from 2009 serves as a base line for the analysis. The first section of the present report is a review of the literature on gender in research funding published since 2009.

The in-depth studies in the report show **notable differences between the funding landscapes of the 13 studied countries. There are differences in the way funding is organised, in how funding is executed by the RFOs, and in the specific funding instruments used.** Some countries have separate RFOs for certain sectors or fields of research. Notably, for Belgium there is also a regional divide.

Gender equality has improved in many ways in the international and European Higher Education and Research & Innovation landscapes in the 12 years since 2009. **Accordingly, gender equality is higher on the agenda today for the RFOs.** The in-depth studies report a number of gender equality measures and initiatives undertaken by RFOs in the GENDER-NET Plus countries.

The in-depth studies show also that **most of the RFOs monitor the gender balance of the selection committees and the evaluation panels.** Moreover, **most of the RFOs monitor the success rates of women and men, and publish the results.** Some RFOs monitor also the average amount of funding for women and men. **However, less than half of the RFOs analyse the difference in application behaviour; i.e., compares the share of women among applicants with the share of women in the pool of potential applicants.** Naturally, there are also differences between RFOs in the choice of data monitored and in how the information is used.

Peer review with external experts is the common way of evaluating research applications. **The representation of women among gate-keepers of research funding – decision-making bodies, assessment panels and reviewers - has improved since 2009.** Unfortunately, in many cases, the improvement is from very low levels, and **gender balance is still far from achieved.** Among the 11 European countries studied in this report, 4 countries had less than 20 percent women in research funding boards in 2017, according to She Figures 2018. **However, the in-depth studies in the present report show diversity in the gender balance between different boards and panels within the countries.**

The gender balance in the pool of applicants – the HEI researchers with a doctorate – is a fundamental factor for gender equality in research funding. **In the European countries studied**

in the report, the share of women among HEI researchers was at least 40 percent in all scientific fields, except in Natural Sciences and Engineering.

However, the study shows that **women HEI researchers are less likely to apply for funding than men are.** In 2/3 of the cases studied (country; research field), women HEI researchers applied for funding less often than men did, in 1/6 of the cases women were equally likely to apply, and in 1/6 of the cases women applied for funding more often than men did. In the “median case”, men were 1.36 times more likely to apply for funding than women were. Under the assumption that GENDER-NET Plus countries are more than average interested in gender equality work, the median difference in application behaviour may be at least as big if all European countries were included.

In the countries studied, the gender difference in success rates varied with research field and country. Some countries and fields had bigger differences than other did. These differences are assumed to be monitored and analysed by the respective RFOs.

However, **no clear systematic success rate trend for all countries and fields emerged. There were a few more of the cases studied (country; research field) where men had higher success rates, than cases studied where women did. Nevertheless, in the “median case”, the success rates were about equal. However, under the assumption that the GENDER-NET Plus countries are more than average interested in gender equality work, there may appear systematic differences in favour of men if all European countries were studied.**

The final section of the report consists of a number of recommendations for improving gender equality in research funding, sorted under the following six headings.

1. Government instructions
2. RFO Gender Equality Plan
3. Gender balance in decision-making bodies and evaluation panels
4. Monitor gender data and publish the results
5. Increase funding applications from women researchers
6. Generally improve transparency in research funding

Recommendations for gender equality in research funding

Background

*Many good examples of measures to improve gender equality in Research Funding Organisations (RFOs) can be found in the report. Also, the 2009 EC report *The Gender Challenge in Research Funding* gives a number of recommendations; most are still quite relevant. Similarly, there is the 2017 *Science Europe handbook Practical Guide to Improving Gender Equality in Research Organisations*¹, and other reports², as well as published *Gender Equality Plans* from a number of RFOs. Moreover, a draft of the recommendations below was sent to the GENDER-NET Plus consortium for comments. They are grouped under 6 headings.*

1. Government instructions

- The European Commission has, e.g., in Horizon 2020, clearly stated the goal of gender equality in research³. At the national level, the Government and the Ministries should apply external pressure, e.g., by instructions or missions, to the RFOs. This a very helpful measure to get the gender equality work going - and to keep it going. The RFO will need something meaningful to write about gender equality work in its Annual Report to the Government.
- National resource centres on gender in research (Ministry units, information centres, national committees) should be established and maintained to promote gender equality e.g., in Research Funding Organisations.
- Research in the field of gender equality in higher education should be funded; e.g., research on gender consequences of a changing higher education system, and research on gender consequences of increasing funding towards excellence centers.

