

POSITION PAPER by the Helsinki Group on Women in Science

The Helsinki Group on Women in Science (HG) is a group of national representatives (policy makers and gender experts) from the 27 EU Member States and the states associated to the Framework Programme. The Group was established by the European Commission in 1999 and meets twice annually for a dialogue with the Commission on ways to address the underrepresentation of women at all levels in scientific research, and also to exchange national good practice on promoting gender equality in research.

This Position Paper complements the Helsinki Group's Mandate on Women in Science and its Strategy Paper (2008). Having reached the 1999-2009 milestone of 10 years of Women in Science activities by the European Commission, and in response to the need to re-launch the activities of the Helsinki Group, as expressed by the Research Commissioner Janez Potočnik¹, the Group wishes to present to the new Commission a Position Paper on gender equality for the benefit of scientific and technological research in the European Research Area.

1. Importance of top-level support for change

Top-level support is needed for the introduction of gender equality measures, for legislating change, and for paying attention to the role of gender in research. However, the pre-condition for such top-level support is first to raise awareness on the importance of the issue of gender equality in research. Thus, both DG RTD and the members of the Helsinki Group must mobilise resources to raise awareness on women in science, and thereby influence policy making.

The HG invites the European Commission to:

- acknowledge the **relevant role of the Helsinki Group** in contributing to the **objectives of the European Research Area**
- align the mandate of the Helsinki Group with the **(post-)Lisbon 2010 European Strategy and the Ljubljana Process for the European Research Area**
- consider this Position Paper as the basis for the development of a **broad-based strategy document**, containing relevant actions, which could be adopted by the Commission and implemented by the Member States and Associated Countries
- **renew its commitment to mainstreaming gender in research**, both by ensuring the inclusion of the gender dimension in research priorities and funding programmes and by monitoring the participation of women in research funded by the Framework Programmes
- provide **support to coordinators for Gender Equality Actions in projects** co-funded by the Framework Programmes, and ensure that a gender perspective is properly included when negotiating projects to be financed (both gender-balanced participation and the contents of the projects themselves)
- cooperate with the **European Institute for Gender Equality** in order to develop a strategy for achieving the common goals. According to its mission statement, "the

¹ At the conference on "Changing research landscapes to make the most of human potential: 10 years of EU activities in Women and Science, and BEYOND, Prague, 14-15 May 2009. The structure for this Position Paper is based on the main conclusions of the conference.

Gender Equality Institute will cooperate as closely as possible with all the Community programmes and agencies"

- fund a media campaign to raise awareness of the women in science issue in particular, and the need for gender equality in research in general.

The HG members commit to:

- create or revive **national Steering Committees** (as per HG mandate) on gender equality in science, and encourage greater activity in implementing actions to promote equality in science
- **bring this paper to the attention of Ministries** of Education, Research, Equal Opportunities, and any other relevant governmental body
- support the implementation and monitoring of the post-2010 Lisbon strategy in women in science and research
- open up a debate on gender equality in science by **mobilising at national level** the local stakeholders, science establishments and civil society organisations
- continue their contribution to the preparation of She Figures by supporting **progress in sex-disaggregated data collection** at the national level through influencing national statistical offices and cooperating with the sub-group of Statistical Correspondents.

2. Structural – and cultural – change is possible

Universities, and research institutions, need to be modernised in order to strengthen their research and innovation capacity (as confirmed by the Council Resolution on modernising universities²), and a key component of this modernisation process is improving the way the institutions are managed. The role of gender in human resource management (i.e. gender management) should be part of the modernisation process. The objective of such structural, and cultural, change is not just to ensure that women have equal opportunities but also to improve the effectiveness and impact of research.

The HG invites the European Commission to:

- ensure that the process for the **modernisation of universities**, and research institutions, includes the gender dimension
- continue efforts in shifting the focus of its gender and research actions from "fixing the (problems of) women" to "**fixing the administration**"³ (i.e. the way universities/research organisations are managed), and also to increase available funding
- ensure financial support for encouraging gender management in universities and research institutions.

The HG members commit to:

- identifying, at the national level, services involved with the development of the **National Action Plans** in the "European Partnership for Researchers for mobility and career development" – as well as the national representatives in the various bodies liaising with the Commission (e.g. CREST, Programme Committees) – in order to ensure that the issue of women in science is addressed
- **lobbying research decision-making bodies** in each country to raise awareness on promoting gender issues in research, and work towards achieving the 25% target for women in leading positions in the public sector⁴.

² <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/07/st16/st16096-re01.en07.pdf>

³ Londa Schiebinger. Gender Issues in Research – Innovation through gender equality: Conference 18-19 April 2007, Berlin

⁴ Council Conclusions "Reinforcing human resources in science and technology in the ERA" – 18 April 2005

3. Women and men – and institutions – benefit from a balanced life

The personnel in universities and research organisations must be enabled to balance professional and private lives, and the specific contractual situations of researchers (project-based, short-term contracts, etc) should be taken into account, allowing flexible work organisation. The objective must be to attract and retain the best talent in research jobs and to increase the pool of European scientists.

The HG invites the European Commission to:

- ensure that the issue of gender in research is properly addressed in the implementation of the Commission's multi-annual "**Roadmap for equality between women and men**"⁵.
- ensure that European mobility schemes address properly the issue of pregnancy and parenthood in its implementation and financial rules.

The HG members commit to:

- **report on national or regional policy measures** and positive actions and exchange good practice.

4. School science education has an important role

Stereotypical images of science and researchers are formed very early in life, as are gender stereotypes. Efforts should not only go to raising the scientific literacy of the population in general, but also to attract higher numbers of students into scientific studies and careers. In this light, it is essential to address the interests of girls in particular, and to use gender-aware strategies involving all pupils, as well as teachers and parents.

The HG invites the European Commission to:

- continue its actions in the area of science education with the objective of attracting **higher numbers of young people to study scientific subjects** and undertake scientific careers
- evaluate the interests of children, with a particular focus on girls, towards science, and identify the conditions in which this interest can best flourish to increase the number of women in science and technology
- Promote studies examining gender and science stereotypes that influence children's perception of science – particularly images of science and scientists in the media and school textbooks.

The HG members commit to:

- **renew their attention to the gender and science stereotypes** that influence children's perception of science, for example in school textbooks and the media
- **identify contact persons in Education ministries** and other relevant national or regional entities, particularly those responsible for school curricula and teacher training, and update them on gender policies.

⁵ COM(2006) 92 final

Conclusions

With this position paper, the Helsinki Group wishes to reinforce its commitment to gender-aware research and to equal opportunities in scientific studies and careers. Gender equality benefits research since both women and men are then able to participate and contribute with their competence and experience.

The Helsinki Group also calls on the new European Commission to continue mobilising staff and resources in making the European RTD human resource framework an attractive and inclusive one.

The Helsinki Group invites the European Commission to consider the feasibility of a Communication on the topic of gender and research beyond 2009.

This Position Paper, "Gender and research beyond 2009", was adopted on 24 November 2009, at a meeting marking 10 years of activities of the Helsinki Group on Women in Science.