

THE HELSINKI GROUP
on Women and Science

NATIONAL POLICIES ON
WOMEN AND SCIENCE IN EUROPE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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- There has been growing concern at European Union (EU) level about the issue of women and science, and more specifically, the under-representation of women in scientific careers. There is considerable wastage of women's skills and knowledge as a result of the 'leaky pipeline', whereby women drop out of scientific careers in disproportionate numbers at every level.
- This has prompted significant and concerted action at trans-national level. The European Commission adopted a Communication in February 1999 setting out an action plan to promote gender equality in science: *Women and science - Mobilising women to enrich European Research*. It also commissioned a European Technology Assessment Network (ETAN) report on women and science in the EU.
- In 1999, the Research Council adopted a Resolution on women and science inviting Member States to engage in dialogue and exchange views on national policies, taking into account benchmarking and best practice. It also invited Member States to establish baseline data on the gender balance of Research and Development personnel and to explore methods and procedures for data collection and the development of indicators to measure the participation of women in research in Europe.
- As a consequence of these activities, in November 1999, the Commission set up a group to focus on women and science, comprised of civil servants and gender experts from the 15 EU Member States and from 15 countries associated with the Fifth Framework Programme of the European Community for research, technological development and demonstration activities (1998-2002). It became known as the 'Helsinki Group on Women and Science', as the first meeting took place in Helsinki, during the Finnish Presidency of the EU. The associated countries are Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Iceland, Israel, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. All but Iceland, Israel and Norway are candidate countries for EU membership.
- The mandate of the Helsinki Group is to promote discussion and exchange experiences on measures and policies devised and implemented at local, regional, national and European level to encourage the participation of women in scientific careers and research. It is also charged with providing national sex-disaggregated statistics and developing gender sensitive indicators in order to monitor the participation of women in European research.
- The Helsinki Group members have met twice a year, since November 1999, and have produced national reports on the situation of women scientists in their respective countries. This report provides a synthesis of those national policy reports. A sub-group of statistical correspondents has been established to develop the work on statistics and indicators.

- There is considerable diversity among the countries in terms of scientific infrastructure, equality measures and the climate for women seeking to pursue scientific careers. Common factors include a lack of gender balance in decision-making about science policy and among those who determine what constitutes ‘good’ science. The Helsinki Group has acted as a prompt in many countries to the setting up of National Steering Committees on Women and Science to focus attention on these issues.
- Many countries have instituted positive action measures to support women and science. These include supporting networks of women in science, encouraging the development of role model and mentoring schemes, and in some cases, establishing targets and quotas. A few countries have experimented with earmarking academic chairs, research funds and prizes for girls and women in science.
- Gender mainstreaming is the systematic integration of gender equality into all policies and programmes, and into organisations and their cultures. It is supported by the European Commission, in its Communication: *Women and science - Mobilising women to enrich European Research*. Nordic countries in particular have been using gender mainstreaming as an integrated approach to gender equality in all fields. However, most countries are using at least some gender mainstreaming tools to help embed gender equality into systems and structures of science and scientific careers.
- Gender mainstreaming tools include legislation. A few countries have legislation to ensure gender balance on public bodies such as funding councils. Some also insist upon a gender balance on university and research institutes’ academic and scientific committees.
- Sex-disaggregated statistics are another gender mainstreaming tool. Candidate countries for EU membership are developing statistical databases that conform to the Frascati Manual and Eurostat conventions. The national statistical profiles of Helsinki Group members are rich data sources on the position of women in science in all 30 countries. They show how sex-segregation is a feature of scientific careers in all the countries, although there are variations in the specificity of patterns. Broadly, women now constitute the majority of undergraduates overall. Although they remain a minority in some science subjects and in engineering, they are in the majority in medical and biological sciences. The nearer the top of the academic hierarchy, the fewer the women. Indeed, universally, women are just a tiny minority of people in top scientific jobs.
- Gender Studies is an important research area to create a better understanding of the complexities and subtleties of both direct, but more particularly indirect and institutional discrimination. Many countries report that there is support for Gender Studies to enhance understanding of the gendering of science and scientific excellence. This has led to a more sophisticated awareness of the use of patronage and nepotism in appointments’ procedures, the social construction of ‘scientific excellence’ and the exclusionary mechanisms used by scientific elite bodies.

- Other gender mainstreaming measures that Helsinki Group countries report on include engendering or modernising human resource management in science. This is being developed through transparency in recruitment and promotion processes, awareness raising and equality training, and the use of gender mainstreaming experts to advise on gender-proofing policies and practice.
- A few countries identified gender-proofing the pedagogy of science education as an approach being used to identify and eliminate biases in how science is taught.
- Measures to facilitate a work/life balance are also crucial to gender mainstreaming. While there is a wide recognition of this as an issue, progress on addressing it is patchy. Measures reported upon include good employment practices to facilitate a reasonable work/life balance, and programmes targeted at women returners to accommodate their re-entry to scientific careers after a period at home with childcare responsibilities.
- Some members of the Helsinki Group acknowledge that by working together and exchanging experiences, they have been able to move faster on this issue than they might have done working in isolation. Future priorities and perspectives therefore include firstly, facilitating future collaborative working to sustain mutual learning and progress.
- A second task entails ensuring more support for Gender Studies research to better understand the gendering of science and scientific careers. Results will inform policy development and review.
- A third task focuses on the development and use of a series of tools to evaluate and monitor positive action and gender mainstreaming measures designed to promote gender equality in science and scientific careers. Scientific rigour needs to be applied to the evaluation of policy approaches designed to promote equality.
- Finally, the Helsinki Group is keen to see gender issues mainstreamed into the Sixth Framework Programme (2002-2006). This is in order to ensure that women scientists from all 30 countries have an equal chance of shaping, participating in, monitoring and evaluating EU supported scientific projects and programmes in the future.