2. RFO Gender Equality Plan

- The RFO leadership must be committed to gender equality in its research funding. The RFO must not just delegate the gender equality question to an HR officer or to a minor advisory committee.
- The RFO should establish a permanent structure (department/section/task force...) for monitoring gender equality in its funding. The structure should report to and be supported by the highest level in the funding organisation, and be given adequate resources.
- The RFO must decide on a Gender Equality Plan on how to promote gender equality in its research funding⁴. Preferably, the following points should be covered.

¹ [Practical Guide to Improving Gender Equality in Research Organisations - Science Europe](#)

² E.g., the Horizon 2020 project GEECCO report *Promoting gender equality in the evaluation process: Guideline for jury members, reviewers and research funding organizations' employees* (2020)

³ See [Promoting Gender Equality in Research and Innovation | Horizon 2020 \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁴ See also the web page of the European Institute for Gender Equality, EIGE: <https://eige.europa.eu>

- * Goals/targets for the research funding and the funding process
- * Data on gender equality in the research funding
- * Follow up and analysis of how the goals are met
- * Knowledge and methods to reach the goals
- * Clear responsibility in the organization for each goal
- * Consequences/actions if the goals are not met
- The RFO should work actively with gender equality throughout the organisation. Invited speakers/experts can give valuable knowledge and positive energy.
 - * Discuss gender and other biases in the research funding within the RFO.
 - * Conduct awareness-raising activities in evaluation panels, decision-making bodies, and with staff on a regular basis.
 - * Provide training to staff, evaluation panels, and decision-making bodies.
- An ambitious action is to conduct gender equality observations in selected assessment panels as a basis for trainings and discussions, and for improving the assessment process.

3. Gender balance in decision-making bodies and evaluation panels

- All decision-making bodies of funding organisations should have gender balance, with at least 40 percent of each gender⁵.
- There should be at least 40 percent of each gender among evaluators and reviewers.
- The RFO should increase its efforts to identify and recruit more female evaluators and reviewers, including the use of databases of women scientists⁶.
- The gender balance among the chairpersons of evaluation panels should be considered.
- If a share of 40 percent women⁷ is hard to reach in a particular research field, in order not to over-extend the few women in the field, a lower percentage can be chosen temporarily. Preferably, in these cases a woman can be appointed chairperson, to give a better balance to the panel.

4. Monitor gender data and publish the results

- The RFO should collect data on gender of applicants (including principal investigators and teams), grantees and evaluators as a part of the funding process.
- Gender data should be collected and presented in long-term time series to enable assessing trends and development over time.
- The RFO should make their gender monitoring data publicly available on a regular basis on their websites, publications and annual reports. In particular, success rates and average amounts of funding for women and men should be published.
- The RFO should estimate the pools of potential applicants to assess whether women apply for funding less often than men do.

⁵ The same percentage holds within EU programs, see <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/h2020-section/promoting-gender-equality-research-and-innovation>

⁶ Cf. the Horizon 2020 project GEECCO report [Promoting gender equality in the evaluation process: Guideline for jury members, reviewers and research funding organizations' employees \(2020\)](#)

⁷ Or men, in the very few research fields dominated by women.

- The data should be presented by scientific field, since there are large variations in share of women researchers across disciplines.

5. Increase funding applications from women researchers

- Women should be especially encouraged to apply in the funding calls.
- Special attention should be given to the call texts, from a gender equality perspective, to avoid e.g., wordings that might appeal more to men than to women.
- Special gender equality attention should be given to grants aimed at researchers at later career stages, e.g., different kinds of excellence grants. Gender equality should be explicitly mentioned in the call text. Each application should be asked to describe the gender balance in the research team. Also, each application should include a Gender Equality Plan from the department/institution involved. This should be considered in the assessment of the application.
- Special gender equality attention should be given to the way researchers' CVs are presented in the applications. Biological age should be replaced by career age (time from PhD) when assessing career of applicants. Research output assessment should not rely only on Journal Impact Factors⁸.
- Maternity and parental leave should be taken into account by counting off at least one year per child when assessing career age.
- Measures to improve and facilitate work-life balance should be integrated in all funding forms. Mobility grant schemes should take into account and compensate for additional costs for mobile researchers with family obligations.

6. Generally improve transparency in research funding

- The transparency of the funding process should be improved, as a means to promote gender equality.
- Evaluation procedures, criteria and results should be made public.
- Procedures and criteria for recruiting evaluators and reviewers should be made explicit and published.
- More international evaluators and reviewers should be used.
- Effective procedures to prevent conflict of interest, unethical behaviour and any form of discrimination in decision-making or peer review should be established and published. A gender perspective should be integrated in codes of conduct for all involved in funding decisions.
- The applicants should receive extensive evaluation feedback in writing.

⁸ Cf. the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) <https://sfdora.org/read/>